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BUILDING SELF-REPLICATING CORE TEAMS FOR CHURCH PLANTING

BY DR. J. R. MILLER, B.A.E., M.DIV, DMIN
Horizon University and Southern California Seminary

ABSTRACT: Building Self-Replicating Core Teams for Church Planting will assist church planters in building more effective teams that can reproduce themselves in the second-generation leadership of the church. The article begins with a summary of the problem in building self-replicating core-teams and continues with a look at the example of the Apostle Paul's church planting ministry. The article goes on to share the results from a survey of highly experienced church planters in the United States. The article concludes by presenting a list of key components necessary for Building Core Teams for Church Planting. The principles were shown through research to be reproducible and applicable to any church planting situation in the United States.

KEYWORDS: Church Planting, Leadership, Missions, Team Building

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to numerical growth, the church in North America is stagnant. Barna writes,

Life in America has changed greatly since 1994, with massive changes in technology, global politics, lifestyle choices and family dynamics. But one constant has been the proportion of adults in the population who are unchurched. During that period there have been noteworthy shifts in religious behavior, but the percentage of adults who have steered clear of churches for at least the past six months has remained stable since 1994...

When these statistics are projected across the aggregate adult population, the numbers are staggering. An estimated 73 million adults are presently unchurched. When teens and children are added, the total swells to roughly 100 million Americans.

To put that figure in context, if the unchurched population of the United States were a nation of its own, that group would be the twelfth most populated nation on earth (trailing only China, India, the churched portion of the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan and Mexico).¹

¹ George Barna, "Unchurched Population Nears 100 Million in the U.S.", The Barna Group <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/107->

To regain growth momentum, existing churches must plant more churches or perish.²

Craig Van Gelder approaches this issue from a denominational perspective.

Studies show that if a denomination wishes to reach more people, the number of new churches it begins each year must equal 3% of the denominations existing churches. Based on this formula, mainline denominations are failing to plant enough churches to offset their decline.³

Van Gelder demonstrates that without church planting, mainline denominational churches will diminish. The larger point he makes, however, is that without aggressive church planting that reaches the lost, the mainline church in North America will enter into a period of strong decline. The problem in creating a lasting church plant is directly connected to the problem of premature abandonment by the core leadership of the church.

Core leadership abandonment in the nascent stage of church planting creates two significant problems. The first problem is the increased risk to future church plants. A church plant that does not adequately address the premature exodus of its leadership leaves the church at higher risk of failure.⁴ Consequently, when a church plant fails to take root, it leaves discouraged church planters, emotionally abandoned members and mistrust in the community toward future church plants. A failure of a church plant can also create disillusioned partner churches, along with denominational leaders, who are left to justify the financial investment in a failed venture.⁵

The second problem created by early leadership abandonment of the church plant is the loss of future leaders. The typical church planting model utilized in

unchurched-population-nears-100-million-in-the-us (accessed 08/01/2009 2009). The research points out that the percentage of those who have avoided church has stayed the same since 1984. The research points out that the percentage of those who have avoided church has stayed the same since 1984.

² Joel Comiskey. *Planting Churches That Reproduce : Starting a Newtwork of Simple Churches* (Moreno Valley, Calif.: CCS Pub., 2009), 28.

³ Craig Van Gelder. *Confident Witness--Changing World : Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 115.

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century : A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 20. See also Lester J. Hirst, III, "Urban Church Planting Missionary Teams: A Study of Member Characteristics and Experiences Related to Teamwork Competencies" (Ed.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994), 2-3.

⁵ Jeffrey Fulks, "Transformational Leadership and Its Relationship to Success in

North America puts the weight of success, or failure, on a solo church planter.⁶ Research has shown that most church planters desire to plant in a team, yet solo-planting remains the most dominant model in North America.⁷ Equipping church planters to build strong teams who can draw in new members from the surrounding community⁸ is crucial for the future of the Church in North America.⁹ In short, for the investment in church planting to continue, a successful approach to team-planting must be developed.

Unfortunately there is a surprising lack of authoritative resources to help church planters build stable reproducing teams.¹⁰ Stan Buck observed how instability in the core leadership can be very problematic for a young church plant, yet few resources exist to help churches survive these transitions. He observed the following.

During the first few years of a new church plant, a great amount of trouble often surfaces, and turnover can leave a young church struggling to move on to a healthy future. A good deal of material exists on the “birthing” process of new churches, but little is written about managing the “terrible twos.” Many pastors leave during this period, as do many of the original core people of the church.¹¹

While Buck is concerned primarily with the impact of the church planter leaving a young church, his study also shows the negative effect of core team instability on the sustainability of a new church.

Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird believe that the dearth of helpful resources exists, in part, because “the adoption of the conceptual strategy of planting ‘reproducing churches’ is a recent phenomenon—primarily in churches founded within the last twenty years.”¹² Without the right resources, the problem of a high rate of turnover in the core team is likely to continue.

Developing New Churches” (Ph.D, University of Texas at Alrington, 1994), 1.

⁶ John S. Bohannon, “Church-Planting Teams: A Proposed New Hermeneutic for Church-Planting Strategy,” *Faith and Mission* 22, no. 2 (2005): 35.

⁷ Ed Stetzer. *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 8.

⁸ Sean Edward Franklin, ““Pre-Preparation”: A Supplement to Team Church Planting in the Inner City” (D.Min, United Theological Seminary, 1999), 99.

⁹ Fulks, 2.

¹⁰ J. D. Payne. *The Barnabas Factors: Eight Essential Practices of Church Planting Team Members*, 1 ed. (Smyrna, DE: Missional Press, 2008), 6.

¹¹ Stan R. Buck, “Staying Power: Pastoral Tenure in Church Planting” (D.Min Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003), 3-4.

¹² Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities ”

My own experience in church planting illustrates a significant, and all too common, problem; a high rate of turnover in the core team creates instability that can severely retard growth, reduce momentum, and potentially shut-down a young church. Within the first year of planting, many groups report that on average 80% of the core team will leave a young church. While some dispute the actual percentage of turnover, experience among church planters supports the premise that the untimely dissolution of the core team leaves church planters without qualified second-generation leaders to perform necessary functions.

I began building my first core team to help plant Reunion Church in Orting, Washington during the fall of 2006. This early core team was an eclectic group with a diversity of church backgrounds and varying degrees of spiritual maturity. The team members were loosely connected to one another, but their primary connection was a relationship to me and my family. At the time it was felt that these bonds of friendship would enable my core team to stand firm through the difficulties of planting and buck the trends of turnover so prevalent in other church plants. While the Reunion Church core team did last longer than some, within two years, I had lost 80% of the original core team. The core team members who left the church plant never passed on their leadership roles and as a consequence, Reunion Church was left floundering; trying to incorporate a second-generation “core team” to help the church move forward. My story is similar to thousands of other church planters around the country and the hard lessons I learned from failure inspired me to do a better job of building core teams that reproduce second-generation leaders for the church.

In the midst of planting my church, I pursued my doctoral studies. In the past few years, I surveyed dozens of leaders across the country. While my research has important implications to disciple-making and leadership trends, it speaks directly to church planters and what it takes to build second-generation leadership that will increase the membership and long term viability of a church plant. Ultimately, I found eleven key components to building a core team that can in turn develop second-generation leaders. Next, I will look at team development in the church planting ministry of Paul.

TEAM PLANTING IN THE APOSTLE PAUL'S MINISTRY

Although writers often speak of Paul's success in church planting as a solo-accomplishment, his success was clearly a team effort.¹³ Of the seventeen references to Paul's ministries in the book of Acts, thirteen contain references

(Nashville, TN: Lifeway Research and Leadership Network, 2009), 33.

¹³ Acts 15:36-41; Acts 16:1-5; Acts 18:18-19; Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4

to the team members who served alongside Paul.¹⁴ Paul also demonstrated a consistent respect for the existing leadership within each locality of the church.

Paul began his team ministry in the local church in Antioch at the invitation of Barnabas.¹⁵ Eventually he was called by the Spirit away from Antioch to take the Gospel to the Gentile world. Paul's commission was then affirmed through the blessing of the church in Antioch, which soon became the center for sending church planting teams throughout the Gentile world.¹⁶ When Paul encountered divisive teachers, he relied upon his unity with the church in Jerusalem to validate his Divine-mission.¹⁷ While most of the time Paul supported himself by making tents,¹⁸ he, and the other Apostles, also received financial support from established churches.¹⁹ Paul recognized that this financial support, was a tangible way the churches could participate in the team-effort to take the Gospel of Jesus to the world.²⁰ Each of these unique instances recorded in the Scripture demonstrate the power of unity in fulfilling the mission of the church.

Bard Pillette has done extensive research into teams in the New Testament. Pillette spent many years as a missionary in central Mexico. He is currently involved in an assembly in Medford, Oregon in a ministry of evangelism and Bible teaching to Hispanics. He makes the following observation about Paul's approach to team development.

It is rather surprising that no fellow worker spent more than fifty percent of his time physically present with Paul. Teamwork did not always mean being together in the same city. It is actually possible that the most trusted fellow workers were delegated difficult tasks in other cities and thus spent less time with Paul.²¹

Based on his study, Pillette makes several salient observations about the amount of time Paul spent with his different ministry partners. Table 1 below summarizes the time Paul spent with various key leaders over the total time of their association.

¹⁴ Gene A. Getz. *Elders and Leaders : God's Plan for Leading the Church : A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 222.

¹⁵ Larry Richards, *Every Man in the Bible* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1999), Acts 11:22.

¹⁶ Acts 13

¹⁷ Acts 15; Galatians 2

¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:9

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 9; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

²⁰ Phil 4:14-19

²¹ Bard Pillette, "Paul and His Fellow Workers - Chapter 3 " *Emmaus Journal* 6, no. 1 (1997; 2002): 120.

Person	Years Associated	Years Together in Same Place	% of Time Physically Present
Titus	25	13	50%
Timothy	19	9	50%
Luke	18	6.5	30%
Aristarchus	11-17	6.5	30%
Aquila and Priscilla	17	4	25%
Tychicus	14	4	25%
Trophimus	14	2	15%
Mark	20	2.5	10%
Erastus	16	2	10%

Table 1: Paul's Long Term Partnerships in Church Planting

This table shows that Paul's associations were long held, yet he trusted each leader to work independently to fulfill their mission.

A second aspect of Paul's approach to team was how he spread his teams out to accomplish the work and allowed each the ability to develop their own teams and partnerships for effective planting. Pillette summarizes his research as follows.

The average number of partners Paul had at any one time was two, but he often had only one co-worker present with him. The curious part in all this is that Paul's favorite co-workers, Timothy and Titus, were seldom together with Paul as a trio. The three can be put together only a few times for a total of a few months. As a consequence, there was no long-term necessity to meld together the various personalities.²²

Pillette demonstrates his observation in Table 2 below which shows how many teams members Paul worked with and for how long.

Number of Persons with Paul	Length of Time with Paul	Names
2	3 months	Barnabas, Mark
1	1 year 2 months	Barnabas
1	7 months	Barnabas (Antioch)
1	1 month	Silas
2	2 months	Silas, Timothy
3	4 months	Silas, Timothy, Luke
2	5 months	Silas, Timothy
2	1 month	Aquila, Priscilla

²² Ibid., 121.

Number of Persons with Paul	Length of Time with Paul	Names
4	1 year 6 months	Silas, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla
2	6 months	Timothy, Titus(?) (Antioch)
13 (off and on)	3 years 6 months	(Ephesus)
10 (off and on)	1 month	(Trip to Jerusalem)
1	2 years	(IMPRISONMENT IN ROME)
1	6 months	Timothy (Ephesus)
1	2 years (?)	Timothy (Ephesus)
1	2 years (?)	Titus (Spain?)
5 (off and on)	4 months	Timothy, Tychicus, Artemus, Apollos, Zenas, (Asia Minor of Greece)
5 (off and on)	1 year	Titus, Erastus (?), Trophimus (?) (Nicopolis)
5 (off and on)	6 months	(imprisonment in Rome)

Table 2: Paul's Ministry Partnerships

The importance of this research shows that teams can be fluid and changing when there is a strong trust in each member to function when working on their own. Based on Pillette's study, there are several concrete applications for church planters and their core team.

First, Paul's approach to team development placed little emphasis on titles that distinguished him from his co-laborers. Pillette provides an important observation regarding Paul's use of teams.

[Paul] almost never reserved a title for himself alone. There was no attempt to distinguish himself from his co-workers as some might today when they use qualifying phrases such as “senior” and “assistant” to distinguish between pastors. Sometimes it is stated that a certain person is the pastor while other leaders in the same church are called elders or deacons. In contrast to our modern use of titles, Paul used designations that showed his partners were of equal value in the work (1 Thess. 2:6; 3:2). Even the designation apostle is shared with his workers in the sense that they were all messengers. He was uniquely commissioned but did not make that an issue by calling himself the senior apostle.²³

Titles often get in the way of a team's ultimate purpose. Joe Westbury of the North American Missions board builds on this very point.

The First Century church planting movement was carried on the shoulders of the laity. There was no such thing as the clergy; believers were called

²³ Ibid., 124.

equally and gifted accordingly. That's the way it began, and that's the way it should continue to be.

It's time for laypeople to reclaim their rightful role in evangelism and church planting. It's time for them to become co-laborers in the field with their pastors and missionaries as healthy, reproducing churches are begun.²⁴

Effective teams, asserts Westbury, eschew unnecessary distinctions that prevent each person from functioning as full co-workers in Christ. From Paul's example, church planting teams are built around the power of the so-called laity who are called and equipped for the work of the Gospel. The synergy of roles defined through the use of giftings produces strong momentum for the team.²⁵

Second, Paul used the power of consensus leadership to develop teams. His consensus approach, summarized by Pillette, allowed the teams to grow stronger by recognizing that each person was responsible for the life and health of the church.

[Paul] used the first person plural to show consensus (1 Thess. 2:18; 3:1–4). There was no distinction between his will (“When I could endure it no longer, I also sent...” 1 Thess. 3:5), and that of his fellow workers (“When we could endure it no longer...we sent...” 1 Thess. 3:1–2). He assigned to his partners the same feelings, the same logic, and the same productivity in the work. In fact, he sent Timothy, a convert of just two years and a worker of only a few months, to encourage the Thessalonians to withstand opposition. He also relied on Timothy's observations there to make a response to issues within the Thessalonian church. That is surely treating others as equals.²⁶

Consensus leadership does not preclude the need for good decision making, but rather it puts an emphasis on each person as an equal. Based on a shared history of ministry, Paul trusted young workers to work with others and build the unity necessary for planting and growing strong churches. John MacArthur shares a similar thought in his book on leadership.

It should be apparent, then, that the biblical concept of team leadership does not demand an artificial or absolute equality. There's nothing wrong, in other words, with a church's appointing a senior pastor, or a pastor-

²⁴ Joe Westbury. *Who Me? Help Start a Church? An Adult Strategy for Lay Church Planting: Participant's Handbook*, ed. Melissa Williams, (Alpharetta, GA: North American Missions Board, 2001), 6.

²⁵ Hirst, 8.

²⁶ Pillette: 124.

teacher. Those who claim otherwise have misunderstood the biblical approach to plural leadership.

Still, the undeniable biblical pattern is for multiple elders, team leadership, and shared responsibility—never one-man rule. And leadership by a plurality of godly men has several strong advantages. Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” The sharing of the leadership burden also increases accountability and helps ensure that the decisions of leadership are not self-willed or self-serving.²⁷

MacArthur suggests that there is a right use of titles and authority within the context of team. Within the team of elders, there are people who can make decisions, but always there is an emphasis on the power of working in unity. Consensus leadership in the practices of teaching and leading ultimately builds a stronger team and stronger church.²⁸

Third, Paul developed teams that he could trust with difficult decisions. He did not have to override their decisions because he relied upon his training and the equipping of the Holy Spirit to ensure that the church would stay strong. Pillette says,

Paul seldom had to override his fellow workers' decisions. In Acts 21:10–14, Paul's age, experience, and special commission were given preference. In the end, his partners allowed Paul's convictions to take priority. On the other hand, there are cases where Paul gave preference to a fellow worker's contrary opinion (1 Cor. 16:12). Paul and Apollos agreed on the need for a trip to Corinth but disagreed on the timing. Paul apparently was persuaded by Apollos's logic and feelings on the matter.²⁹

Each of these passages listed above demonstrate a clear pattern in Paul's value and preference for team leadership in the church.

Fourth, Paul demonstrated flexibility within team roles. After Paul was converted on the road to Damascus,³⁰ Barnabas brought the newly converted Paul to the church in Antioch where they ministered together for more than a year.³¹ While the church fasted and prayed together, the Holy Spirit called

²⁷ John MacArthur. *The Book on Leadership: The Power of a Godly Influence* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 2004), 169.

²⁸ Marshall Shelley. *Changing Lives through Preaching and Worship: 30 Strategies for Powerful Communication*, 1st ed., Library of Christian Leadership (Nashville, Tenn.: Moorings, 1995), 260.

²⁹ Pillette: 125.

³⁰ Acts 9

³¹ Acts 11:21-25

Barnabas and Paul, the prophet and teacher,³² to their first missionary journey. With the blessing of the church, the team, led by Barnabas, began their long church planting journey through the region of Galatia.³³ Part way through the journey, we see a shift in roles within the team. After standing firm against Elymas the magician, Paul becomes the team leader of the growing band of missionaries.³⁴ As Paul and his team planted churches, they ensured that the model of shared leadership would be carried out by appointing a team of elders³⁵ to lead each of the churches.³⁶ Once their mission was fulfilled, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and gave a report. Their actions demonstrate that even after great success and the passage of time, Paul and his team still valued the partnership of the church that first affirmed their call from the Holy Spirit.

Fifth, following the example of Jesus, Paul knew that successful leadership was defined by the ability to invest in other people who could in turn invest in other people and establish a chain of generational leadership. Paul encouraged the older generation to teach the younger generation.³⁷ Paul's teaching created an expectation that those who were mature in Faith would become like older siblings or parents who could guide the young in faith into maturity through both strong teaching and "informal, one-on-one encouragement."³⁸ Paul treated Timothy as his spiritual son exemplifies the relationship of generational

³² Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Electronic ed., Baker Reference Library 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1989), Acts 13:4. This passage in Acts 13:8-13 has implication for how we build our teams. The full exploration is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but Elwell's comment referenced above is worthy of further investigation. Elwell writes, "In his account of the inception of the mission (13:1-3), Luke lists the primary workers at the church in Antioch and classifies them as prophets and teachers (v. 1). In the original Greek, two grammatical particles usually translated "both... and" appear, the "both" prior to the names of Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius, and the "and" in connection with the names of Manaen and Saul. Thus Luke divides the names into two groups which correspond with the two classifications, prophets and teachers. This means that Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius functioned as prophets, while Manaen and Saul functioned as teachers. The emphasis would be revelation and exhortation for the prophets and instruction and application for the teachers."

³³ Acts 13:1-3

³⁴ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), 388.

³⁵ MacArthur, 167.

³⁶ Acts 14:23

³⁷ William MacDonald and Arthur L. Farstad. *Believers Bible Commentary. New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson Publishers, 1990), Tit 2:4.

³⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 59 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46

training necessary for church planting.³⁹ Douglas Milne in his *Focus on the Bible Commentary* explores the depth of this relationship between Paul and Timothy.

Timothy was already a Christian disciple when Paul first met him (Acts 16:1) and took him to be his helper in the service of the gospel (Acts 19:22). The relationship so deepened that they became like a father and son, full of mutual affection and trust ('my true son', Phil. 2:22; 1 Tim. 1:18). In spite of Timothy's youth and his recurring ill-health (1 Tim. 4:12; 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:6f), Paul respected and recommended him before all his other helpers because of his selfless motives (Phil. 2:19ff.). As a result Paul sent him on some difficult assignments (1 Thess. 3:2; 1 Cor. 16:10f). This close working relationship between the two men grew out of their shared faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of their age difference. This shows that there need be no generation gap in the Christian church, and that the one thing needful is a common commitment to the same Lord and his message of truth.⁴⁰

Paul grew to love Timothy as a son. Just as important, Paul built on this relationship and entrusted Timothy with key leadership roles building churches and passing on the faith to the next generation.

Finally, it is impossible to leave this section without mentioning the centrality of Jesus Christ throughout the mission of the church. The momentum of the Great Commission was begun in Acts and fulfilled in Paul.⁴¹ Craig Van Gelder in his book, *The Ministry of The Missional Church*, summarizes Paul's view as the "missio Dei."

The missional church reorients our thinking about the church in regard to God's activity in the world. The Triune God becomes the primary acting subject rather than the church. God has a mission in the world, what is usually referred to as the missio Dei (the mission of God). In understanding the missio Dei, we find that God as a creating God also creates the church through the Spirit, who calls, gathers, and sends the church into the world to participate in God's mission... The redemptive reign of God in Christ is inherently connected to the missio Dei, which means that God is seeking to bring back into right relationship all of creation. Or as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (5:19).

(Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 400.

³⁹ 1 Timothy 1:2

⁴⁰ Douglas J.W. Milne. *Focus on the Bible: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus*, Logos Bible Software Electronic ed., vol. 5 of 25 (Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 2003), 1 Tim 1:1.

⁴¹ Richard A. Noble, "Recruiting a New Generation of Missionaries: Doing Missions

The Spirit-led, missional church is responsible to participate in this reconciling work by bearing witness to the redemptive reign of God in Christ as good news, and through inviting everyone everywhere to become reconciled to the living and true God.⁴²

Teams were a tool used by Paul to create vibrant communities of Spirit-empowered disciples who were equipped to fulfill the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of Divine reconciliation.

Douglas Moo summarizes Paul's view of Christ's leadership of the church in his commentary on the book of Colossians.

Few texts in the New Testament make the case so clearly that Christian living must be rooted in Christ. He is the "head" who supplies power to the whole body (2:19). It is by our existence "in him," the "new self," or "new man," that renewal in the image of God takes place (3:10). He is the repository of all wisdom (2:3), the "reality" or "substance" of new covenant truth (2:17). Our very mind-set must be governed by "the things above," where Christ is and with whom we have been raised to new life (3:1-2).⁴³

The headship of the church was, and is, Christ alone who forms the thoughts and mission of the church. With Paul's church planting ministry as the backdrop, the next section provides a summary of my research and results.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUMMARY

My research project was designed to address the problem that core team abandonment, which exists in all church plants, can be effectively addressed by assuring that the founding core team is recruited and trained according to critical factors. The following research question was used in the development of this project, "Are there critical factors in developing a core teams that can be emulated by other church planters?" To properly address this question, the project sought to enumerate the common elements inherent to church plants that have successfully developed core teams.

The project took place in three phases. Phase one of the project was the

with Older Millennials in the Christian & Missionary Alliance" (DMin, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2004), 28.

⁴² Craig Van Gelder. *The Ministry of the Missional Church : A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 18.

⁴³ Douglas J. Moo. *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 69.

identification of twelve key elements for building a core team, herein referenced as the Discipleship Path. These twelve key elements were identified based on three criteria: my own experience in church planting, a thorough study of the Scripture, and an analysis of the related literature. The twelve key elements of the Discipleship Path are listed below in the form of a personal affirmations.

	Discipleship Path	Key Component
1	I have made a profession of faith in Christ demonstrated in water baptism.	Personal Faith in Jesus
2	I study the Bible on a consistent basis and demonstrate a growing knowledge of Scripture.	Bible Knowledge & Passion
3	I can verbalizes my desire for holiness and demonstrate real-life change by making consistently positive choices.	Demonstrates Maturing Faith
4	I desires to serve others and demonstrate an ability to draw others to Christ through specific acts of compassion.	Evangelistic Deeds
5	I have a growing passion for the lost and can make a clear and persuasive presentation of the Gospel.	Evangelistic Words
6	My love for the church is demonstrated in my family's priorities and by my commitment to a small group that inspires and encourages other Christians.	Small Group Participation
7	I am actively mentoring at least one other brother or sister in Christ.	Mentoring Others
8	I demonstrate a practical humility by serving the church and performing the daily tasks necessary to help grow the church.	Humble Service to Church
9	I am committed to giving time for training and development of the skills necessary to share the Gospel,	Teachable in Evangelism
10	I am committed to giving time for training and development of the skills necessary to understand the Scripture,	Teachable in Scripture
11	I am committed to giving time for training and development of the skills necessary to disciple other believers and move them through the Discipleship Path.	Teachable in Discipleship
12	I find and take advantage of opportunities to train others in the tasks necessary to grow and maintain a healthy church.	Training Others in Ministry Tasks

Table 3: Summary of the Discipleship Path

These twelve core-team affirmations, or Discipleship Path, were used in the development of a questionnaire discussed in the following pages.

The second phase was the design of a survey tool used to identify which elements experienced church planters considered most essential in developing a core team. It was expected that there would be a high correlation between the elements identified by experienced planters and the original elements identified in the first phase of this project.

Interviews were conducted with ten leading church planters around the United States. A twenty-one question survey was used as the primary measurement tool. The survey was conducted live using Skype®. The utilization of a live interview format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions to help refine and better understand each church planter's approach to building a core team. The survey addressed three key concerns.

The first part of the survey collected biographical information about each church planter, his leadership experience, and overall background in church planting. The second part of the survey gathered information on how each interviewee became involved in church planting and his overall impression of success. The third part of the survey asked each participant to evaluate his specific experiences in developing core teams. The survey asked respondents to summarize the lessons they learned in planting churches and asked what advice they would give to future church planters in developing a strong core teams.

The interview subjects were recruited through a two-step process. Step one was a networking phase that was conducted between February and April, 2009. In this stage, a basic set of questions was posted on the internet (see Appendix A). Church planters within the researcher's existing network were invited to participate. As church planters participated in the survey, a larger network of church planters was developed. As the network of church planters grew, more people were invited to participate in the networking survey. Ultimately, fifty-six church planters from around the United States participated in the internet survey.

Stage two of the selection process begin in the late Fall of 2009. Using the group of fifty-six respondents from stage one, ten church planters were invited to participate in the second, and more intensive, live-interview process. The criteria for selection of the ten live interviewees were as follows:

1. Each participant must have planted at least one church in the United States
2. Each participant must be actively engaged in church planting as a trainer, planter, sending church or some combination of the three.
3. Each person interviewed must be recommended by at least four other church planters.

The live interviews with these ten planters were conducted between April 8th through May 12th of 2010. The participating church planters were surveyed and recorded through a live interview on Skype®.

The interview subjects reflected a very diverse group of planters from across the United States of America. In total, ten experienced church planters were surveyed. The respondents were men who ranged from 36 years of age to 66 years of age. The men surveyed represented nine different states with two residing in California. Eight of the ten surveyed classified their primary role as

a trainer of church planters. One man identified his primary role as Sending church planters into the field from a large church. One described his primary role as a church planter. Six of the ten respondents are associated with the Baptist tradition. Three of the ten are multi-denominational. Three of the ten are planting within the Charismatic or Pentecostal tradition while two are non-denominational in their church planting efforts. A very diverse and experienced group of planters provided a solid foundation for analyzing the research question.

The measurement for the project was a comparison of the results of the twenty-one question survey with the twelve key components of the Discipleship Path. This section explains the purpose and the design of the measurement.

The twelve elements of the Discipleship Path are listed below in Table 8. The left-hand column states the key components of the Discipleship Path in the form of a personal affirmation. The right hand column refines each personal affirmation into a single key component of core team development.

The first step in the analysis of the data was to compare and contrast the original twelve components of the Discipleship Path with the answers to the survey questions. The survey questions strongly confirmed four of the elements in the Discipleship Path. Each of the four factors received over 50% confirmation from the survey group. The four strongly confirmed factors were:

1. Personal Faith in Jesus-100%
2. Demonstrates Maturing Faith-80%
3. Evangelistic in Deeds-70%
4. Training Others in Ministry Teams-70%.

The survey questions moderately confirmed two of the elements in the Discipleship Path. Each of the two factors received just 50% confirmation from the survey group. The two moderately confirmed factors were:

1. Evangelistic Words-50%
2. Teachable in Evangelism-50%

The survey questions did not confirm six of the original twelve components of the Discipleship Path. These six components received less than 50% confirmation and are therefore unverified as crucial to core team development.

1. Teachable in Discipleship-40%
2. Humble Service to Church-30%
3. Teachable in Scripture-30%

4. Bible Knowledge & Passion-20%
5. Mentoring Others-20%
6. Small Group Participation-10%

The survey also revealed five additional components of core team development not contained in the original Discipleship Path. The survey questions strongly confirmed four of the elements in the Discipleship Path. Each of the four factors received over 50% confirmation from the survey group. The four strongly confirmed factors were:

1. Teachable in Methods-90%
2. Engagement with Non-Church Community-60%
3. Empowered to Lead-60%
4. Complimentary Gifts / Diversity within Team-60%

The survey questions moderately confirmed one new component not in the original Discipleship Path. This new factor received just 50% confirmation from the survey group.

1. Unity Around Vision-50%

These five components offer a significant addition to the elements necessary to answering the research question of this project. The next section summarizes the eleven key elements to building healthy self-replicating core-teams for church planting.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on my research, the following conclusions were derived: The researchable question for this project was, “Are there critical factors in developing a Core Teams that can be emulated by other church planters?” The answer is yes, there are critical factors in developing core teams for church planting. A summary of all the factors confirmed through the research project are listed in Table 4 from highest to lowest.

	Suggested Component in The Original Discipleship Path	Church Planter Confirmation	
		#	%
1	PERSONAL FAITH IN JESUS: The initial core-team needs to have an existing relationship with God.	10	100
2	TEACHABLE IN METHODS: Every church plant is unique, so members of the team must have an openness to learning new and different methods to achieve ministry goals.	9	90

	Suggested Component in The Original Discipleship Path	Church Planter Confirmation	
		#	%
3	DEMONSTRATES MATURING FAITH: Not every member has to be a life-long follower of God, but they do need to show a history of maturity and a desire to grow stronger.	8	80
4	EVANGELISTIC DEEDS: Team members must have a track record of taking action to reach the lost with the love of Jesus.	7	70
5	TRAINING OTHERS IN MINISTRY TEAMS: A willingness to work hard in the basic task of ministry and to train others in those tasks.	7	70
6	ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-CHURCH COMMUNITY: Each member of the core teams needs to have preexisting involvement/relationships outside the church.	6	60
7	EMPOWERED TO LEAD: Only core-team members who are empowered to lead will reproduce a second-generation leadership for the church.	6	60
8	COMPLIMENTARY GIFTS/DIVERSITY WITHIN TEAM: Every team member must know and be empowered to use their unique strengths.	6	60
9	EVANGELISTIC WORDS: Members of the team must demonstrate a history of inviting others to participate in the church.	5	50
10	TEACHABLE IN EVANGELISM: Show an openness to learning new methods and approaches for reaching out to the lost.	5	50
11	UNITY AROUND VISION: Members of the team must have a personal investment and passion for the vision of the church plant.	5	50

Table 4: Summary of Components Critical to Core Team Development

These eleven components listed above reflect the key components receiving confirmation with 50% or more from the church planters as necessary to building a core team. The research demonstrated a viable relationship between the use of these eleven key components in the Discipleship Path and the successful development of core teams for church planting. Any church planter who implements a training process incorporating the key components of the Discipleship Path will significantly increase the odds of successfully planting a church.

Successful use of the Discipleship Path to build core teams is by no means an easy task. To fully engage the process the following recommendations are given to church planters. First, church planters must utilize a “train as you go” approach. The Discipleship Path is not transferable in a “classroom-only” approach. The key components of the Discipleship Path must be demonstrated and taught through the daily process of planting a church.

Second, proper implementation of this research requires preparation coupled with reproducible action. The church planter must prepare the right materials and tools for training and then combine those with an intentional set of actions that reinforce the Discipleship Path.

Third, the key components of the Discipleship Path are established best in an environment where there is both an empowered and decentralized leadership. This means that church planters must learn to train people who in turn are given the freedom to train other people. A restrictive centralized power structure will hinder the proper development of a core team.

Finally, the corollary to the previous conclusions is the right use of “Divine-Neglect.” That is, the church planter must build a core team and allow the Holy Spirit to be the teacher, sustainer, and builder of the church. At times, establishing the key components of the Discipleship Path can only be accomplished when a planter pulls back and allows the team to succeed and fail without his or her direct intervention in the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The following areas are in need of further research. My theological study does not demonstrate a strong support for the five new components of Engagement of the Non-Church Community, Unity Around Vision, Teachable in Methods and Empowered to Lead. Although each of these is confirmed through the survey and implicit throughout the research, these four new factors in building core teams deserve future study with a broader examination of the Scripture.

It is clear from the research that the following six elements are not necessary for building a core team for church planting.

1. Teachable in Discipleship-40%
2. Humble Service to Church-30%
3. Teachable in Scripture-30%
4. Bible Knowledge & Passion-20%
5. Mentoring Others-20%
6. Small Group Participation-10%

The existing research does indicate these factors are still important for making disciples of Jesus. Therefore, it would be of great value to church planters for future researchers to define how and when a church planter can properly transition members of the core team into a fuller program of discipleship that incorporates these six factors.

Joe Miller is currently an adjunct professor in Southern California teaching a variety of courses in Practical Theology and Leadership. In addition, he

coaches multiple church planters. Dr. Miller has a diverse educational background earning his B.A.E from the Pennsylvania State University, M.Div from Oral Roberts University, and D.Min from Biola University. Joe has 15 years of pastoral experience and has authored multiple books on church history, biblical theology, and small group study. He is the author of 7 books and an avid blogger at: www.MoreThanCake.org

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UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S CONTEXTUALIZATION METHODS FOR MISSION ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

BY GWAMNA DOGARA JE'ADAYIBE

Department of Religious Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

“... I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law, so as to win those under the law... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel...” (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

INTRODUCTION

History of Christian mission is incomplete without the mention of Paul. Paul is considered in Christianity as one of the greatest figures after Jesus Christ. Elucidating this point further, N. R. Needham writes that, “more than any other individual, the apostle Paul was the man who made it possible for the Jesus movement to turn from being a purely Jewish sect into a largely Gentile body.”¹ Needham notes Paul's credentials as “supreme thinker and theologian of the early Church,” and concludes that, “next after Jesus Himself, Paul has had the greatest historical impact on the life and thought of the Christian church over the past 2000 years.”² Michael F. Bird has reinforced this assertion by stating that “Paul was the towering force behind much of early Christianity.”³ For Bird, “in the history of the Christian church, times of reformation and renewal have often found their catalyst in fresh encounters with the apostle,”⁴ and concludes that, “Paul the servant of Jesus Christ, has a fresh word from God for the church in all ages.”⁵

Without doubts, a discourse on mission today requires understanding Paul as a quintessential Christian missionary per excellence and a missionary strategist for all time. Any contemporary reflection on mission will derive immeasurable insights from Paul's life, mission and its application.

Understanding Paul's contextualization methods for mission in Africa,

¹ N.R. Needham. *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*, Grace Publications Trust, London, 2002. P 49.

² N.R. Needham. *2000 Years Christ's Power*. p. 49.

³ Michael F. Bird. *The Man, His Mission and His Message*, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, 2008, p. 13.

⁴ Michael F. Bird. *A Bird's Eye View of Paul*, p.13.

⁵ Michael F. Bird. *A Bird's Eye View of Paul*, p.13.

derives from my conviction that any meaningful mission engagement in Africa today must take contextualization of the gospel seriously. Contextualizing the gospel entails the ability to proclaim and relate the gospel message to the African soil in a manner in which the gospel speaks to the African heart in order to make sense to African existential realities of life.

Mission historian, Wilbert Shenk states that one of the key features of contextualization is that, "it is a process whereby the gospel message encounters a particular culture, calling forth faith community which is culturally authentic and authentically Christian."⁶ After identifying more than a dozen of Paul's mission strategies, I chose to discuss Paul's contextualization methods as it is more of the need of the moment. This chapter is based on certain presuppositions that will direct the flow of the discourse.

- I. That Paul was the greatest Christian preacher and missionary agent apart from Jesus Christ;
- ii. Paul's missionary strategies and impact are still relevant for mission in Africa today, and there is the need to appropriate Paul's vision and mission for the church;
- iii. Contextualization approach to missions in Africa have been played down, and some (conservatives) "have traditionally been suspicious of contextualization;"⁷
- iv. Modern challenges in mission calls for an understanding of Paul's contextualization methods as key to mission in Africa;
- v. The growing influence of Pentecostalism in Africa today can be explained within the framework of contextualization of the gospel which need to provide a motivation for mission in Africa;
- vi. Contextualization is Biblical and also imperative. Andrew Nkwalla has identified three reasons that portray contextualization as being imperative. These are; the ministry of Christ, the example of New Testament and the example of New Testament discipleship;⁸ and
- vii. Contextualization method provides safeguards against past errors of mission in Africa. David J. Hesselgrave, has corroborated this need with reference to mission in Africa and indicates that it is a necessity.⁹

In his, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice*, Dean S. Gilliland, has asked whether Paul had a strategy or do we really need strategy in missions? In answer

⁶ Quoted in Andrew Nkwalla, "Contextualization and African Pentecostal Mission," www.antsonline.org/article2r2:1.html, p.3.

John Corrie, "Mission and Contextualization," www.trinity_bris.ac.uk/.../Corrie_missi_an_contextualization.pdf, p.5.

⁸ Andrew Nkwalla, "Contextualization and African Pentecostal Mission", p.3.

⁹ David J. Hesselgrave, "Great Commission Contextualization," www.ijfm.org/

to this puzzle, Gilliland provides an answer in the affirmative that Paul had a strategy and it is a necessity in missions.¹⁰ He defines strategy as something that has to do with the conception of a plan before the campaign and its modification as the war progresses.¹¹ Paul's style and mission methods strategically played significant roles. After identifying some "general features of Paul's missionary strategy," he however failed to mention contextual approach of Paul. Danny McCain, in his Notes on acts of the Apostles, discusses "Paul's missionary strategies," and shows how Paul was conscious of the context of his audience where he contextualized his messages in the application of the gospel that he preached.¹²

Shoki Coe, sees contextualization as the "missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it."¹³ For Coe, contextualization is a missionary necessity as the gospel moves from one culture soil to another and has to be translated, reinterpreted and expressed afresh in the new cultural soil.¹⁴

By mission, we are referring to proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the kerygma) to the nations in fulfillment of Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19:

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Mission involves reaching out to the world with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. It involves discipleship and nurturing in faith. It is considered "Great Commission," a mandate that God himself commanded with all the assurances of Divine presence.

John Stott sees the word "mission" as interchangeably used over the years with "witness" and evangelism.¹⁵ For Stott, the "purpose of God's mission, the *missio Dei*, is the establishment of Shalom (Hebrew-peace)."¹⁶ Mission is in the

PDFs/JFN/12_3_PDFS//06, p.

¹⁰ Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, p. 284.

¹¹ Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice*, p. 284.

¹² Danny McCain, Notes on Acts of the Apostles, Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru, 2001, pp. 340-354.

¹³ Shoki Coe, "Contextualizing Theology," Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (eds), *Mission Trends*, No. 31, Third World Theologies, Paulinist Press, New York, 1976, p. 19.

¹⁴ Shoki Coe, "Contextualizing Theology," p. 19.

¹⁵ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, IVP Books, Illinois, 1975, p. 15.

¹⁶ John Stott. *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, p.15.

character of God as the “living God of the Bible is a sending God.”¹⁷ Biblical concept of mission is contextually conditioned and expressed within particular milieu. Thus, Paul’s model provides an example (paradigm) that could help to determine modern engagement of mission in Africa.

PAUL AND HIS BACKGROUND

Scholarly works on Paul have presented him in many ways and from various perspectives. N.T. Wright notes this when he writes that “Paul in the 20th century, has been used and abused much as in the first.”¹⁸ Brad H. Young corroborates Wright by stating that; “the question of how we use Paul for today remains as firmly on the table as ever.”¹⁹

For example, Michael F. Bird presents Paul as a persecutor, missionary, theologian, Pastor and Martyr.²⁰ Perhaps, one of the acceptable portraits of Paul is provided by Ben Witherington III who refers to the “trinity of Paul’s identity,” namely, Paul the Jew, Paul the Roman citizen and Paul the Christian.²¹ We shall adopt his own portrayal of Paul for the purpose of this chapter.

a. Paul the Jew

Paul was a Jew. In Philippians 3:5, when he had asked;

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh,” he replied that “I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” Paul refers to Jews as “my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom. 9:3).

Paul studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was a grandmaster and teacher who was greatly respected throughout the Jewish world. Gamaliel was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body in Jerusalem

¹⁷ John Stott. *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, p. 15.

¹⁸ N.T. Wright. *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1997, p. 23.

¹⁹ Brad H. Young. *Paul the Jewish Theologian: The Pharisee Among Christians, Jews and Gentiles*, Hendrickson publishers, Massachusetts, 2006.

²⁰ Gene A. Getz. *Paul: Living for the Call of Christ*, B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2000, pp 15-16.

²¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus*, Inter-Varsity Press, Illinois, 1998 p. 18.

and he greatly influenced Paul's theology.²² Paul says, "I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers," and one who had advanced in Judaism beyond many Jews of his age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of the fathers (Gal. 1:14). There is an indication that Paul had a relative (sister) in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16), and "the family of Paul seems to have had some influence in the city."²³ Paul also learned tent making from his father which assisted him greatly later in his missionary career. Tarsus was noted for its leather goods, a cloth identified as cilicium, which came from the hair of black goats. This cloth was used to make tents.²⁴

b. Paul the Roman Citizen

Acts 9:11 mentions that Paul (Saul) was from Tarsus, the chief city of the province of Cilicia and was a large and important city in the days of the Roman empire. It is described as not "ordinary city" (Acts 21:39). Tarsus was a cosmopolitan city, a religious centre which blended all types of religious beliefs, philosophies and practices. It was a city where the Western and the Eastern (oriental) worlds met.²⁵ Tarsus was famous for its institutions as it was considered centre of learning in Asia minor, comparable to Athens in Greece and Alexandria in Egypt. Getz adds that Tarsus was made liberia civitas (free city) by the Romans in addition to its self governing status.²⁶

Tarsus was Paul's home (Acts 11:23, 22:3) and he was brought up there. Brad H. Young has added to some credentials of Tarsus thus:

Indeed, Tarsus was no mean city. Connected to the Mediterranean sea by the Cydnus River, it was strategically located, a thriving center of commerce, Greek culture and philosophic learning. The city had a university and was greatly influenced by the stoic philosophic schools.²⁷

The educational status of Tarsus is buttressed further when Strabo wrote:

The people at Tarsus have devoted themselves so eagerly, not only to philosophy, but also to the whole round of education in general, that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers.²⁸

Acts 22:25 mention Paul as a "Roman citizen." Acts 22:26 and v. 28 also refer to his "citizenship." Paul, in reaction to their imprisonment by the jailer in

²² Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, p. 18

²³ Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, p. 18.

²⁴ Gene A. Getz, *Paul: Living for the Call of Christ*, pp.12-13.

²⁵ Martin Dibelius, *Paul*, West Minister Press, Philadelphia, 1960, p. 8.

²⁶ Gen A. Getz, *Paul: Living for the call of Christ*, p. 13.

²⁷ Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, p. 14.

²⁸ Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, p 15.

Philippi, told him, “they beat us publicly without trial, even though we are Roman citizens” (Acts 16:37, 22:25, 28).

Roman citizenship conferred certain benefits to its beneficiaries. For example Paul could appeal his case to Caesar as a Roman citizen and while in prison, “was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him” (Acts 25:10-12; 28:16). Ben Witherington III writes on this thus:

Paul's Roman citizenship would have provided him with advantages that would have assisted his work as a traveling evangelist. Besides having Roman justice on his side, he would have an instant entrée to any city in the Empire, especially Roman colony cities like Corinth or Philippi... He would have access to Roman roads and could travel with parties of other Roman citizens or even with Roman soldiers on a mission if need be. His positive interaction with the praetorian guard while under house arrest (see Phil. 1) was no doubt in part because they were not disposed to ignore or despise a Roman citizen.²⁹

For Paul, the Greco-Roman world was his familiar terrain and he was acquainted with the socio-political realities of the times. It also shaped Paul. Don Fleming accepts this observation when he asserts that “Paul's style of systematic thinking suggests a Greek educational background of the type available in Tarsus.”³⁰ In fact, it has been noted that “Paul wrote Greek as if it were his mother language as his style was eloquent and classicist, possessing an extensive knowledge of Greek.”³¹ Thus, one could say that Paul was a product of a “globalized world,” and he understood the dynamics of such a multi-cultural world which he employed for his mission work, including his contextualization efforts. Martin Dibelius captures this succinctly this way:

It is unlikely that Paul would have become the great Christian missionary if his home had not been in this wider Judaism, if he had not been able to read and write Greek and possessed the Septuagint as his Bible, if he had not been used to accommodating himself to foreign customs, and if he had not had an eye for the wider world of highways by land and sea and for the great cities of the Mediterranean world.³²

Early physical description of Paul is found in the apocryphal Acts of Paul as:

A man of little stature, thin haired upon his head, crooked in the legs, of

²⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest*, p. 73.

³⁰ Don Fleming. *World's Bible Dictionary*, World Bible Publishers, IOWA, 1990, p. 427.

³¹ Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, p. 14.

³² Martin Dibelius, *Paul*, p. 22.

goodstate of body with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace; for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.³³

c. *Paul the Christian*

Paul was also a Christian. Paul's dramatic and radical transformation from a persecutor of the church to one who was destined to be persecuted for Jesus Christ. Paul's encounter with Jesus Christ on Damascus road changed Saul's life. Later, Paul referred to the event as God's revelation (Gal. 1:16), and a moment in which he experienced God's grace and "apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles" (Rom 1:5). Paul's Damascus event changed his worldview and he experienced what Ben Witherington III refers to as a "thorough resocialization."³⁴ At the Damascus encounter, Paul was called, and commissioned as "chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15). Paul's vision about God was changed and his mission redirected. A former zealot of the law and persecutor of the church was now destined to be zealous for Christ and to be persecuted (9:16). Getz notes that Paul's life was dramatically changed with the power of the Holy Spirit, and was born again.³⁵ Paul's conversion remained a pivotal event and a constant reminder throughout his ministry, and it shaped his theological thoughts in respect of the law, the grace of God, salvation, righteousness of God and of justification by faith. "His transformation is unequalled in the history of Christianity."³⁶

Paul was commissioned to the Gentiles (Act 9:5). Paul also spoke of receiving God's grace "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:16). The term, Gentiles, from Hebrew goyim, (Greek ethne or Hellenes) originally referred to "nations" before it acquired a restricted use.³⁷ It was used to refer to all non-Israelite people (Gal. 2:15). Israel was prohibited to copy the "detestable ways" of the Gentiles (Deut. 18:9), who had a reputation for not knowing God, being selfish, immoral, greedy, ungodly and idolatrous (Matt. 6:32; Rom 1:18-22, Eph. 4:17-19). In fact, "in the eyes of the Jews, Gentiles had no hope of salvation, because they were excluded from the covenant promises that God gave Israel (Eph. 2:11-12)."³⁸

In the next section, we shall refer to Paul's missionary activity at Athens where Paul "gave a conspicuous exhibition of his marvelous versatility"³⁹ as a

³³ Brad H. Young. *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, p. 12.

³⁴ Ben Witherington III. *The Paul Quest*, p 77.

³⁵ Gene A. Getz. *Paul*, p. 31.

³⁶ Gene A. Getz. *Paul*, p. 31.

³⁷ P. A. Blair, "Gentiles," J.D. Douglas (eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*, Inter-Varsity Press, Illinois, 1996, p.405.

³⁸ Don Fleming. *World's Bible Dictionary*, p 148.

³⁹ F. B. Meyer. *The Life of Paul*, p. 117.

missionary. Paul's address at Athens was the greatest contextualization message, and also the "greatest audience Paul ever addressed."⁴⁰ It also brings out the passage as "a brilliant example of missionary strategy."⁴¹ Dean Flemming sees "Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts 17 as perhaps the outstanding example of intercultural evangelistic witness in the New Testament."⁴²

PAUL IN ATHENS (ACTS 17:16-34)

Paul visited Athens in his second missionary journey. Paul had visited Thessalonica and Berea where he preached the Gospel and some believed the message with "great eagerness" (17:11). Athens was famous for its culture, home of great dramatists, and of great philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle.⁴³ Athens was the most famous among the university cities just as Tarsus and Alexandria.⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce calls it the "mother of Western civilization,"⁴⁵ and "a city notorious for its liking for intellectual chat."⁴⁶ F.B. Meyer refers also to the educated literati of Athens.⁴⁷

Athens was a city of antiquity which exhibited rich historical monuments and legacies. It was a city rich in art, architecture, literature and politics during the golden age of Grecian history (5th B.C). Meyer notes that "on every side were achievements of human genius. Temples that a Phidias had designed, statues that Praxiteles had wrought."⁴⁸ Philo, the Jewish Hellenist historian also spoke of the Athenians who "were the keenest-sighted mentally of the Greeks, famous for its temples, statues and monuments."⁴⁹ Appollonius, the philosopher and contemporary of Paul, rebuked them for their lascivious jigs at the festivals of Dionysius and for the love of human slaughter in the gladiatorial games.⁵⁰ They were pleasure lovers and of novelty (17:21). "Though religious, their spiritual level was not exceptionally high."⁵¹ Athens was a *citias foederata* (a

⁴⁰ F. B. Meyer. *The Life of Paul*, p 118.

⁴¹ D. R. Hall, "Athens", J.D. Douglas et al. (eds.). *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 101.

⁴² Dean Flemming. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Inter-Varsity Press, Illinois, 2005, p.72.

⁴³ D. R. Hall, "Athens", J.D. Douglas et al. (eds.). *New Bible Dictionary*,... p. 101.

⁴⁴ D. R. Hall, "Athens", J.D. Douglas et al. (eds.). *New Bible Dictionary*,... p. 101.

⁴⁵ F. F. Bruce (ed.). *The International Bible Commentary*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 1298.

⁴⁶ F. F. Bruce (ed.). *The International Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, p. 1298.

⁴⁷ F. B. Meyer. *The Life of Paul*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ F. B. Meyer. *The Life of Paul*, p. 117.

⁴⁹ D. R. Hall, "Athens", J.D. Douglas et al. (eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*,... p. 102.

⁵⁰ D. R. Hall, "Athens", J.D. Douglas et al. (eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*,... p. 102.

⁵¹ D.R. Hall, "Athens", J.D. Douglas et al. (eds.). *New Bible Dictionary*,... p. 101.

city linked to Rome by treaty). It was a city that was renowned.

Paul came to this city and was “distressed that the city was full of idols” (v. 16). Paul met with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue and in the market place daily and “reasoned” with them. He debated with Epicureans and Stoic philosophers who had a low view of God, and about the world and the hereafter. He preached about Jesus and the resurrection and they accused him of speaking out of his senses, some that he was advocating foreign gods, and therefore, called him a “babbling” (v. 18). They decided to bring him to the Areopagus.

Areopagus was an ancient and highly respected council of philosophers in Athens situated on the Mars Hill. They were responsible for the orderly conduct of public lecturing in Athens.⁵² Paul was invited to come and explain more of this “new teaching” that he was presenting. It was then that Paul stood up and addressed Athenians that were gathered to listen to him. Here, Paul showed his best in his masterly, powerful, spell-binding address. It was a unique address, “full of grace, intellectual sequence, grandeur of conception and range, stately march of eloquent words.”⁵³ Paul spoke of their external religiosity (evident everywhere) in reference to the altar that had an inscription, “to an unknown God.” He said, “I see that in every way you are very religious” (v.22). This became the core of Paul’s contextualization message where he used it to draw their attention to God who could be known and who had indeed, revealed himself in history (cf Rom. 1:20). He drew allusion to some of their Poets in order to build a bridge in between them.

He called for their response by repenting from their “ignorance” (v. 30). But when they heard of the mention of the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, while others said, “we want to hear you again on this subject” (v. 32). Some who became followers of Paul believed, Dionysius a member of the Areopagus and Damaris and others. Craig S. Keener has maintained that the conversion of Dionysius was significant as a member of the Areopagus and writes that “although Paul’s message to the university community of his day does not produce massive immediate results, his ministry to the Areopagus is clearly effective.”⁵⁴

CONTEXTUALIZING ACTS 17:16-34 TO MISSION IN AFRICA TODAY

Paul’s ministry in Athens has attracted scholarly responses where Paul’s contextualization message can be applied to modern mission engagement in Africa.

⁵² Don Fleming, *World’s Bible Dictionary*, p 28.

⁵³ F. B. Meyer, *The Life of Paul*, p.118.

⁵⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*,

In fact, David A. Reed has noted that, "Africans have written many studies on the subject of the Areopagus speech."⁵⁵ We will draw a few of some highlights in Paul's Athenian address:

- i. Religious Athenians and African traditional religious heritage. Paul encountered Athenians who he described as "very religious" (v. 22). The vast presence of shrines and altars show that Athens was indeed, religiously committed to idols.

According to Reed, "the presence of the numerous idols apparently contradicted his perception of Athens as the cultural and intellectual center of the ancient world."⁵⁶

John Mbiti has described Africans as "notoriously religious," and that religion permeates all aspects of the African life. According to Mbiti, "African peoples do not know how to exist without religion,"⁵⁷ and asserts that Africans had no atheists in the true sense of the word. To George Omaku Ehusani, "this all-pervading sense of the sacred, a unique African legacy, is a gift to Christianity. Missionary Christianity has nothing to add to the African spiritual worldviews, but it rather has a lot to gain from it."⁵⁸ God's consciousness in Africa is reflective in their knowledge of Him through theophoric names, attributes of Him and in proverbs, etc. Ikengah Metuh observed also that there is a paradox of transcendence and immanence of God in African religions not peculiar to Africans.⁵⁹

Though God is considered as a *deus incertus deus remotus*; that is, "remote and a withdrawn God," He is not worshipped in most African societies, not even in images of Him in drawings or carvings, though there are a few exceptions of this in some parts of Igbo land, Ashanti, Dogon and Ambo.⁶⁰ According to J.V. Taylor, "He is God whom man has made in his own image."⁶¹

Intervarsity Press, Illinois, 1993, p. 374.

⁵⁵ David A. Reed "Acts 17:16-34 in an African Context: An Assessment from a N. Atlantic/Western Perspectives," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 22. 1, 2003, p.97.

⁵⁶ David A. Reed, "Acts 17, p.92.

⁵⁷ John S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heineman, Nairobi, 1969, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁸ George Omaku Ehusani. *An Afro-Christian Vision Ozovehe: Toward a More Humanized World*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1991, p. 208.

⁵⁹ Emefie Ikengah – Metuh, "African Worldviews as 'Praeparatio Evangelica': An Appraisal," *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 1:3, 1987, p.59.

⁶⁰ Emefie Ikengah Metuh, "African Worldviews as 'Praeparatio Evangelica,'" p. 47.

⁶¹ J.V. Taylor. *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion*, SCM Press, London 1963, p.67.

Reflecting on Acts 17:16-34, with reference to African traditional religion, Sam Oleka remarks that: It is remarkable fact that people from a background of African traditional religion respond more readily to the gospel than people from a different religious background, say Buddhism. One possible explanation is that the limited knowledge of God in African traditional religion has some common points with the full revelation of God in Christ for a point of contact. African traditional religion show God as creator, spirit, transcendent and all powerful. When the Gospel preaches love, grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ, His God who is far off becomes the God who is near (Jer. 23:23).⁶²

It is Oleka's conviction that African traditional religion has areas of contact with the Biblical concepts of God and his revelation that makes the proclamation of the gospel in this context, easier, familiar and meaningful. Paul Mumo Kisau corroborates Oleka by showing that;

Like the Athenians, Africans are very religious and have numerous shrines. The concept of the supreme God in African traditional religion is also shadowy, not unlike the concept that led to the erection of an altar to the unknown God.⁶³

As a missionary in Africa, Richard German has realized this African reality and wrote that, "knowledge of the supreme being, the creator of heaven and earth, was a valuable heritage of traditional Africa."⁶⁴ German points out that Africans even had the knowledge of Paradise Lost,⁶⁵ and concludes that, "it has become quite clear that the grace of God has been at work in the hearts of the African before the coming of missionaries. This measure of truth known to the African has served as a road for the gospel to enter into the hearts of the peoples."⁶⁶

What German identifies as elements of the "Grace of God", "measure of truth", and the "road to the gospel," is what has been considered among others as elements in African worldviews that are "praeparatio evangelica," that is, preparatory grounds for the spread of the gospel.

⁶² Sam Oleka, "The Living God: Reflections on Acts 17 and African Traditional Religions", Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw and Tite Tienou, *Issues in African Christian Theology*, East African Educational Publishers Ltd Nairobi, 1998, p. 130.

⁶³ Paul Mumo Kisau, "Acts of the Apostles," Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary*, Word Alive Publishers, Nairobi, 2006, p. 1331.

⁶⁴ Richard Gehman. *African Traditional Religion in the Light of the Bible*, p. 174.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 174-176.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 176.

Just like the Athenians were “very religious” and knew of the “unknown God,” the gospel need to engage Africans with the message in order to understand religion and spirituality that transcends individual to public life, just as Africa’s idea of a “remote God” (withdrawn God) needs to have a Gospel touch that will transform its belief in God who is both transcendent and immanent and who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:14).

- ii. Paul was constructive and corrective in his mission at Athens. Dean Flemming has showed how Paul was able to lead the Athenians to the knowledge of the true God through “various apologetic arguments in verses 24-29,” and constructively corrected their notions of God.⁶⁷ Missions today must constructively engage African worldviews in order to correct some of what Richard J. Gehman calls, “errors in ATR,” such as Africa’s concept of the remote God and idolatry.⁶⁸
- iii. Paul preached to the Athenians in their language (Greek) and they understood him well. We have demonstrated that Paul used Greek which he knew and spoke well to communicate to Athenians. He used rhetoric which was the elite language with all the power of persuasion and debate. He presented the gospel very clearly with much grasp. Missions today must seek to communicate in a language that speaks to the hearts of the people. Early Christian missionaries in Africa tried in this area and early translation efforts of some African languages and the Bible remains the pioneer work of missionaries.⁶⁹
- iv. Athenians heard something new in Paul’s address (v. 19). Africans generally are very receptive to new ideas. The Gospel message must carry good news that is new and attractive. Contemporary news coverage of Africa have been consistently negative in reportage. Most news that come from Africa are on hunger, crises and wars, environmental degredation, corruption, illiteracy and effects of poverty among others. The Gospel message has the potential to present good news that is refreshing and empowering to Africans.
- v. Paul “reasoned” daily with them. He interacted with them, identified with them, presented the Gospel to them and answered their questions. Paul met the Jews in the synagogue which was their familiar terrain, and some

⁶⁷ Dean Flemming. *Contextualization in the New Testament*, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁸ Richard Gehman. *African Traditional Religion in the Light of the Bible*, Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru, 2001, pp. 84-86.

⁶⁹ Lamin Sanneh, “Renewed and Empowered: The Christian Impact,” *Ogbomoshon Journal of Theology*, Vol. XV (1) 2010, pp. 28-31.

God fearing Jews in a market place in their relaxed environment.

Paul met his target audience at their convenient places. They were religious people, but who needed greater knowledge of God. The gospel in Africa today must meet people wherever they are found with the sole aim of presenting something new to them. There is the need for an alternative message that will interest people's ears and hearts.

- vi. Paul was scorned (v. 32). They called him a “babblers” (v 18). To scorn someone is to condemn, sneer or scoff at someone.⁷⁰ To call someone a “babblers” is to insult one who is incoherent in talk or is a mere chatter.

These were forms of insult and contempt that greeted Paul's mission in Athens. Later, Paul made reference to similar mission experiences in 2 Corinthians 6:4 where Paul listed other experiences to include;

great endurance in trouble, hardships, and distresses, in beatings, imprisonment and riots, in beatings, sleepless nights and hunger, in the Holy spirit, in truthful speech, and in the power of God, with weapons of righteousness, through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report, genuine, yet regarded as impostors, known, yet regarded as unknown, dying, and yet we live on, beaten and yet not killed, poor, yet making many rich, having nothing and possessing everything (paraphrased).

This passage summarizes quintessential Paul as a missionary who had adapted himself to all situations in “order to win some.”

- vii. Paul delivered a sound message. His address about the living God in Athens was profound and theologically sound. It was also unambiguous. He caught the attention of Athenians who heard him. At least, Luke the writer of Acts did not indicate that Paul was faulted in his speech on theological grounds, but rather, they responded differently, “we will hear him again on this” (v. 32). As the gospel message is proclaimed in Africa today, the message must be very clear, unambiguous and relevant to issues that border Africans. Kehinde Olabimtan has identified some of them as “areas of this global reality that must inform mission at this stage of human history,” such as; governance, globalization; poverty, burgeoning population growth, migration and multiculturalism, rapid urbanization, environmental crises, culture change, religious and ethnic tension, and the challenge of new morality.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Concise Edition Dictionary and Thesaurus*, Geddes and Grosset, Glasgow, 2002, p. 665.

⁷¹ Kehinde Olabimtan, “Mission Theory and Practice,” *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology*, vol. xv (1), 2010, pp. 83-87.

- viii. Paul did not outrightly condemn Athenians of idol worship; but he commended them for being “very religious in every way” (v. 22). He took them from the “unknown” to the “known,” as he presented God to them. Mission today in Africa must learn to respect and love Africa, its peoples, culture, history, and beliefs, before it can reach them with the Gospel whose central tenet is the love of God to all men. Paul was not chased away in Athens because he respected the Athenians. That was why Paul got a listening audience that heard him. Mission need listening ears. Africans are good listeners, and as story lovers, the Gospel comes readily to a people whose worldview fits in very appropriately. Paul constructively engaged them and led them to the truth. Mission in Africa today must avoid prejudices, biases and superior outlook of the Western European type which characterized past missionary endeavour in some parts of Africa.
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- ix. Paul delivered his speech with power and mastery. Mission in Africa today need to engage Africans with the gospel of power to a people who are “power conscious.” Charles Kraft, a past missionary to Africa, C. G. Baeta, G. C. Oosthuisen and J. S. Trimmingham have noted this very well as necessary requirement in mission in Africa, in order to avoid the errors of the past missionary encounter.⁷² Pentecostal growth in Africa today should provide the stimulus for this re-discovery.
- x. Paul challenged them to repentance, and judgment, and the last day. Paul's message was centered on core aspects of salvation, faith, justification and the grace of God. Missions today must engage Africa with the message of salvation and the true essence of the kerygma, and not the “butter and bread,” prosperity Gospel that has become very fashionable among some

⁷² Je'adayibe Dogara Gwamna. *Perspectives in African Theology*, Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru, 2008, pp. 72-73.

preachers.

- xi. Paul did not compromise his Christian message to the Athenians. Flemming notes this when he writes that, "Paul is able to convey biblical revelation in the language and categories of his Greek listeners without as N.T. Wright puts it, "traveling down the slippery slope towards syncretism."⁷³ As had been noted earlier, one of the suspicions and fear of contextualization by some today is that it leads to syncretism. But if we draw from Paul, contextualization can be insulated from syncretism. Contextualization must not compromise cultural worldviews in order to reach people. Contextualization can penetrate cultural worldview of a people as we had already seen, in order to "correct" or "transform" it without giving in to syncretistic trappings of culture particularly in Africa where culture is a potent force in most societies.
- xii. Though the response was little in Athens (part of mission experience), a seed of the gospel was sown. It was quite remarkable. Keener has noted this as we had seen earlier. It left imprints among philosophers who heard him at Athens. Similarly, the gospel must leave imprints in Africa wherever it is preached.
- xviii. Paul identified and interacted with the groups he met in Athens: Jews, God fearing Greeks and philosophers. He was involved in cross-cultural mission. Paul was able to relate with them at their levels because he was able to adapt to them, with their diversities, beliefs and peculiarities. Today, Africa is no more the "Dark continent" of the 19th century. Globalization has opened the villages to the satellite televisions and the mass media is an added boost to the influence of multi-ethnic consciousness and reality in Africa. Mission engagement in Africa must recognize this reality and the shift in the paradigm that will fit its relevance to its mission goal.

CONCLUSION

Paul was a great strategist in missions. As we had stated earlier, there are other models of Paul which contributed immensely to his successes in mission. Most of such strategies were adopted as a result of Paul's contextualization efforts. For example, Paul's use of letters were written to meet specific needs of church congregations and to address practical issues of some congregations, as was the case with the Epistle to the Corinthians, Galatians and Thessalonians among others. E. Randolph Richards has provided a hint that Paul was able to maximize letter writing in his ministry because travel within the

⁷³ Dean Flemming. *Contextualization in the New Testament*, p. 77.

Mediterranean shores and courier culture was very popular.⁷⁴ Richards gives details of ship travel in ancient Mediterranean world at the time of Paul which helps to contextualize Paul's mission.⁷⁵ Thus, understanding 2 Corinthians 1:25-27, in respect of "shipwreck" experiences for example, is situated within this context.

Paul showed commitment and brought his intellectual capabilities to bear in his mission practice. It eased his work and enhanced effectiveness. Such commitment of talented people is needed in missions in Africa in order to be able to make the kind of impact Paul made. Added to his multi-cultural upbringing, Paul's commissioning to the Gentile mission kept his focus on the gospel message (2 Cor. 4:2, 17).

Other models such as Paul's focus on urban ministry, collaboration in mission, tent making, friendship in mission, discipleship (follow up), etc, are models that require or need to be explored, and adopted for effective mission engagement in Africa. But note must be taken that particular contexts determine the applicability or otherwise of strategy in mission, hence the flexibility and adaptivity in mission as was exemplified by Paul becomes relevant.

Africa is still groping today in sin, illiteracy, poverty, civil unrests, underdevelopment, corruption and all the negative indices of civilized cultures. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can reverse the African condition. The Gospel which is the good news must be proclaimed in Africa just as Jesus declared namely; "to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom to the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (LK 4:18-19). This can be achieved today only through purposeful mission engagement in Africa.

⁷⁴ E. Randolph Richards. *Paul and First Century Letter Writing*, Intervarsity Press, Illinois, 2004, p. 189.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

THE POOR, POVERTY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

BY DR. DAUDA A. GAVA

Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Bukuru

ABSTRACT: The poor have been the subject of oppression and exploitation by the merchants and land owners at the time of James in the first century. James stood up to address those that oppressed and exploited the poor. The message of James is relevant to the society, church and government of today. The poor are also encouraged to live spiritual life. The poor in this context refers to material poverty. Because of their status, the poor are not honoured in the church, society and government. This article is meant to remind the poor not to neglect being spiritual though they are despised. On the other hand, those that oppress and exploit the poor today should know their responsibility to one another whether in the church, society or government. When everyone holds to their responsibility exploitative relationship would be thing of the past.

KEYWORDS: Poverty, Spiritual Growth, Christianity, Government

INTRODUCTION

Being poor is accompanied by poverty. In this article I started by looking at the issue of poverty and the poor in Palestine and I give an explanation as to what “poor” means in both the Old and New Testament. The word “poor” is a key word in this article. I tried to use the Epistle of James to look at the poor and poverty. But in order to understand the meaning of the poor and poverty in the New Testament one has to start with the Old Testament. At the end, an application is used in order to help the church and society.

POVERTY AND THE POOR IN PALESTINE

What happened in first century Palestine can be traced to its immediate background. The period 167-63 BC was a good one as far as the history of the Jews was concerned. That period saw the Maccabean revolt break out when Antiochus Epiphanes defiled the temple in 167 BC. The ancient sacrificial worship in the temple was restored in 164 BC after the revolt. The Maccabean rule was successful politically but it had its problems too. The desire of the Maccabean rulers for power came in conflict with the religious goals of those that supported them. “Both the pharisaic and essene movements came into existence during this period largely as a protest against the political and secular direction of the upper classes and sharp conflicts broke out among them...” (Pilgrim, 1981:39-40). Because of the above conflicts, the main Jewish leaders invited Roman soldiers under Pompey to restore peace and order. Instead of

keeping peace, the Roman soldiers destroyed the city, violated the holy Temple and took over the control of Palestine fully. Later on, “the reign of Herod the Great, though hated by most Jews and especially by the pious, actually brought about fairly stable conditions in Palestine” (Pilgrim, 1981:40). During Herod's reign, he was able to restore peace; there was prosperity economically in the land. “But poverty and other socio-political tensions were never far away...” (Pilgrim, 1981:40). When Herod the Great died, things changed for the worst as economic exploitation came in and the poor were the ones exploited while the wealthy were in control of the public transcript. Maynard-Reid corroborates this when he says, “...the economic situation of the ordinary people became increasingly worse. Besides, the same... technology that was used to improve the economic situation was used for economic exploitation and aggravated the accompanying poverty” (1987:18). This poverty created tensions between the upper and lower classes. The lower classes were the ones living in poverty while the upper classes oppressed the poor. “It was an intolerable situation in which impoverishment and chronic insecurity were the lot of the members of the lower class, these conditions being brought on by small group of financiers who dispossessed and oppressed them” (1987:18). The exploitation and oppression of the lower classes by the upper classes came about because of the influence of the Hellenistic culture on the Jews of Palestine. Most of the noble class in Palestine adopted a Hellenistic way of life as Stanbaugh says that “the seductiveness of Hellenistic culture was apparent to the Jews of Palestine. Some of them, chiefly the upper class nobility in Jerusalem, were tempted to assimilate, to adopt Greek ways and accept the social and economic benefits of Greek society” (1986:21). This has created disparity between the wealthy and the poor in Palestine.

It is obvious that “Even a puppet ruler in poor Palestine found power as an easy access to wealth” (Pilgrim, 1981:41). The poor in Palestine lived in abject poverty as they only depended on subsistence agriculture. The subsistence agriculture was only able to sustain the poor for a short time. “The vast of majority of the people...lived in appalling poverty” (Maynard-Reid, 1987:18). At that period, the wealthy came from the royal court of Herod the Great. “These were the merchants, large landowners, tax-farmers, bankers and families of inherited means who belonged to the wealthy class” (Pilgrim, 1981:42). Among the wealthy were also the high priestly families that got their wealth from the temple tax which the Jews were required to pay. In the lower class were the poor, “the poor belonged essentially to two groups: those who sought to earn their own livelihood, and those who lived off subsidy” (Pilgrim, 1981:44). To be included among the poor are those that lived on the poverty line ‘the people of the land’ “either as small landowners or as tenants for large landowners” (Pilgrim, 1981:43). The other categories of the poor are the “sick, blind, lame, lepers and the destitute” (Pilgrim, 1981:44). There is another group of the poor in the first century “the fatherless and widows, the victims of

ill fortune, who needed social care and regularly received it” (Pilgrim, 1981:44). It is to the widows and orphans that James emphasizes care for them as true religion (1:27). This means that the extremes of wealth and poverty associated with the poor are by far the majority in Palestine. “The members of upper classes were relatively few, but they were conspicuous because they controlled the wealth and political power” (Stanbaugh, 1986: 112). This is what Scott (1990) means by saying that it is the wealthy or the elite that control the public transcript.

THE POOR¹

In the Old Testament, different words are used to explain the term 'poor' which in Greek is *ptochos* and sometimes *penes*. In Hebrew, these are words frequently used: *ani*, *dal*, and *ebyon*. “*ani* denotes a dependent because of his inferior position of answering to the one who demands the answer” (Kanagaraj, 1997:41). In referring to the economic position, *ani* is used together with *dal* or *ebyon*. Also “*ani* refers to a person who is dependent in an economic sense - to one who is poor, needy, oppressed, humiliated, dispossessed, afflicted, and in a state of lowliness and distress” (Maynard-Reid, 1987:25). When *ptochos* is used to translate *dal* then it refers to physical weakness and to low and insignificant social status. The Hebrew “*ebyon* indicates the one who seeks alms, the beggar, and generally the poor man, it also refers to the very poor, those with no roof over their heads” (Kanagaraj, 1997:41). Also the poor are seen by their economic distress this comes as a result of exploitation and oppression by the wealthy “God's people were recognized as poor owing to their extreme economic distress, which was often caused by oppression, and in this connection 'poor' can mean 'lowly' or 'humble'” (Carson, 1989: 17). In first century Judaism the term “poor” is not used strictly in the sense of the economic status of a person but “the rich and the poor marked the extremes of the social body in terms of elite and non-elite status, in a moral context 'rich' referred to those powerful due to greed, avarice and exploitation and 'poor' referred to those who were weak and unable to maintain their honour and dignity in society” (Malina, 1987: 354-67). And in Palestine, the wealthy acquired their wealth through oppressive means and they justified their attitude since the poor did not have power to face them.

“The rich agriculturalists, commercial farmers, merchants, and large landowners...justify their attitude to wealth and the wealthy used oppressive

¹ Though the poor is used in socio-economic context but I do not intend to look at poverty levels, high and low income earners in this article. For details See my Doctoral Thesis on “A Critique of Discrimination on the Basis of Poverty in the Epistle of James” where issues of poverty are treated extensively.

means both to obtain their wealth and to keep it” (Maynard-Reid, 1987:30). The poor in Palestine suffered a lot from the hands of the wealthy and the elite “we have noticed that the poor in Palestine suffered greatly in the first century” (1987:31). In order to show the intensity of how the poor were oppressed by the wealthy Horsley says that “the peasantry in subject societies have typically experienced some degree of dispossession of land, destruction of the economic unity of the family, a disruption of traditional custom which regulated local socio-economic relationships” (1987:11). Because of the oppression and exploitation, the poor became landless in their own community as they have been dispossessed of their lands by the wealthy.

Among the wealthy in the first century were the high priestly families, they also oppressed the lower class. “The rich people in the first-century Judaism were: the observant Jewish leaders, such as high priestly families who, in practice, oppressed the lower clergy; the land owners who abused their tenants and hired labourers (cf. Jas. 5:1-6); the merchants who controlled much of the economic life of the country...” (Davids, 1992: 701-2). The poor did not find it easy in the first-century as they were marginalized “they lived on the edge of existence even in the best of times, for to be in an agricultural economy without owning sufficient productive land to provide security is to be economically marginal” (1992: 703). The living condition of the poor was not improving as they continued to be exploited by the wealthy. Maynard-Reid says “the economic situation of the ordinary people became increasingly worse...the economic situation was used for economic exploitation and aggravated the accompanying poverty” (1987:18). This increased the rate of the poor and poverty in the first century Palestine.

Are the poor seen in different perspective in the New Testament? The Greek words used in the New Testament as seen in the epistle of James are *ptochos*, “the word *ptochos* is related to *ptossu*, meaning to 'cringe' or 'crawl'” (Esler, 1987: 180). The other Greek words are *penes* or *endees* to describe some one who was poor without being destitute” (1987: 180), and the verb *ptwxew*. “There are several passages which use 'poor' of people who are lowly in social status, the hungry, beggars, the politically powerless, and who have to depend on others' mercy and help to survive e.g. James 2:3-6” (Kanagaraj, 1997:45). It was obvious that “James warned the rich so harshly because they had hoarded wealth and refused to pay their workers (5:2-6)” (Gwamna, 2008: 96). In Gwamna's words the poor person is “one who is in need, one whose sustenance depends on others, one who lacks the minimum satisfaction necessary for subsistence, and therefore cannot attain fully the basic necessities in life towards human fulfilment. The poor are simply dehumanized. They are the unheard voices, the burden bearers in all human experience and aspirations” (2008:17).

INSIGHTS FROM THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

James might have seen the poverty of the poor and their exploitation by the wealthy few in first century Palestine. “The force of James's words grows from his understanding that he and the people he addresses are the poor. They lack the resources, the influence, the power to challenge the great men who control lands and market places” (Warden, 2000: 4). Though the *Didache* was not written in Palestine but in Antioch, it emphasizes sharing as community members. It was this type of condition that made the peasants to set up their alternative communities as Draper has shown in his writing about the moral economy of the *Didache*.² The moral economy of the *Didache* emphasises sharing with one another in the community, as they expect the community members to be treated in the way that one would treat themselves. The poor in Palestine did not only stop at sharing with each other in the community but they developed resistance and rebelled against the wealthy. Though the poor rebelled against their domination by the wealthy or the elite, it was done offstage. Thus, Scott (1990) says, the poor dictate the hidden transcript. *ptochos* for James is one that is poor and cannot take care of him/herself. They are always at the mercy of others. That was why they were discriminated against and exploited by the wealthy. The wealthy *plousioi* dictated the public transcript in the time of James, and no one challenged them, but James came out to denounce them because of their attitudes toward the *ptochos*. The poor for James are the ones that are trampled under the wealthy's foot stool, *upopodian*. It is a sign that the poor are oppressed, exploited and discriminated against. When James uses the word *ptochos* he is referring to the physical poverty that his community members faced. And the majority of James' community members were peasants.

“We cannot fail to notice that James is on the side of the poor people whom he addresses. His sympathy lies with them” (Warden, 2000:4). James addresses the issue of humiliation experienced by his community members and he stood up to the wealthy members that exploited the poor. Being a Galilean, James was aware of what was happening in Palestine in his time. He knew that the wealthy oppressed the poor by holding their wages and taking over their lands, “As far as James is concerned, the rich are those who not only turn their backs on Christians, but who oppress them” (2000:4). It could be seen that there was great disparity between the poor and the wealthy in James time. Because of that, “it is not difficult to imagine the resultant exacerbation of social-economic divisions within Palestinian Jewish society. The Galilee portrayed in the gospels is a society of the very rich and the very poor” (Maynard-Reid,

² Jonathan A. Draper (2011) “The Moral Economy of the *Didache*”, *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(1), Art. #907, 10 pages. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v67i1.907.

1987:13). Because of the experience faced by the poor and the oppressed, “James is on the side of the poor. He is more concerned that the labourers in the field receive their wage than in defending an abstract principle of free enterprise economics” (Warden, 2000:7). James was also aware that the wealthy accumulated all the landed property and other materials for themselves by means of exploitation. It was the wealthy that controlled most of the resources, “the material wealth of the Greco-Roman world was distributed very unevenly. A tiny fraction of the population owned a vast proportion of the land and resources, and the mass of men and women had to make do with moderate means or scrape by on very little” (Stanbaugh, 1986: 65). It means that the majority who are the poor control a few resources which were not enough for them to make a living.

WHAT THE POOR SHOULD DO

In this context, we are talking about the poor in the Christian community as with the case of James' audience. The poor in James' community developed a hidden transcript toward the wealthy but James reminded them that they have been chosen by God. When the poor recognized that they are chosen by God they would not bother about their exploitation or oppression by the wealthy. The poor are also encouraged to stand up to their task not depending solely on others.

WHAT THE CHURCH SHOULD DO

The church is expected to be a caring community, sharing with one another. When the church sees each member as equals there would be progress. There would be no room for exploitation and oppression. The church should bend down to teach God's word to her members instead of dwelling so much about health and wealth gospel that does not lead to salvation of the soul spiritually. The church must make sure that there is no preferential treatment given to any member because all are one before God.

WHAT GOVERNMENT MUST DO

Every citizen has the right to live a fulfilled life. Unfortunately, in some cases, the few exploit and loot government treasury for their selfish interest. Most governments focus on poverty alleviation only on paper, it does not translate to the poor. Responsible and faithful stewards should be put at the right positions. When this is done, the level of poverty would reduce drastically. The result would be healthy members for the church and society.

CONCLUSION

The poor are despised and relegated to the background in the society as we saw in Palestine in James' community. The poor had to have a hidden transcript in order to achieve their goals. This is not encouraged today as it could lead to revolt. Though the poor always live a life of shame because of the maltreatment they receive from the wealthy, they are encouraged to look up to God. The only consolation for the poor is to live spiritual life where they will be honoured by God and shame will not be their portion. "Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5NIV)."

Rev. Dauda A. Gava is a lecturer/ Ag. Registrar at Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Bukuru. He did his Ph.D in Biblical Studies (New Testament) from the University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. He has been teaching Greek New Testament and other NT courses.

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BETWEEN THE SIGNIFIER AND THE SIGNIFIED: A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

BY CHINONYE C. EKWUEME UGWU
West Africa Theological Seminary, Lagos

ABSTRACT: This study was undertaken with a concern over the too frequent interpretation of actions and issues from their surface structure, with little or no regard for possible deep, underlying meanings to such actions, entities, and issues. It is based in part on the assumption that most Christians form opinions regarding other peoples' practices with little or no regard for the doctrines and conventions that inform such practices. On this premise, it sought to underscore outward practices and entities as mere indicatives of deep, underlying structures. It emphasizes furthermore the great benefit of drawing conclusions to an outward gesture or a practice, only after a thorough evaluation of the deep or base structure behind such outward expressions. Methods of analysis of factual/primary data and relevant literatures on this issue were adopted, and this was done within the framework of Saussurean structuralism.

Some of the major findings include that: layers of meanings form part of the dynamics of socialization and that the words of a language have no meaning outside convention; words are signs consisting of both signifier and signified, meaning as Rachael Tom pointed out that every “object in the world can pass from closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society...”; words (in their written and oral form) remain dead and inactive (just like their unspoken form) until someone reads/listens to them, and ascribes meaning to them; Denominational backgrounds and experiences leave layers of structures/ideas that inform words and actions. Documented Christian creeds are vulnerable, like any other text, to various, individual and group interpretations.

Based on the findings, it is recommended, among others, that: a people (Christians especially) must endeavour to understand the structures or ideas behind individual and group choices and actions (including the choice of which church or Christian denomination) to worship without prejudices; individual/lay perceptions of doctrinal issues should not be confused with the universally accepted doctrine of the church or of any Christian denomination; creeds and positions of the various groups should be weighed against the more valid doctrinal statements of the church – the body of Christ – for a more balanced appraisal of issues. Criticism of any outward practice should begin with the documented evidence or statement in form of interpretations by each denominational leadership.

KEYWORDS: Language, Theology, Communication

INTRODUCTION

The concern of this paper is with the too frequent interpretation of actions and issues from their surface structure, with little or no regard for possible deep, underlying meanings of such actions, entities, and issues. This problem, ironically, has particularly been observed to be common among persons who seek metaphysical explanations for virtually all human experiences, actions and relationships – theologians to be specific. As such, it has continued to cause disaffection among persons in seemingly homogeneous communities. The question is: to what extent do socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences influence a person's actions and ideas?

The study was based, in part, on the assumption that most Christians form opinions regarding other peoples' practices without verifying structures (doctrines and conventions) that inform such practices. In addition, one's own doctrinal background informs his/her opinion regarding persons of a different background.

Therefore, the study sought primarily to underscore outward practices and entities as mere indicatives of deep, underlying structures. It sought furthermore to emphasize the great benefit of drawing conclusions to an outward gesture or a practice, only after a thorough evaluation of the structure (behind such outward expressions) has been made.

Employing the methods of analysis of factual/primary data and relevant literatures on this issue, a rational basis for interpretation of actions and entities was surmised. The structuralist theory, with its emphasis on layers of meaning, came handy in this goal of underscoring the place of socio-cultural dynamics in determining acceptability or otherwise of human thoughts, actions and inactions.

First and foremost there was an attempt to underscore the basic concepts, embedded in the essay topic. These include the concepts: signifier and signified, both of which originate from the same semiotics construct – sign. This concept may further be explained using associated notions of form, symbol, mark, signal, indication, hint, clue, suggestion, etc.

CONCEPTS OF SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED

These are concepts borrowed entirely from structuralism – a school of thought founded in the early twentieth century by the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. During his lectures, Saussure stressed differences between 'the sign, the signifier, and the signified'. In his seminal paper, *Courses in General Linguistics*, he taught that the letters and words with which a language is formed are but signs. When sound is imposed on these signs or forms, they become signifiers, while the idea or understanding derived from a combination of form and sound becomes the signified.

This theory, to the twenty-first century reader/critic may appear antiquated considering countless other theories that have surfaced since then. Yet structuralism holds such universal appeal that renders all-time significant. It is said to have revolutionized the study of language and inaugurated modern linguistics. Furthermore, structuralism is believed to have had a profound influence on the development of other disciplines, especially anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism (Criticism.Com, 2005).

Among other finds emphasized by the structuralist school is that layers of meanings form part of the dynamics of socialization and that the words of a language have no meaning outside convention (meaning accepted by and imposed on those forms by the users of the language). Words, like “images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects ... have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning” (Chandler, 2009). The implication of this is that an object may be invested with as many different meanings as there are persons of different socio – linguistic backgrounds.

From the above conceptual frame work therefore: signifier (a combination of sign and sound) and the signified (the deep structure) an attempt is made to underscore the effect of social – interpersonal relationships, and the thought pattern of persons regarding certain significant elements of Christian worship.

THEOLOGY AND STRUCTURALISM

Hans Penner identified structuralism as “a rational search for formal rules for the explanation of religious beliefs and practices”. Penner's study was however carried out in order “to explain the multifaceted beliefs and practices of Hindus...” (Lewis and Travis, 1991, 33) and not Christian. Nevertheless, it does not end in a rational search but in outright explanation of how a people's thoughts and behaviours are influenced by norms and layers of beliefs acquired over a long period of time.

Beyond language, or linguistics, we have been encouraged to apply structuralism to anthropology and sociology, both of which deal with the study of human interrelationships within the social setting. So then, as signs or symbols, what for instance, do words/statements made by individuals, in their individualistic and idiosyncratic capacities mean? What do statues, dresses, colours, gestures, and other elements of culture signify or mean to people within a socio-religious setting, such as a non-denominational seminary? Are there correlations between individual submissions and the doctrinal statements of institutions? Are persons able to transcend forms, styles and other external influences of the environment to the deep, abstract, concepts those forms represent, or do they simply stop at the signs and draw conclusions? And, how sufficient are words/human language in portraying transcendental realities?

Theology may not have been explicitly recognized as one of the disciplines

influenced by structuralist theory, but the identified fields of anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism are areas that theology intersects. Studies in Cultural Anthropology, Greek, and Hebrew languages attest to this. It is on this premise that Saussurian structuralism becomes the theoretical framework of this treatise.

Further insight into what structuralism and Saussure's 'the sign, signifier and the signified' entail may equally be gleaned from the view below:

The central tenet of structuralism is that the phenomena of human life, whether language or media, are not intelligible except through their network of relationships, making the sign and the system (or structure) in which the sign is embedded primary concepts. As such, a sign -- for instance, a word -- gets its meaning only in relation to or in contrast with other signs in a system of signs (criticism.com, 2005)

This paper is therefore based, in part, on the understanding that a 'sign', word or words, with all the letters of which they are composed, for instance, are meaningless outside the thought systems/structure upon which they are founded. It emphasizes base structures upon which superstructures are imposed. These base structures constitute a number of social-cultural constructs, deep and unconscious, out of which plausible meanings may be surmised. The relationship between the signifier and the signified may be likened to that between empiricism and metaphysics. It is a relationship between form and concept; one material and the other physical. They are two different, yet inseparable entities. Divorced from the other, one becomes meaningless.

Equally embedded in the structure of this paper is the issue of adequacy or otherwise of human language in portraying ultimate reality. Seemingly embedded in Saussure's work and propagated by some of his disciples is the belief that word (human language) is not sufficient to indicate truth and the ultimate reality. And some theologians have, seemingly also, and quite understandably too, taken this position to imply that human language is inadequate for giving accurate information about the nature of God. Yet, argument contrary to this view abounds.

Inadequacy of human language has been viewed from a different perspective to imply human limitations, but not God's. Psalm 145:3 reveals that "God's greatness is beyond understanding"; implying the incomprehensible nature of God. As a finite being, man cannot fully understand the infinite and ultimate reality – God. However, that human beings cannot fully comprehend God's greatness may not in a strict sense imply that human words/language is not enough to express God or His nature. It may just mean that much as human beings speak, human words, bounded by human limitations and limited perception, are inadequate to completely encapsulate the boundless and

Ultimate Reality.

Dr. Matthew McMahan began his introduction to Dr. Gordon Clark's book, *Language and Theology*, with the submission that:

There are many “religious thinkers” today who deny the adequacy of human language to express ultimate reality and thoughts about God. Interestingly enough there is no shortage on academic books of this nature though they say language is inadequate (McMahan, 2012).

McMahan's position above is that human language is sufficient “to express ... thoughts about God”; implying that human language can express whatever imagination or thought is able to capture. Yet, since human thought, according to Psalm 145, and by reason of man's finite nature, cannot encapsulate God's greatness, it follows naturally the inadequacy of human language. Words cannot express what thought cannot comprehend. The important thing to realise however is that inadequacy implies 'not enough', and that it is this inadequacy that keeps human beings constantly longing for bigger and better words/language, with which to express that 'ultimate reality' – God Himself. Therefore, these words become signs consisting of both signifier and signified. As Chandler argues, “a sign must have both a signifier and a signified”.

Whatever the faith of Saussurian linguists, one clear and undeniable fact from the Structuralist tenet, remains that: human language and artifacts do not entirely lead to a full and accurate perception and transmission of the abstract. It requires additional faith. Hence, one can safely begin with an argument for the adequacy of human language in transmitting information about institutions and about God; but conclude that language and physical entities must be understood within contexts, such as the environment of usage. Other contexts include the culture, social influences and backgrounds. All of these elements are, of course, made possible through God's gracious providence.

Like James Packer, we are eager to delve into language forms and their relationships with theology in a bid to understand, shed more light on, and advance a proper perspective of language and artifacts. We do this, not to just or to simply fulfill academic goals, but for the more pertinent need of identifying and adhering “to the proper view of God's word so that we might live to honor, obey and fellowship with the One to whom the Word points” (Herrick, 2012). It is, at the same time, to fulfill those wishes of Jesus Christ – 'that they may be one ...' and to always act and speak in love of God and of one another, just as He wants us to.

Having dwelt so much on the identified issue of confusion between form and concept, there is need, at this juncture, to further clarify the other recurrent content element of the topic of this paper, and that is 'theology'.

Theology has been defined according to its Greek original (theologia): as “an account of, or discourse about, gods or God” (Ferguson, 1998). The

Encyclopedia Britannica on the other hand incorporates such themes as “God, humanity, the world, salvation, and eschatology...” (www.britaninica.com, 2012). In Webster's New 20th Century Unabridged Dictionary, it is defined as the “study of God and the relations between God and the universe ... study of religious doctrines and matters of divinity.”

The last of the definitions is of special interest because of the synonyms – principle, policy, set of guidelines, canon, and dogma – that are associated with the word “doctrine”. It is interesting because some have come to view certain Christian doctrines with some cynicism over the churches dogmas. Dogma is, in fact, often viewed as disapproving. Yet, they form the basis for an understanding of the ideas that informed most of our religious artifacts and practices from earliest of times, through the ages of great reforms, even to the modern period. Dogmas have in fact come to stay; for with every revolt against church traditions, new traditions with their sets of dogmas are born. As such, diverse as they are, the result of denominationalization and group/individual appropriation of the Holy Scriptures, doctrines or dogmas remain essential elements of cohesion, consistency and bonding in the church. Accessibility of the Holy Bible to peasants, market women and lay people everywhere has come to mean individuals and groups appropriating its content, in accordance with their socio-cultural and other experiences that certain scholars of language and semiotics have expressed.

No doubt the word theology may mean different things to different people, depending on culture and the particular way in which a person perceives it, stressing once more, the relevance of environment to form/signifier and the concept/signified. A content word (sign) may signify different things to different people. As the renowned scholar of semiotics, Roland Barthes, puts it in his work *Methodologies*, “conventions inform both language and style, rendering neither purely creative. Instead, form, or writing (the specific way an individual chooses to manipulate conventions of style for a desired effect), is the unique and creative act. A writer's form is vulnerable to becoming a convention ... once it has been made available to the public” (Wiki encyclopedia, 2010).

The Holy Bible, in our modern world, has become vulnerable (much as we hate to admit it) to specificity and to individual and group manipulations, and to varied conventions and style; thereby almost losing grip of its universal essence. Every individual who, according to Barthes, decides to work on a piece of an ancient document (the Holy Bible inclusive) becomes a uniquely creative being. Yet one must not fail to reflect, as Plato did, on the plausibility of human 'creativity' being no more than “poor imitations of the real”.

Although Barthes advances the course of structuralism to imply layers of meaning, language, from his point of view, has direct bearing on culture and on the particular interpretation given it by others. According to Rachel Tom, “along the lines of circuit of cultural (re)production, every object in the world

can pass from closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things.” (Tom, 2009)

The above assertion opens a significant insight into an area of theology and language use that might be significant to all who are called to the teaching ministry. Whatever a preacher says (but especially that which is written) comes alive and becomes open, not just to public appropriation, but equally to varied interpretations. Signs become what Barthes terms 'myth' in the sense that they become catalysts for subjective opinions (the signified), usually based on socio-cultural experiences of the interpreter/reader.

Arising, secondly, from the above submission of Barthes's, is that words (in form of writing) remain dead and inactive until someone reads them and ascribes meaning to them. This is of specific significance to consumers of theological and other written materials in the sense that the particular reading/understanding given a material by the reader becomes an ultimate basis for the reader's subsequent actions, attitudes, opinions, etc towards the writer and other referents. This view is somewhat akin to the Reader-Response theory, which according to Chris Lang, “focuses on what happens in the reader's mind as he or she reads”; an “analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time.” (Lang, 2009). To buttress this point, Lang introduces his study of Stanley Fish's Reader-Response theory with this quotation of Edwin Markham's poem:

He drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout:
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!
(Lang, 2009)

The above, like every other writing has been made vulnerable to everyone's interpretation by virtue of the form or structure given to the idea that bore it; so that one is at liberty to read the first two lines as 'a revelation of what happens when God's children fail to fulfill His mission – love as I have loved ...'; and the last two lines as 'God, the ultimate reality, in action within His faithful children.' There would, in fact, be as many interpretations as there are readers of those lines for embedded within the words (signifiers) are structures or layers of meaning (signified).

Depending on the level of perception of the reader, a surface or deep meaning may be read from those lines of poetry, and from any other lines. God-given freewill and graces to human beings, makes it possible for everyone who is able to read and comprehend the lines of poetry above to pass his/her opinion, irrespective of popular opinions regarding the content of those forms (signifiers). In fact, the more unpopular the opinion (signified), the more

popular the giver of such an opinion becomes. Such readings are sometimes called criticisms.

Unfortunately, even the sacred writings (the word of God) have become subject to such criticisms, otherwise called synthesis, exegesis, etc. Nonetheless, responsibility is demanded of every reader/critic. Jesus in Matthew 7 makes it explicit that anyone who judges would be judged by the same measure with which he/she judges others. The reader/critic is judged by the same measure with which he/she judges others.

Sample of the brief survey presented below was designed to test the assumption that most Christians form their opinions regarding the practices and doctrines of the church according to the doctrines of their own denominational affiliation. The survey consists of 10 questions structured on a three point scale and was randomly distributed among 22 adults—males and females—of a non-denominational Christian seminary. The result of the questionnaires is as follows:

	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
The presence of a cross reminds me of Christ's sacrifice for humanity	22	0	0	22
The cross does not remind me of Christ at all	0	22	0	22
The statue of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe brings to mind his important role in the Nigerian history	17	1	4	22
It is wrong to put a statue in a church	18	3	1	22
There is nothing wrong with having a statue in the church	3	18	1	22
Kneeling or standing in prayer before the cross of Jesus is sacrilegious (a blasphemy)	9	11	2	22
Kneeling or standing in prayer before any statue is sacrilegious	17	2	2	21
It (items 6 and 7 above) depends on the intent of the person's heart	13	6	3	22
The statue of any historical figure reminds me of the deeds and importance of such a figure	16	5	1	22
Sounds and letters of a language have no significant role in their meaning	13	5	4	22

22 students agree to the statement, “The presence of a cross reminds me of Christ's sacrifice for humanity. All 22 disagree with the opposite: “The cross does not remind me of Christ at all”. 17 agreed, 1 disagreed and 4 were undecided on over the statement: “The statue of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe brings to mind his important role in the Nigerian history”. 18 agreed, 3 disagreed and 1 was undecided over the statement: “It is wrong to put a statue in a church”, while the reverse is the case over the opposite statement: “There is nothing wrong with having a statue in the church”. That is, 3 agreed, 18 disagreed, and

1 was undecided. On the statement: “Kneeling or standing in prayer before the cross of Jesus is sacrilegious (a blasphemy)”, 9 of the respondents were in agreement, 11 disagreed and 2 were undecided. On “Kneeling or standing in prayer before any statue is sacrilegious” 17 agreed; 2 disagreed and 2 were undecided. On “It (items 6 and 7 above) depends on the intent of the person's heart” 13 agreed, 6 disagreed and 3 were undecided. On “The statue of any historical figure reminds me of the deeds and importance of such a figure”, 16 agreed, 5 disagreed and 1 was undecided. On “Sounds and letters of a language have no significant role in their meaning”, 5 disagreed, 13 agreed, and 4 were undecided.

A close study of the responses, irrespective of the denominations to which the respondents are affiliated, show that their denominational backgrounds have a lot of influence on their responses. For lack of space and time, a fuller analysis of these responses cannot now be made. Perhaps this would be a limitation of this paper. However, much of evidences so far proves that most people reason, behave, talk, etc. based on deep structures formed by their socio-cultural, and religio-denominational backgrounds.

IMPLICATIONS OF STRUCTURALISM TO THEOLOGY

By way of conclusion, structuralism has a number of implications for theology as a study of “God and the relations between God and the universe” or a “study of religious doctrines and matters of divinity”. But specifically, it has lessons for Christian theologians.

Firstly, structuralism recommends a clear understanding of base structures or ideas behind choices and actions of persons, including the choice of which Christian congregation or denomination to worship with. This is bearing in mind that backgrounds and experiences leave layers of structures/ideas that inform choices, words and actions.

Such contentious issues in the church as women ordination, women wearing head cover to church and while praying, and absolute submission of a spouse to the authority of the other (the latter being a big problem in the African church and family) can easily be overcome with the application of the structural principle. Understanding the background of one's spouse and the impact it has on his/her world view enables one to condescend to accommodating ephemeral issues without compromising the centrality of one's more enduring faith.

Some typical African 'Christian' husbands who are inappropriately exposed to basic Christian article of faith regarding the issue of a wife's submission to her husband (Eph. 5:22) readily interpret that verse literally and in line with his authoritarian African patriarchy. Such a man rather than being castigated by fellow believers should be accommodated, in love, considering the overwhelming influence that culture has on him. Such a person would be

better won over through love and right education and counselling.

On the other hand, the Christian husband who has been rightly exposed to the Christian article of faith regarding this question, as the one quoted by Austin Cline from the Southern Baptist church's, would find it a lot easier to make adjustments, from his inherited African structure to the new faith in Christ as "Head" to whom all submit.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and his church, and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel for sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to his people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation. (Cline, 2013)

But even this issue appears to be secondary to the issue of racial and cultural distinctions in the body of Christ, going by Craig S. Keener's commentary on the Ephesian Church and how Paul addressed it. "Racial or cultural division between Jew and Gentile was a major issue in the Ephesian Church ... and Paul was one of the best qualified writers of antiquity to address both sides intelligently" (Keener, 539). It thus behooves well-meaning theologians and people of God to equip themselves with enough of the 'antique' notions to be able to deal intelligently with persons of all cultures within the body of Christ—the Church.

Secondly, divergent/unfamiliar doctrinal practices are equally as a result of different interpretations given to the same source (ancient scriptures). All genuinely inspired people of God (theologians, clergy and lay preachers alike) must take cognizance of differences among God's people, as they expound the scriptures. This consideration should enable each one to patiently and without acrimony consider the views of the other person.

Thirdly, embedded in the physical elements (signs) such as pictures, statues, dresses, colours, gestures, and other elements of culture, are deep structures founded, not just on traditions, but on the Holy Scripture as well.

Fourthly, words (in their written and oral form) remain dead and inactive (just like their unspoken form) until someone reads or listens to them, and

ascribes meaning to them. This is of specific significance to consumers of theological and other materials in the sense that the particular reading/understanding given a material by the reader becomes an ultimate basis for his/her subsequent actions, attitudes, opinions, etc towards the writer/speaker and other referents.

Fifthly, individual/lay perceptions of doctrinal issues should not be confused with the universally accepted doctrine of the church or of any Christian denomination. This is because many would, most probably, be based on erroneous readings/interpretations of the Holy Scripture, which would only lead to hasty and often faulty generalization.

James Lewis and William Travis explain Pluralism as “the fact that more than one expression of Christianity exists” (Lewis, 1991, 174). This implies vulnerability of the centrality of Christian creed to different individual or group interpretations; thereby necessitating the need to weigh the creeds and positions of the various groups against the more valid doctrinal statements of the church—the body of Christ. This process will lead to better understanding, and to correction of errors where any in order to achieve unity of faith. This is because “hopes for unity among the churches are based on the principle of oneness laid down by Christ in John 17” (Lewis 1991, 175). This oneness is characterized by one God, one Christ, and one Spirit. The specific way in which each person perceives this oneness will of course depend on background and level of maturity of the individual. This is where Christianity differs from some other religions of the world.

Lastly, readers and interpreters of human actions, submissions and motives should go beyond concrete realities, which are mere signifiers, to the deep, abstract realities that give rise to such actions, submissions and motives. Only then would a clear perception of the real and factual meanings embedded in those concrete realities be reached and a valid conclusion arrived at.

Between the signifier and the signified is this thin line, which requires eyes far more than ordinary to see. It requires super senses to perceive and mega spirituality to comprehend. Every well-meaning Bible scholar should seek this deep insight; and not rest until it had been attained.

All God's people, have been called to be more than ordinary; simple, unlearned, insignificant men and women that we were before our call. Like the fishermen and other outcasts that followed Jesus Christ, all who have encountered him are called to see beyond the simple, scientifically verifiable, surface/super structures of meanings to the base/deep structures that hold the ultimate and universal truth. The Galilean fishermen and other Jewish outcasts who followed Jesus (simple though their external appearances testify) were able to recognize in the simple, easy-going carpenter 'son of Joseph and Mary' the promised Messiah. The learned/scholars and teachers of the law, on the other hand, (though they studied the scriptures and read all the signs) were unable to read between the lines and reconcile the suffering servant of God, prophesied

by Isaiah, with their surface understanding of a Messiah/Saviour as one who should possess the dignified, yet brutal attribute of kings of their time and experience. The scholars were unable to perceive 'the real' that was embedded in the symbolic structure (the physical person of Jesus).

Theologians, Bible scholars and preachers of this age should learn from the mistakes of scholars of old; for indeed, misunderstandings must occur ... The Lord knew that they shall, much of it probably from genuine misconceptions of the scriptural truth, and others, may be, from a cheap desire for subjugation of others. The reasons indeed are as varied as only God knows.

Chinonye C. Ekwueme Ugwu is a literary scholar, whose areas of interest include Theories and Criticisms. She is presently writing her doctoral thesis (with the department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka) on the literary ecosystem of selected Niger Delta novels. She has been a teacher of English language and Literature, at both secondary and tertiary levels of the Nigerian education system.

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RE-INTERPRETING LUKE 4:18-19 IN THE LIGHT OF URBAN RENEWAL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

BY DR. GODSPOWER UGBOH
West Africa Theological Seminary, Lagos

ABSTRACT: Achieving the missional mandate of the Church depends largely on the amount of missiological teaching and perspective of various local churches. If the Church relinquishes urban renewal responsibilities to the state government, that would go a step further in constituting inadequate and unacceptable Christological theology of mission. The call for global evangelization is sequential as in arithmetic progression. Jesus first appealed to the social needs of the people prior to dealing with the spiritual. Undermining this progression truncates the missional efforts. This paper examines the theological relevance of Luke 4:18-19 in the context of urban renewal as both a metaphor and a divine philosophy for pragmatic mission enterprise. For Luke Jesus' view of salvation includes deliverance from poverty, social menace and spiritual emptiness. This should be the hallmark of contemporary missions.

KEY WORDS: Reinterpretation, Missional Church, Urban Renewal, Narrative, Pericope, Empowerment, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The narrative in Luke 4:18-19 which could be titled "Jesus' inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth" encapsulates the vision of Jesus earthly ministry and the fundamental principles of holistic ministry. What seemed to be an ordinary reading of Scriptures in the Synagogue at Nazareth, turned out to be the public declaration of Jesus' divine transformational ministry mandate to the world. Nazareth was the same town where Jesus had been brought up. While in the town as a visiting rabbi, Jesus attended service at the synagogue on the Sabbath. As the service went on, "Jesus was invited to read the Scriptures."¹ "The synagogue service usually included recitation of the Shema (Numbers 15:37-41; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21), benediction, a psalm, a priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-26), prayers, a reading from the law (the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy) and then from the Prophets, and then an interpretation of the reading."² It was customary to read the law during the synagogue. However, Jesus' reading of Luke 4:18-19 which was in "the scroll

¹ *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 260.

² *Ibid.*

containing the messages of Isaiah the Prophet” during the synagogue service in Nazareth was a great turning point in the narrative of the Messiah's earthly ministry.³ Isaiah 61:1-2 was the passage that Jesus read from the scrolls, which was later recorded in the New Testament by Saint Luke, in the fourth chapter, verses eighteen and nineteen.

During the time of Christ the New Testament Scriptures were not yet written. Scriptural readings were often taken from the Torah or any of the other Old Testament books. Jesus understood his vision and mission and was prepared to make the first public announcement of his ministerial assignment accompanied with holistic ministry mandate. Jesus unrolled the scroll and then sought for a passage therein which would provide him with the appropriate platform for the announcement of his ministry. F.F Bruce records, “Expounding the passage, He proclaimed that the Messianic prophecy therein was even now being visibly fulfilled.”⁴

The narrative of Jesus' ministry announcement has been subjected to very many interpretations. First, some interpreters argue that the narrative applies to just spiritual liberation, deliverance and transformation. And that the narrative has nothing to do with the physical condition of humanity. When the narrative speaks of the poor being liberated, Jesus was only addressing the poor in the Spirit in continuation of his message on the Sermon on the Mount.

Second, other interpreters find it difficult to separate the spiritual dimension of Jesus' ministerial goals from its social implication. This group of scholars believes that Christ was anointed not just to liberate his people spiritually, but that he was more concerned about both spiritual and physical needs of the people he came to serve. This view is in harmony with the prophecies of the advent of the Messiah and the activities that will characterize his ministry. It is therefore the aim of this paper to examine the theological relevance of this scriptural passage and extrapolate principles for urban renewal in contemporary Nigeria. The interest of this paper is to interpret the “Jubilee echoes on the lips of Jesus from Isaiah 61:1-2.”⁵ Understanding this “alleged echoes”, and how it relates to “the interpretation of Luke's concern for the outcast and marginalised” people of his time, is central to this study.⁶

THE THEOLOGICAL IMPORT OF THE NARRATIVE OF LUKE 4:18-19

Attempts towards understanding Luke's theology in this pericope has led to

³ Ibid.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, ed., *The International Bible Commentary: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 1194.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

diverse interpretations of the passage. Viewed in the light of “The concept of Jubilee and Luke” Willoughby in the work titled *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* argued that the pericope covers Luke 4:18-30.⁷ Literary works focusing on interpreting this pericope is enormous.⁸ Looking at the Luke 4:18,19 narrative, could it be that Luke was more concerned about the jubilee resonance that tended to becloud this narrative as many scholars argue? Or was he simply determined to project the inaugural sermon of Christ irrespective of its social and jubilee implications? Some scholars are of the opinion that Luke’s profession as a physician must have influenced his writing about the Messiah’s concern for the social, physical wellbeing of the people he came to save. For Luke Jesus’ view of salvation includes deliverance from poverty, social menace and spiritual emptiness. Schweizer in *Historical Jesus to the Christ of Word and Sacrament*, argues:

Already in the second century the author of the Third Gospel was identified as “Luke, the beloved physician” mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:14... However, beginning in the late twentieth century, scholarship has again begun to see in the Gospel according to Luke a text that exhibits a focused interest on issues of health and healing... there are more than sixty episodic references to healing and health in Luke.⁹

Luke seems to be more interested in the healing works of Christ than other Gospel writers. Judging by the number of references he made to the subject of healing and health, one would conclude that Luke cared more about the Gospel which addressed the people's felt needs and at the same time empowered the people spiritually. For Luke Jesus was careful not to undermine the place of the social needs of the people in respect to his goal of spiritual rebirth and the transformation of the people. This truth does not imply that

⁷ Robert Willoughby, “The Concept of Jubilee and Luke 4:18-30” in Antony Billington ed. et al, *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell*(Carlisle, Paternoster: Paternoster Press, 1995), 41.

⁸ Ibid., Willoughby suggests, “For good surveys see H. Anderson, *Broadening Horizons: The Rejection of the Nazareth Pericope in Light of Recent Critical Trends*, interp 18 (1964), 259-75, and especially the more recent C.J. Schreck, ‘The Nazareth Pericope: Luke 4:16-30 in Recent Study’, in F. Neiryck (ed.), *L’Evangile de Luc* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 399-471.” Willoughby added, “An important recent work which was unfortunately unavailable to me at the time of writing is that of G.K-S. Shin, *Die Ausrufung des Endgultigen Jubelgahres durch Jesus in Nazareth: Eine historisch-kritische Studie zu Lk 4, 16-30* (Bern: Lang, 1989).” These books present scholarly argument on the Nazareth Pericope of Jesus’ inaugural sermon in the synagogue.

⁹ Eduard Schweizer 2008, “Historical Jesus to The Church of Word & Sacrament” from <http://www.amazon.com/challenge-present-theology-Edward->

Jesus was a social transformer or political leader, but he cared for the people and his contributions toward the people's welfare enhanced his evangelistic thrive.

Re-examining Lucan theology and Luke's import, Schweizer argues, "Luke-Acts is often characterized in terms of God's "preferential option for the poor" as epitomized in Jesus' inaugural sermon on Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-19. A quick read-through of Luke-Acts confirms that the narrative is often critical of 'the rich.'"¹⁰ Schweizer further opined, "This engagement with the theme of wealth and poverty begins with the Magnificat (1:51-52) and moves on to include such well-known texts as the woes against the rich in the beatitudes (6:24), the special Lukan parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21), the first/last saying of 13:31..."¹¹

Willoughby expresses, "As far as the Jubilee is concerned, one of the more surprising features of scholarly writing concerning the Nazareth Sermon in Luke 4 is the way in which commentaries have tended to make light of the idea of Jubilee, whilst monographs and articles which champion this hypothesis continue to abound."¹² Robert Sloan observed that, "Though not universally noticed, or, at best, not often pointed out by commentators of bygone years."¹³ Recent studies on the Jubiliary theme in Luke 4:16-30, continue to drive the interest of scholars who make effort to reinterpret this Nazareth pericope

Schweizer/product-reviews/0804206864 (accessed October 3, 2012).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. Schweizer continues to record more evidences why one should consider his argument about Luke's theology of healing which saturates his writing. He added, "...the special Lukan parable of Lazarus and the Rich man.

¹² Willoughby, 42. Willoughby laments: This neglect is, not confined to the commentaries. Many significant articles and monographs have been published which are cautious of emphasizing any jubiliary background. See especially: D. Hill, *The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke iv:16-30)*; *NovT*13 (1971), 161-80; R.C. Tannehill, 'The Mission of Jesus according to Luke IV:16-30', in W. Eltester (ed.), *Jesus in Nazareth* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 51-75; J.A. Sanders, 'From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults 1* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 75-106; B.D. Chilton, 'Announcement in Nazara: An Analysis of Luke 4:16-21', in R. T. France and D. Wenham (eds.), *Gospel Perspectives II* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 147-72; J. Kodell, 'Luke's Gospel in a Nutshell', *BTB* 13 (1983), 16-18; D.L. Bock, *Proclamation From Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, *JSNTS* 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), esp.105-11; D.J. Bosch, 'Mission in Jesus' Way: A Perspective from Luke's Gospel', *Missionalia*17 (1989), 3-21; P.G.R. De Villiers, 'The Gospel and the Poor: Let Us Read Luke 4', in P.G.R. De Villiers (ed.), *Liberation Theology and the Bible* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), 45-76.

¹³ Robert Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord* (Albilene, TX: Hardin-Simmons University Library, n.d), 19. Sloan also noted several others works which established

focusing on Jesus' ministry to the poor. These scholars agree that connecting the pericope with the Jubilee represents exactly Jesus' intention and plan for the salvation of the poor.

Michael Prior's English translation of the chiasmic structure of the Nazareth pericope is worth noting:

- A And he came to Nazareth ... and went to the *synagogue*
 B He *stood up* to read;
 C *there was given to him* the book of the prophet Isaiah
 D *He opened the book and found the place ...*
 E *The Spirit of the Lord* is upon me, because he has anointed me
 F to *proclaim* good news to the poor.
 G He has sent me to proclaim *release to the captives*
 H and recovering of sight to the blind
 G' to set *at liberty* those who are oppressed.
 F' to *proclaim*
 E' the acceptable *year of the Lord*
 D' He *closed the book,*
 C' and *gave it back* to the attendant,
 B' and *sat down;*
 A' And the eyes of all *in the synagogue* were fixed on him¹⁴

While Prior's chiasmic design climaxed with the (H) in the parenthesis with the release phrase (G-G'), the aspect taken from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 require further explanations. Using the Greek text, Hertig offered a further analysis of the text:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
 and on the Sabbath day he went into the *synagogue*,
 as was his custom

- A And he *stood up* to read.
 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was *given to him*.
Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written:
 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

some connections between Luke 4:16ff with the Jubilee such works are Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke*, The International Critical Commentary (Edingburg: T & T Clark, 1896); George B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963); John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972).

¹⁴ Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995),

because he's anointed me *to preach good news* to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim for the prisoners release

B and recovery of sight for the blind, to send away the oppressed into release to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he *rolled up* the scroll,
gave it back to the attendant

A' And *sat down*

The eyes of everyone in the *synagogue* were fastened on him,
and he began by saying to them . . .¹⁵

Robert Stein opines, "Although Isaiah 61:1-2 develops certain themes from the concept of the Jubilee Year (cf. Lev 25:8-55), Luke did not seem to have been thinking of this here."¹⁶ On the other hand, Howard Marshall agrees that v. 19 of Luke 4, contains the concept of the "Year of Jubilee" but argues that it's now "Made symbolic of his own saving acts."¹⁷ The challenge posed by these arguments is that the various scholars did not provide adequate information that would aid any specific interpretations and conclusions on their exposition of Luke. Contributing to the *World Biblical Commentary* series, John Nolland recognizes, "The Jewish tradition of using the language of Jubilee to image salvation."¹⁸ He however added:

It is not finally an analysis of the language of Isa 61:1-2, but rather the perceived nature of men's bondage in the Lukan frame that must determine the force of the words as used here . . . The Lukan Jesus is no social reformer and does not address himself in any fundamental way to the political structure of his world, but he is deeply concerned with the literal, physical needs of men (Acts 10:38), as with their directly spiritual needs.¹⁹

So the Lukan Jesus is interested in the poor in material things as well as the

150.

¹⁵ Paul Hertig, "The Mission of the Messiah and the Year of Jubilee: A Comparison of Luke 4 and Isaiah 61" (Th.M. thesis, Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), 72. Another version of Hertig's and Prior's chiasm can be seen in the following work, David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 43.

¹⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 157.

¹⁷ Howard I. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 184.

¹⁸ John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 197.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 197.

rich in material things but poor in the Spirit. Reacting to the Jubilee resonance in the Nazareth pericope in Luke 4, Timothy Johnson in his 1991 commentary writes on the possible Jubilee resonances when he said:

This is possible, but the Gospel does not offer further support for this being Luke's point. Rather than picturing Jesus' work in terms of political or economic reform, Luke portrays his liberating work in terms of personal exorcisms, healings, and the teaching of the people. The radical character of this mission is specified above all by its being offered to and accepted by those who were the outcasts of the people.²⁰

While some scholars joined the debate seeking recognition of their views, others argue from the orientation of the Jubilee perspective of Luke 4, yet without apparent interpretations and conclusions. Various arguments also portray a political Jesus who had socio-political agenda. What seems to be a middle common ground in Luke 4 is the missiological perspective of the author (Luke). Luke's concept of the missiological agenda of Christ rather than the commonly projected socio-political may be clearer and closer to what Jesus actually had in mind. Various interpretations of the Nazareth pericope depend on individual scholar's exegetical abilities. Bultmann observed:

Exegesis without presuppositions is not only possible but demanded. In another sense, however, *no* exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a *tabula rasa*, but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea of the subject matter with which the text is concerned.²¹

REASONS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF JUBILEE

Findings show that the law for the year of jubilee was enacted by the Lord several reasons. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* here are some of the reasons:

1. The jubilee was instituted primarily to keep intact the original allotment of the Holy Land among the tribes, and to discountenance the idea of servitude to men (Leviticus 25:54,55)²²
2. The jubilee year was the year of liberation of servants whose poverty had

²⁰ Timothy L. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 81.

²¹ R. Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presupposition Possible?", in *Existence and Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 289.

²² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12967->

forced them into employment by others. Similarly all property alienated for a money consideration to relieve poverty, was to be returned to the original owners without restoration of the amount which had been advanced.²³

In the Nazareth pericope Jesus calls on every Christian and the Church to join him in celebrating the ministry of deliverance from slavery, poverty and oppression of the poor. The strategic nature of Jesus' ministry requires every follower of Christ to join in the jubilar mission to the poor. Transformation of society cannot be achieved if the Church fails to take the lead. Individual Christians must be willing to help the poor urban dwellers overcome their challenges. The rich must be willing to identify with those living on the margins of society and give them hope. Unless this change takes place, the jubilar mission of the Church may be in jeopardy.

THE NARRATIVE FOR URBAN RENEWAL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

The term renewal may be complex for many to understand in every given context. It could be related to the term transformation which can be interwoven with the term development. Here development can be measured according to the, "Levels of national income, generation of savings, growth rates of industrial output, availability of public utilities, or rates of illiteracy, infant mortality and life expectancy." Thus these indices become 'indicators' by which a country's stage of development" are viewed."²⁴ Defining the term *renewal*, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* offered, "...an act of renewing something ... the process of bringing new jobs, industry, homes etc to the poor areas of large towns."²⁵ Jesus had approached the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4, with the burden he had for the renewal of the poor in that city and throughout the world.²⁶

sabbatical-year-and-jubilee (accessed October 18, 2012).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Tiongco, R., "What has Theology Got to do with Development, Peace and Reconstruction", in *Nsukka Journal of Religious Studies (NJRS)*, Vol. I, (Umuahia, Nigeria: Sylva Printers co., 1996), 17-33.

²⁵ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Harlow, England: Pearson Educational Limited, 2001), 1199.

²⁶ Lucan account shows that Christ was prepared to attack the hostile system he met. He was ready to transform lives of the people, especially those living on the margins of society. He was particular about those people who were absolutely poor without any help. Arguments about the Jubilar resonance of Luke 4, good as they maybe should climax with a credit to Jesus' boldness, vision and mission to the world.

Viewing the Nazareth pericope in missiological perspectives, one sees Jesus' ministry to the poor as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. Howard Marshall in an attempt to summarize the Lucan view of Jesus' ministry offered the following:

1. He brought the good news of the Kingdom of God and salvation to the people and offered it to all who would receive it, whether economically rich or poor.
2. He befriended the people who were poor and needy in his own society. Within the group of disciples they experienced a new status in society.
3. He cared physically for the sick with mighty works of healing.
4. He fed the hungry.
5. He strongly commanded the giving of alms by the rich.
6. He criticized the rich and violent. He voiced God's future judgment against them. There were those, like Zacchaeus, who heeded his words and who underwent a conversion that altered their way of life.²⁷

The commission to preach good news to the poor, releasing of the captives and setting the people free, was further recorded in Acts 26:17-18, "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."²⁸ Tannehill opined that, "All this material demonstrates the fulfillment of the commission which Jesus announced in Nazareth, the commission to preach good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives and oppressed."²⁹

The target of Jesus which was not only centered on the physical release of the captives should be understood in the light of the original language '*aphesis*' which implies '*release*', a word that was used to refer to '*forgiveness*'. The deliverance of the people begins with the forgiveness of their sins. This is evidenced when Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven", before addressing the man's predicament. Jesus knew the power of sin in creating obstructions to the blessings, deliverance and the healing of a people. His holistic ministry approach was timely when taken into consideration his context of ministry. For deliverance from poverty and other social challenges to be effectual, salvation of the soul must be given primary attention. The focus on social justice, eradication of poverty, forgiveness and reintegrating into society those living

²⁷ Howard I. Marshall, "The Interpretation of the Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55", in C. Bussmann and W. Radl (eds.), *Der Treue Gottes Trauen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 191.

²⁸ All Scriptural quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the NIV.

²⁹ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1986), 139.

on the margins of society, defines the vision and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus showed through scriptures his love for the poor. It seems he launched his ministry particularly to reach out to the poor. Not just the poor in spirit, but those who are enslaved to the rich and wealthy people of their communities. Those people who have no voice in society; who struggle to feed and attend to their daily social needs. Announcing his mission for the poor, Jesus truncated the status quo of his time. The poor were neglected, often rejected and considered as outcasts, but those were the people Christ identified with.

1. Mission to the Poor in Urban Regions

Across the globe today, the rate of poverty is alarming. Several urban regions are saturated with absolutely poor city dwellers. It's amazing to see how some cities are designed with some parts representing wealthy areas by the type of structures and beautifications evidently in place, while some areas are densely populated with shanty houses without electricity, pipe borne water system and poor roads. The ugly effects of poverty on people living on the margins of societies are not measurable. One of the immediate responses to the question of abject poverty in cities across the globe is urbanization. In his book, *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa*, Wilbur O'Donovan states, "Urbanization not only creates enormous social and physical problems – it also has profound effects on the souls of individuals. City life can lead to major psychological and emotional problems".³⁰ A quick missiological question in response to O'Donovan's concern is 'What would Jesus do in situations such as the one facing many cities of the globe today?'

Poverty stricken communities across the globe are no longer at peace with its torture. Here is the description of a Latin American situation:

It is not only that sixteen-year-old Latin Americans of this land weigh ninety-five pounds and are five feet tall; the point is that at the other side of the avenue he can see other boys the same age who are six feet six and weigh one hundred and twenty-six pounds. It is not just that they will hardly live to see their grandchildren, their life expectancy being way below forty. They know that disease and death can be pushed back and the joys of life can be enjoyed twenty years more. Rapid and luxurious cars, TV sets, new dresses, fun and comfort are displayed everywhere, and even backwoods populations can see them in the news-papers in which their miserable purchases are wrapped. Commercials and political propaganda, Sears Roebuck catalogues and Communist pamphlets produce the same results. The eyes of the

³⁰ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa* (Cambria, CA Paternoster Press, 2000), 52.

poor are transfixed by the picture of this heaven he must obtain at all costs. Life without it is in-tolerable. This is the revolutionary temper, this is the face of the Latin American and of the whole underdeveloped world-a face contorted by hunger, expectation and wrath. This is the face of revolutionary man.³¹

Proffering solutions to the challenges facing the urban poor requires urgent attention. The Church should not be comfortable with the number of causalities in her neighborhood which could have been avoided or reduced if she had opened her doors to the poor who come around knocking and asking for help. It's challenging to note that in some situations, the poor who try to identify with social organizations, religious institutions such as the Church and Mosque, pay dues, give offerings, pay tithes and fulfill most of the conditions for acceptance as full members of their organizations, but unfortunately when such poor people are in need of accommodation, finance to sponsor their children to schools, health care, deaths etc, they are referred to their relatives by their organizations. Some organizations especially, the Church, who claim to have aligned herself with the vision and mission of her Lord, Jesus Christ, are often wrapped in the ugly arts of disowning their followers who happened to be in need. Some churches build schools through financial contributions and sacrifices of both the poor and the rich in their parishes, but at the end, the children of the poor will not be allowed to attend such schools due to high cost of acquiring education in such *church owned schools*. One discovers that the focus of some churches in building schools is clearly seen in the class of children admitted into such schools. Would Jesus have built such schools? Would Jesus have targeted the affluent children and left the poor children at the margin of society?

Urban Christian leaders have great assignment to carry out in the quest for urban renewal. The Church must leave the four walls and get involved in the lives of people on the streets of the cities. The need for missionary attention in the cities seemed to have been neglected. The first impression about missions has often been that of rural regions. While the rural regions require attention, the present situation of the cities calls for more attention that it has ever received. Today the rate of crime in the cities cannot be compared with what is obtainable in the rural areas. It does not mean there are no cases of crime in the rural areas. Cities seemed to have been neglected with the illusion that everyone who comes to the city is comfortable. Acknowledging the devastating effects of such negligence, O'Donovan states:

Urbanization not only creates enormous social and physical problems-it

³¹ Jose MiguezBonino, "Christians and the Political Revolution," in *The Development Apocalypse*, a RISK paperback (Geneva: WCC, 1967), 103-104.

also has profound effects on the souls of individuals. City life can lead to major psychological and emotional problems. People moving to the city can lose many of their traditional values and their sense of personal identity. Young people living in the city often lose the all-important African core value of life in community. Sometimes they lose the traditional African value of respect for the elderly which is also an important biblical value...living in the city and being surrounded by godless people with godless values can bring temptation to adopt materialism, secularism, greed, individualism and selfishness instead of the Christian values of generosity, self-sacrifice, humility and support for the community. Working with people whose lives are dominated by hypocrisy, dishonesty, lying and corruption can lead to cynicism and indifference to the needs of others.³²

Contending with the realities of urban life and system, O'Donovan added:

The temptation to conform to the godless and evil values of the city brings an urgent call to the church for culturally relevant ministries of evangelism, discipleship, Bible teaching and counselling. The church must give Christians the tools to overcome the moral and spiritual temptations of modernity. The Bible says, 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Rom. 12:2). Nowhere is this exhortation needed more than in modern urban Africa.³³

The Church in this age faces great opportunities to do similar work that Christ did in his time. Announcing the Nazareth pericope in churches today would not only require commitment from the Church, but conscious efforts to ensure that Jesus' vision of liberating the poor, transforming societies is accomplished. Urban pastors must be committed as they champion the course of renewing their communities. Writing on the subheading "Getting the Church into the World", Tony Campolo in his work *Revolution and Renewal: How Churches Are Saving Our Cities* asserts, "The good urban pastor will get the people of the church into the community. Jesus got things going by sending out his disciples door to door and instructing them to minister to any who would receive them. That is a good model for the church today. We don't have to go beyond the Bible for directives. All of this is recorded in an unforgettable passage in the Gospel according to Luke."³⁴ The laborers Christ prayed for in

³² O'Donovan, 52-53.

³³ Ibid., 52.

³⁴ Tony Campolo, *Revolution and Renewal: How Churches Are Saving Our Cities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 63. Campolo made

Luke 10 were needed for the transformational project he had in the city. The Church must engage the city thoroughly to be true ambassadors of Christ in the urban areas.

2. The Good News to the Poor

The heart of God for the poor is *love*, the sacrificial love often referred to as *agape*. Good news to the poor occupies the centre of Christ's ministry and message throughout the period of his earthly ministry. His teachings on the liberation of the poor begin with his genuine love for humankind. Trying to lay solid biblical foundations for his argument in his paper titled *Social Justice*, Raymond Aitchison navigates through the Old and the New Testaments showing how the Scriptures deals with ministry to the poor. Answering the question 'What are the Biblical guidelines to direct us?' Aitchison said:

A basic one is Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". This was quoted with emphasis by our Lord on one occasion (Matt. 22:39), and on another occasion gave rise to the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was also reinforced by both Paul (Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14) and James (ch. 2:8). Both our Lord and Paul declared

reference to Luke 10:1-17 as follows: After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. (Luke 10:1-17).

that this commandment summed up the Law. It can therefore be taken to sum up the social duty of the Christian. And its Biblical implications are both wide and demanding. The injunctions in both Testaments to be concerned for the *poor* and *needy*, and to be upright, just and merciful in all our dealings with others, are written plain for all to see. Our Lord also summed up social responsibilities on another occasion by saying (Matt. 7:12): "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." And the Christian's social responsibility does not end with his fellow-Christian, though this is his first priority. The example of our Lord Himself, and Paul's remark in Galatians 6:10 make it clear that this responsibility extends to everyone.³⁵

Good news to the poor occupied the heart of the ministry of Christ. Some questions rhetorical questions which may follow the focus of Jesus' ministry are "Could his interest on the poor be accountable for his choice of coming to the world via a relatively poor background?" "Could his poor background be responsible for his extensive engagement in ministry to the poor?" Jesus had real time spent working among the poor. In fact he claimed to have come basically for the poor and the outcast of societies. Schweizer observed that the good news to the poor was the heart of Jesus' ministry. Addressing this biblical message, he said, "The good news to the poor has everything to do with the Son of God becoming someone of lowly status and dying on the accursed cross with utmost shame among the criminals (Luke 4:18; Gal. 3:13; Phil. 2:6-11). He was not born among the rich but the poor."³⁶ Though he was God in his very nature, yet he related with the outcast, the lower class and the rejected people of his society. "By identifying with those with least privileges Jesus brought salvation to humankind and called his disciples to take on the same value system he had."³⁷ His humility drew many people to him. Christ was not partial in his love; he cared for everyone, both the people who encountered him personally during his earthly ministry and the people who now encounter him through the power of the Holy Spirit. He made enough provision to accommodate all.

Obviously salvation is not only for the poor. There were rich Christians in the early church. But the gospel cannot be fully understood unless discipleship is interpreted in terms of one's willingness to identify with the lowly and the weak. What should be noted is that Jesus did not

³⁵ Raymond Aitchison, "Social Justice", <http://www.thebigpicture.homestead.com/socialjustice.html> (accessed October 4, 2012), (Emphasis mine).

³⁶ Schweizer 2008.

³⁷ Ibid.

demand Zaachaeus to sell all his possessions – something that Luke emphasises in his gospel (14:33; 18:22). Zaachaeus probably remained relatively well off. But for Jesus, wealth is not to be measured in monetary terms. In this story Luke has shown us how the poor outcast) has been restored, and how he now, by the use of his possession, has included the poor in his circle of kin.³⁸

Provisions are made by Christ for young and old, poor and rich to hear the message of salvation with the opportunity to make decision either to follow him or to remain in sin. Nothing else apart from thorough ministry to the poor drives the mind of Christ. In the *Christian Mission and Social Justice* Samuel Escobar and John Driver observed, “The expression “the gospel to the poor” is an expression that Jesus used precisely in relation to the definition of His own mission (Luke 4:18; 7:22).³⁹ Answering the questions, 'How did He accomplish this mission of preaching the gospel to the poor?' 'What was the nature of Jesus' presence among the poor?' Escobar and Driver said, “The first fact of Jesus' presence among the poor is that it was *the presence of a poor Man among the poor*. Writing to the Corinthians Paul says, 'For you know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, NEB).’⁴⁰

Successful ministry of the good news to the poor must be wrapped with compassion. Jesus was not a selfish minister; he did not approach the poor with some ulterior motive. He was genuine in his love, very honest with all simplicity. He spoke from a heart full of love and pains for the plight of the poor. When he said, “You have the poor among you always” (Matthew 26:11, NEB), Escobar and Driver observed:

...these words were pronounced by a poor Man who lived among the poor and spent His life in service which sprang out of compassion for the poor, we can better understand at least what those words do not mean. The fact is that usually when used by people who are not poor, the words have a different meaning. They really come to mean, “The rich you will always have with you,” because they are used to defend a position that refuses to change things, to be bothered by inequalities and injustices.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Samuel Escobar and John Driver, *Christian Mission and Social Justice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 47.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 47-48.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

Jesus was careful to destroy the system of inequality and injustices. He did not waste time to condemn the act and pronounced condemnation on anyone who perpetrates the act. Renewing urban regions in contemporary Nigeria requires proper implementation of Jesus' principles of ministry found in the Nazareth pericope as recorded by Saint Luke. Since this renewal is vital the question then is 'Who will be responsible for renewing urban areas just the same way Jesus would have done?' 'Who will be at the fore front of its implementation, the rich who are interested in maintaining status quo or some other people?' In addition to Jesus' principles, the seven main points of Robert Lewis' book titled *The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community* are worth noting:

1. Reconnecting Church and Culture
2. The Big Idea of Jesus
3. Building the Best Structure
4. Moving from Pew to Participation
5. True Stories of Faithful Bridge Builders
6. Three Keys to Multiplying Influence
7. Where Do We Go from Here?⁴²

How is the Church working towards realizing Robert Lewis' vision that will give birth to the Church of irresistible influence? If the Church fails to meet the demands of people in her neighborhood who glamour for protection, shelter and other aspects of care from the Church, then Jesus' vision in sending the Church into the world would have been hampered. Addressing the importance of reconnecting Church and Culture Lewis and Wilkins recorded an ugly response from a survey, "In an informal survey taken at a large suburban mall, people were asked if the Church was making any impact on the community. One teenager answered with directness, "The Church is crap." That hurts. But are there elements of truth in his response?"⁴³ Jesus was a bridge builder who concentrated on building bridges connecting the Church and the people in the communities around the Church. Lewis and Wilkins suggested:

⁴² Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, "The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge-Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003)," in Ken Kelly Christian Book Summaries vol. 3, Issue 12, <http://www.christianbooksummaries.com/library/v3/cbs0312.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2012).

⁴³ Ibid. The word "crap" is an offensive term for saying that something is 'nonsense, worthless, useless and annoying (Microsoft Encarta 2012).

Study the life of Christ and you will discover one who imagined a dangerous dream of building bridges spanning the chasms of indifference, hostility, and skepticism. He dreamed of a bridge that would connect His people, the Church to an unbelieving, apathetic world. He urged people to follow Him, and He would teach them how to fish for the souls of men. He exhorted people to let their lights shine in the world of darkness. He told His followers they were salt and, therefore, they should add a tasteful flavor to their culture.⁴⁴

The concept of *bridge building* used by Lewis and Wilkins has to do with the idea of holistic, transformational ministry first mentioned and practiced by Jesus Christ as seen in Luke 4. Building the bridges helps the Church to penetrate their community. “Imagine New York City with no Brooklyn Bridge, London minus London Bridge, or San Francisco without the Golden Gate” or Lagos, Nigeria without the third Mainland Bridge. “*Bridges give life through two-way movement!*”⁴⁵ “Without its own bridges to the world, Church life-in-time-fades into isolation, self-congratulation, and finally, irrelevance.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the above is the description of most of the churches across the cities of the globe.

The intention of Christ in establishing the Church is that the Church would continue with the vision of Christ which is to set the captives free (spiritual and physical captives), feed the poor, care for them and give the poor hope once again. Instead of accomplishing the Master's vision and goal of ministry, there seems to be more issues in the Church that occupy the attention of the leaders than evangelism, discipleship and holistic ministry to the poor. Such accounts for the failure of the Church in an age that needs more spiritual vigor to overcome the evil one. “So let us confess that our comfort, our moral compromises, and our misguided pursuits and priorities have rendered us increasingly important before the watching world.”⁴⁶ To lead the Church to accomplish the task of transforming the nations, cities and communities, there must be transformed leaders who are truly agents of transformation in different capacities. “Turning the face of the church outward, giving its resources away, blessing the community, unleashing the gifts of laypeople to serve-this is what our living God desires for his church.”⁴⁷ The challenge of lack of transformed leadership is the tyrant facing the Church today.

Lewis and Wilkins' three keys to multiplying influence is worth noting:

1. Partnering with other churches, “Whereas prayer became the catalyst for a new unity between our churches, good works have become a catalyst for

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

- building a new credibility with our community.”⁴⁸
2. Equipping leaders for ministry, “Without progressive leaders, bridges can never be built with lasting success. These leaders must possess a vision that extends far beyond the growth and success of his own congregation.” “Everywhere the church is suffering from a dearth of competent leaders, especially the kind of leader needed to turn the church outward.”⁴⁹
 3. Creating a community Strategy, “...first the perception that our geographical area is highly churchd is erroneous. Second, two dominant issues are still race and education. Third, there is a wide gap between community needs and church ministries that are addressing those needs. Fourth, churches are investing very little money in local ministries. Fifth, the community welcomes any efforts that churches can provide.”⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

To renew the urban regions in contemporary Nigeria, every Christian should be willing to pay some prices. Just like Jesus did in his time, Christians should endeavor to address critical social issues such as:

1. providing housing for the urban poor dwellers
2. giving scholarships to the children of the poor in the cities
3. empowering the people by creating jobs and employing the below average citizens who are also in the churches

God did not call the Church just to focus on building of Cathedrals and mansions for earthly purposes. He has something in mind far above that. His mission is the total transformation of humanity, spirit, soul and body. He cares for every individual person on the planet. His desire is to see everyone blessed and overcome the challenges of life. The church that does not live with (*incarnational church*) is a Christ-less church. The Church should be like Christ in all ramifications of his existence including his ministry visions and achievements.

In every city, there must be city changers who will intentionally identify with the poor as incarnational, selfless leaders who work hard to transform the city. Sunday Adelaja in his book *Church Shift* relates the teaching of Matthew 5:13 to the divine call on the Church as city changers and city sustainers. Matthew identified the Church as the salt of the earth, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” Salt has a definite characteristic which was of particular interest to Christ. It is used for flavoring and preserving. Why would Christ liken his disciples to salt? Could it be that he wanted them to provide seasoning to the earth? It is important that believers realize their unique position in relation to their services to humanity. “There is absolutely no use in having a big church without changing culture, speaking to society, and curing social ills.”⁵¹ The church and all her agencies have been commissioned by Christ to provide saltiness to the earth. Dealing with societal challenges becomes one of the primary ministries of the church.

Adelaja added that, “When a church loses focus, people get busy fighting among themselves. When our focus is not on finding our promised land and changing our society from right where we are, we start using kingdom resources to build our own kingdom.”⁵² Can your own church really raise her hands in innocence from Sunday Adelaja's comments? The chief occupation of the Church is to build societies, give succor to societies around her walls and by so doing provide that saltiness to the earth which Christ expects of her. Drifting from this divine mandate truncates God's design for the deliverance of communities around the Church. The Church becomes city changers and city sustainers by intentionally providing saltiness to the city in which she is located. The idea here is to start from the Church's immediate ‘Jerusalem’ (environment). Challenging the weaknesses of the Church in remaining within the ‘four walls’ of the building, Sunday pointed out that, “When Christians make church the focal point of their lives and ministry, they burn each other like an over-salted dish and blind each other like a room full of spotlights.”⁵³ The ministry of the Church is best located outside the walls of the building. The Great Commission specifically pointed the Church towards a direction of ministry, “...go and make disciples of all nations...” The instruction does not say remain within the building whereby you have fellowship. The instruction does not say engage in house battle and serving of tables. But Jesus identifying the needs in the nations directed believers to those nations, cities and societies around the Church where the poor and afflicted can be seen and touched for the glory of God. In doing this therefore the Church also recognizes the fact that there are needy people in her midst who equally deserve the peace of God. The scope of the Great Commission is wide and all encompassing but it begins just from one's immediate environment. Jesus had this Great Commission in mind when he entered the synagogue in Nazareth. The Lucan narrative in 4:16-30 shows the urgency of Jesus' vision for holistic transformation of humanity. So the Church should take a cue from

⁵¹ Sunday Adelaja, *ChurchShift* (Florida: Charisma House, 2008), 69.

⁵² *Ibid*, 69.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 69.

this ministry vision of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Godspower Ugboh is a professor of Transformational Leadership and Urban Studies, Director of Ministry Program, West Africa Theological Seminary, Lagos-Nigeria. Priest of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion. Research interests: Theology, Missional Church, Wesleyan Theology, Urban studies/City transformation, Global transformational leadership and Peace studies.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SON OF MAN TERMINOLOGY IN EZEKIEL

BY DR. OFFIONG ETUK UDOIBOK
Pan-African Christian University College, Winneba

ABSTRACT: This article addresses the “son of man” from its Old Testament canonical roots, with particular reference to the book of Ezekiel. Ben-adam, the Hebrew for “son of man,” is used both in generic and personal senses. God identifies the prophet as “son of man” because of his submission to the power of the Spirit and consequently being qualified to speak for God, a thing that bespeaks the purpose for which man was created. At times God uses the prophet as object lesson (pedagogy in biography), with pains inflicted on his person to remind Judah that a man can be that obedient, although so spiritual. Due to the fact that “son of man” implies not only the human aspect God's servant, but as well the divine strength that produces true humanity, readers of this article have been cautioned by H. E. Todt not to place the “son of man” of the prophets exactly on par with that of Jesus.¹

KEYWORDS: Son of Man, Ezekiel, Eschatology

PROLEGOMENA

A. The Son of Man in the Old Testament

Besides Psalm 8:4, the terminology “Son of man” is mentioned only in the Old Testament books of the exilic prophets, Daniel and Ezekiel, as bar-nasha (Aramaic) and ben-adam (Hebrew). In Daniel it is found once (Daniel 7:13) and 93 times in Ezekiel.²

The word ben etymologically means “son of.” Ben-adam is, therefore, a description of generic man, that is, man in the collective sense. Like Adam in Genesis, ben-Adam in Ezekiel is both a generic as well as a specific name or title.³

The need to identify Ezekiel with the human genre is so high for God that He (God) addresses him (Ezekiel) as “son of man” 93 times. Only on two occasions has God addressed the prophet by his name. That is, the first occasion of the

¹ H.E. Todt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), p.13

² Wilhelm Kelber, *Christ and the Son of Man*, (Great Britain: Floris Books, 1997), p.63; Jean Burnier-Genton, *Ezechiel Fils d'Homme* (France: Labor et Fides, 1982), p.29

word of God coming to the prophet (Ezekiel 1:3) and when Ezekiel lost his wife (24:24)⁴

A. The Son of Man in the Gospels

An Analysis of available documents reveals that the title of the “son of man” was habitually used in first century Judaism.⁵ According to R. Leivestad, the title as applied to Jesus, was merely to show his humanity⁶

However, a closer look at the Gospels has revealed that Leivestad's position is shaky or lopsided. For we find in the Gospels that this title bespeaks both human and divine characters of Jesus. In Matthew 9:6, Mark 2:10-11 and Luke 5:24, Jesus the Son of Man in His divine nature has power to forgive sins. In Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28 and Luke 6:5, He has the power to alter the laws of the Sabbath, because He is the Lord of the Sabbath. In Matthew 16:18; Mark 8:9; Luke 9:28, the Son of Man is the Son of the Living God.

As human, the Son of Man is to suffer and die in order to save humanity (Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22), being their Messiah. This Messiah shall, however, return to the earth as Divine Judge (Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27). Finally, as He was raised from the dead (Matthew 17:9, Mark 9:9, Luke 9:36, so shall all those who believe in Him (1 Corinthians 15:13-23).

EZEKIEL AS “SON OF MAN”

Having had a general idea of the terminology based on the Old Testament and the Gospels, we shall now pay a fuller attention to its occurrence in Ezekiel. In Daniel 7:13-14 we have noticed that only the divine aspects of the “Son of Man” are portrayed. In the Gospels both divine and human aspects are featured. The question now is, where does Ezekiel fit in?

The question of honour and dishonour, and exaltation and humiliation, fit into a single personality, would best address the ambiguous picture of the “Son of Man”, both for Ezekiel and Jesus.⁷ Based on Ezekiel and Daniel 7:13f, the dual personality of the Son of Man has always been the subject of much discussion and controversy.⁸ H. E. Todt has stated that “One of the most important issues which modified the Jewish religion during the pre-Christian

³ Burnier-Genton, pp.28-29

⁴ Ibid., p.29

⁵ I. Howard Marshall et al, eds. *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed, (Leicester, England/Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1962) S.V. “Apocalyptic”

⁶ Pierre de Martin de Viviés, *Jesus et Le Fils de L'Homme* (France:PROFAC, n-d.), p.31.

⁷ Barnabas Lindars, S.S.F. *Jesus, Son of Man*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp.102-103

⁸ Ibid., pp.60-63; Martin de Viviés, p.20

and late-Hellenistic periods was the decisive step taken towards a radically transcendent concept of eschatological saviour (who is identified with the “son of man” terminology).⁹

A. The Divine aspects of the “Son of Man” in Ezekiel

1. His ability to speak for God

If the “son of man” speaks for God, he is a holy man, with divine powers to receive messages from God. Before he could do this, we see the Spirit of God entering into him (Ezekiel 2:1-2,8) and equipping him with the word of God (Ezekiel 3:1-3,10). It must however be noted that the way we can refer to Ezekiel and other prophets as divine is not on the same category as we would place Jesus.¹⁰ While the Spirit of God entered into Ezekiel, Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit of God Himself (Luke 1:35). Also, while Jesus was perfectly divine, Ezekiel experienced divinity only as a communicable attribute.¹¹

In Ezekiel 8, the “son of man” receives divine revelations. He is carried by the Spirit, and in the Spirit, to see the abominable practice of God’s chosen people going on in the temple at Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:3, 12, 17), where they worship images of abominable beasts, accompanied with the burning of insense. This was practiced even by the seventy elders of Israel, including the supposedly faithful Jaazaniah, who was from the holy lineage of Shaphan (Ezekiel 8:7-13).¹²

Further, women were weeping for Tammuz, the Babylonian equivalent of the Summerian god of vegetation known as Damuzi (or Dazū), which means “true son”, “faithful son”, or “proper son”. It is believed that Tammuz was a pre-deluvian Summerian shepherd who married the goddess, Istar. When he died, she followed him into the underworld to secure his release. Consequently, all fertility ceased upon the earth. That is the reason why women had to weep for the restoration of fertility (Ezekiel 8:14-15).¹³

Yet still there were twenty-five men worshipping the sun (8:15-18). All of these were equivalent to putting the branch to their noses or scorning God

⁹ Todt, p.13

¹⁰ Ibid., p.22ff

¹¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 4th ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), pp.64-67, 316-317.

¹² John F. Walwood and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. (USA: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985), pp.1243-1244; Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr. *Ezekiel: The New American Commentary*. E. Ray Clendenan et al, eds. (USA: Broadman and Hodman Publishers, 1994), p.121

¹³ Cooper, p.123; Marshal, S.V. “Tammuz”

– which the holy “son of man” could not tolerate.¹⁴

2. The Son of Man's Prophetic scope in Ezekiel

Because of the heinous idolatry of Israel, the “son of man” was mandated to prophesy against the rebellious people and their land (Ezekiel 2, 4, 15). He spoke to them, and against them, with divine authority, but his prophetic responsibility extended over and beyond the land of Israel.

The scope of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry affirms this son of man's divine mind, for God is not only God of the Jews but God of the entire universe. To exercise his Sovereignty, God shows concern for Moab, Edom, Philistia (25:1-17), Tyre (26:28, 1-28:19), Egypt (29:32:32). God made sure that He used the “son of man” to deal squarely with those other nations before consummating the fall of Jerusalem.¹⁵

It has been noticed that Amos used a similar homiletic method, so that by the time he turned against Judah, they would have no gumption to accuse God of injustice (Amos 1:3-2:3).¹⁶

The universality of Ezekiel's prophecies make him a fitting figure to be the “son of man”, which at the same time highlights the impartiality of God. This places his “son-of-man” status on par with that of Jesus, at least, as far as universality is concerned.

In a JETS article by C. Hassel Bullock, Ezekiel is said to be a bridge between the Testaments.¹⁷ This is so because of the relationship he finds between Ezekiel and the Apocalypse of John, and Paul, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Bullock shows how Ezekiel and Jesus are prophets with similar modes of communication, notably, parables. Both have deep knowledge of the Lord as seen in Ezekiel's recognition formula, “You shall know that I am the Lord,” and Jesus' “I am” sayings, as in John's Gospels. Finally, is the common use of their “son of man” terminology.¹⁸

2. The Son of Man's Compassion by the Spirit in Ezekiel

The exercise of compassion has been one of the virtues that characterize the “son of man” in the Gospels. In Matthew 9:36, when He saw the multitude He was moved with compassion because He saw that they were

¹⁴ Patrick Fairbairn. *An Exposition of Ezekiel*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Kio& Christian Publishers, 1979), pp.81-82.

¹⁵ Derek Thomas. *God strengthens: Ezekiel Simply Explained*. (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1993), pp.185-209.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Rogers. *The Panorama of the Old Testament* (Newburgh, iN: impact Press, 1990), pp.424-426.

¹⁷ C. Hassel Bullock, “Ezekiel, Bridge Between the Testaments,” *JETS* 25/1 (March 1982), 23-31.

¹⁸ Rudder Bartelmus, Ez. 37:1-4, *ZAW*97 (366-389).

weary, and were scattered like sheep without a shepherd. In a similar vein, Ezekiel is associated with divine compassion events such as resuscitated dry bones; we see the possibility of restoration for the house of Israel. This will depend upon repentance, and by the agency of the Spirit and the Word of God.

Consequently, the tide now turns in favour of Israel and against their enemies, after the dumbness of Ezekiel has terminated (33:22). The son of man is now commanded to set his face against Gog and prophesy destruction upon them (38:2, 14).

Furthermore, God's unfailing compassion for His people (Lamentations 3:22, 23) causes the return of His glory to Israel, with full restoration of landed property and temple worship (43:7-18, 47, 48). Rudder Bartelmus has remarked that this does not refer to physical resurrection.¹⁹

Daniel Block is not happy the way most theologians refer to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament only in passing. For this reason he has devoted twenty-three pages in a JETS article to do justice to the place of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.²⁰ He notices that out of the various verbs used in describing the Spirit, such as "to pant," "breath," "wind," "vapour," "heat," "blood," "life" etc, the Hebrew, *ruah* or wind, occurs more often in Ezekiel (52 times) than it does in Isaiah (51 times) and in Jeremiah (18 times).²¹

Having christened Ezekiel, the prophet of the Spirit, he details how wind or the Hebrew *ruah* is used in Ezekiel as an agent of conveyance, animation, inspiration and how it means "mind" and a sign of divine ownership. There is little wonder, therefore, that the "son of man" must use the Spirit to bring restoration to Israel. The Spirit is the means to bring revival and renewal.²²

B. Human aspects of the Son of the Man in Ezekiel

1. Suffering Messiah

In the Gospels and Epistles, the "son of man" terminology is replete with messianic overtones. This Messiah is not only presented in his exalted state, but as a suffering servant of God. Ezekiel is comparable with the suffering and obedient human messiah, both as a person and as a minister of God. The suffering and obedience of the prophet can be seen in the

¹⁹ Daniel I. Block, "The Prophet of the Spirit, The Use of RWH in the Book of Ezekiel" *JETS* 32/1 (March 1989) 27-49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Thomas, p.40; Rogers, p. 349.

²² Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans

pedagogy in biography²³ or acted prophecies peculiar to the prophetic books.

It has been debated that the dumbness of chapters 3:25 to 33:21 was not permanent but occasional. In addition to acted prophecies, Ezekiel was to reprove the exiles only when he had messages from God. This lasted until the fall of Jerusalem in 33:22, a period of seven and half years (597-589 BC).²⁴

Block has shown that most have misinterpreted this restrictive measure as a psychological feat or illness. He enlightens that it was neither psychological nor pathological dumbness, because to have one's tongue stick to one's palate (lasondabagel/lehek, Hebrew), does not require an irreversible physiological condition. Rather, like in Job 29:10, it is a voluntary speechlessness.²⁵ The overall lesson, however, is that Ezekiel obeyed God's restriction as an obedient servant or "son of man".

Another teaching using the life of the suffering "son of man" is the exilic metaphor of preparing his baggage as if going on exile (Ezekiel 12:3). Jesus, the first missionary sent by the Father left His throne, to the corrupt world to redeem mankind from sin (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). In a similar vein, Ezekiel, the other "son of man" was relocated from Jerusalem where he was supposed to serve as priest for the exiles in Babylon, under the deplorable exilic conditions.

This obedient servant did this without speeches to teach God's lessons to the rebellious house of Israel. He even had to eat his defiled bread with quaking in order to portray to the rebellious people of God that all was not well between them and their God (12:18).

The most excruciating of pedagogies in biography in the life of "son of man" was that of the death of his wife, an incident that had to see no mourning by the prophet (Ezekiel 24:15-18). Lamar Eugene Cooper has, however, objected to the notion that God put Ezekiel's wife to death as an object lesson. Rather, he says that God used the imminent death of the prophet's wife as an occasion to prepare his people for judgement. That is, he reminds them, by the incident, of the inevitable calamity that shall befall Jerusalem.²⁶

Millard C. Lind, upon hooking up the result of the prophet's pathos

Publishing Co. 1997), pp. 154-155

²³ Rodgers, pp. 349, 424-426

²⁴ Bruce Vawter and Leslie J. Hoppe. *Ezekiel: A New Heart*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Ltd, 1991) p. 25

²⁵ Cooper pp. 239-240

²⁶ Millard C. Lind, Ezekiel. *The Believers Church Commentary*. (Scottsdale,

with that of Jesus, as the son of man comments:

There is but a step from this prophetic and divine pathos to the divine compassion revealed in the unmarried status, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth; and the divine pathos revealed by those who take up the cross and follow him.²⁷

By this we can see the climax of God's burden for Jerusalem, which, being the centre of God's world was important both to Ezekiel and to the Lord Jesus Christ, both of whom were burdened for the Holy City. On one occasion the Lord visualized and prophesied that Jerusalem was like broods of a hen that have refused the protection and warmth of their mother. The result of this was always total deliverance unto their enemies (Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35).

2. The Creatureliness of the Son of Man

Creatureliness in this context refers to the fact that the prophet does acknowledge the fact that God is his Creator, while the prophet must limit his freedom within the human domain. The most outstanding trait of the son of man that outlays his creatureliness is his dependence upon the transcendent God. The son of man was always dependent upon God's direction. Whether this meant going to Babylon, or serving among the captives by the river Kebar, or eating God's scroll, or being carried by the Spirit to Jerusalem, or serving as a watchman over a stubborn house of Israel, or receiving visions of God for direction, the son of man was ready to comply to the leading and mandates of the Transcendent. Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan confirm:

By this commitment to the Transcendent, a person is able to transcend himself. And since he has a fundamental desire to transcend, the religious experience of self-transcendence is germane to his very existence as a human.²⁸

The Lord did transcend unto the Father by praying to Him, and depending on His will (Matthew 26:24, 39, 42, 45, 53-56). The ability and readiness to pray to the Transcendent and be willing to submit to His will is the true essence of humanity. The fall in Genesis 3 came as a result of the creature (man) looking away from His creator (God), and looking

PA/Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1918), p 210

²⁷ Norman L. Geisler and Winfried Corduan. *Philosophy of Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p40

²⁸ Bullock, *JETS* 25/1 (March 1982) 29-31; Vawter-Hoppe, p25

unto a fellow creature, the serpent. We must be ready to pray and wait upon Him, for even Jesus went back to heaven with this praying and dependence ability, insofar as He is now in heaven with the ability to pray, intercede for the saints (Romans 8:34). Invariably Jesus He is now in heaven with his humanity.

2. The Priestly Duties of the Son of Man in Ezekiel

Bullock has shown how both Jesus and Ezekiel have the priestly calling because both were speaking to God on behalf of his people. Ezekiel was initially trained to be a priest, but God only altered his ministry to that of a prophet in Babylon. Nevertheless, the priestly spirit was still there in Ezekiel, just as it was in Jesus.

In terms of priesthood, we can see that both Ezekiel and Jesus had the zeal for a purified temple (Ezekiel 8:1-8; John 2:13-22). They realized that the temple was their Father's house, and ought not to have been defiled by vain worshippers. So they wished for the sanctity of God's temple to be restored (Ezekiel 37:26, 40-48; John 2:13-22).

Both priests had the welfare of their people in mind. They were interested in the continuation of life for the people. That is why they emphasized the resurrection. Jesus emphasized the resurrection, but Ezekiel resuscitation. Bullock has realized that according to the Babylonian Talmud, Jews used to consider Ezekiel 37 to affirm the hope for physical resurrection, even though the prophet was actually referring to the people's restoration to righteousness. He uses the word resuscitation in referring to the event of Ezekiel 37, and states:

If the resuscitation of Israel in Ezekiel 37, and the inaugural sign of the eschatological era are described in chapters 40-48, then Jesus' restoration of the temple (his bodily resurrection) was the countersign of the beginning of that era that the prophet Ezekiel foresaw.²⁹

The resurrection and the coming of the new age point to a previous state of suffering and death. Both Ezekiel and Jesus passed through traumatic periods in their earthly ministries for the sake of the people they were serving. This was to characterize their priestly spirit (e.g. Hebrews 2:14-16). For Jesus, the suffering was vicarious to the extent that He became the Sacrificial Lamb in the atonement. For Ezekiel, the suffering was such that drew him, body and soul, into his experience which prefigured the Atonement of Christ.³⁰

²⁹ Bullock, *JETS* 25/1 (March 1982) 29-31

CONCLUSION

What the title “son of man” means in Ezekiel is that he was holy enough to see visions of God, and be found worthy of standing in the gap between God and Israel, the purpose of which was to warn them of impending danger to the intent that they might return to God.

On the other hand, he was human enough, through his revealed restrictions and privations, to feel for the calamity that was to befall them: the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. No wonder, God being the discernor of all hearts, warned Ezekiel not to weep when this would happen.

By the power of the Spirit, he was able to speak for God and by the same power of the Spirit, he was able to bear the priestly pains of suffering for his people.

The problem with most of the 21st century church is the overly use of political power and relegation to the background of the power of the Spirit. When the flesh is put under subjection (I Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5:16-17) and the Church is led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14) then shall we realise the full control of the Spirit of the Son of Man (son of man) over the lives of the believers.

Dr Offiong Ibok has been an ordained bishop of Church of God International, Cleveland, TN since 1987. He has taught and served in administrative capacities in Bible schools and seminaries across West and Central Africa since 1980 to present. Established Bible Schools in Nigeria, La Cote D'Ivoire, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Ghana (served as pioneer Academic Dean and Lecturer of Pan- African Christian University College, PACUC, Winneba, 2002-2008); worked with West Africa Theological Seminary (WATS), Lagos Nigeria as Lecturer, Director of Graduate Studies and Academic Dean 2009-2012. Presently: Adjunct Faculty of WATS; Director/ Dean of External Affairs, PACUC, Winneba, Ghana.

³⁰ Ibid



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