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Radio Ministry in Emerging Nations

John Edmiston

Old technology can still be good technology! In this article I will discuss how radio (including new types of radio) can help in the delivery of the Gospel.

Even though Cybermissions is an Internet ministry, we have embraced radio because it involves no special equipment for the end user, is widely available, and works with oral learners. It is also easy to produce great audio with simple podcasting equipment.

Over the years Cybermissions has been involved with FM, AM, Shortwave, Satellite and Internet radio and we have our own Internet radio website and app called Eternity Radio. We have also done FM radio planting in Asia, and we were part of Asia by Radio conferences for a couple of years.

We have a 30-minute expository Bible teaching program called Insights for Eternity and a 15-minute pastoral program called Uplifting Moments. We were very briefly (6 months or so) on satellite radio in the Middle East with teaching on Christian emotional intelligence. We broadcast both overseas and in regional USA.

We produce the audio program just once and then distribute it across multiple platforms. For instance, the same MP3 file might be broadcast on FM in Uganda, be uploaded on our EternityRadio.Org website, made available on the Eternity Radio app, and then added to our Olam autoresponder to be sent out to subscribers on an email list. We are also working with a partner ministry for future SD card distribution of our audio content.

ORAL LEARNERS

“An oral learner is someone who chooses to learn and communicate by oral means rather than written. They can be completely illiterate, functionally illiterate, visually impaired, or hearing impaired, or simply part of an oral culture. Oral learners are people all

over the globe whose mental processes are primarily influenced by spoken rather than textual forms of communication. Two-thirds of the world’s population are oral learners.” (from Bing search)

Oral communicators are people from all over the globe, from all walks of life and all levels of education who communicate primarily or exclusively through oral, not textual means. Their lives are therefore more

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likely to be transformed through stories, songs, drama, proverbs and media. (<https://orality.net/about/who-are-oral-communicators/>)

Scriptures In Use roughly gauged that there are an estimated 5.7 billion people who are oral learners. This includes 3 billion adults, 900 million very young children, and 450 million children

The wonderful folk at the International Orality Network and Visual Story Network among many others have made huge contributions in helping the Church to become focused on developing strategies for oral learners, who, according to ION, constitute at least 80% of the unreached.

Radio is one way to engage with oral learners and it need not just be one way. Local FM or AM talk radio with phone-in listeners can work well. Listeners are encouraged as they hear people sharing their spiritual problems and receiving answers from the presenter.

THE POTENTIAL OF RADIO

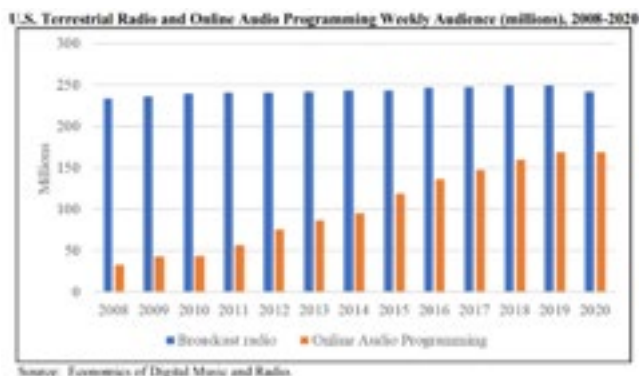
A United Nations article has this to say about the potential of radio: "At the global level, radio remains the most widely consumed medium. This unique ability to reach out the widest audience means radio can shape a society's experience of diversity, stand as an arena for all voices to speak out, be represented and heard. Besides this, radio helps listeners feel less isolated and more connected to their community."

Some of you might be thinking "who even owns radios any more"? There are radios in cars, workplaces and even on your phone!

With the incorporation of various types of radio apps on mobile phones, the phone may also soon be the main receiver of radio. I live in Virginia, USA but I listen to classical music stations from California, Australia and Britain and to Family Radio from New York - on my mobile phone.

The largest radio market is in China and even in the USA 82% of adults listen to radio at least weekly and the average US adult listens to 974 minutes a month of online radio.

Here is a diagram that shows how the US market has changed between broadcast and online:



Even shortwave radio still has an audience, mainly in West Africa and some parts of the Middle East. Wikipedia estimates that there are between 600

million to 1.5 billion shortwave receivers worldwide. There are still some great Christian ministries broadcasting on shortwave such as Voice of Hope which Cybermissions had airtime on until early 2024. Apparently shortwave radio is playing a key role in the war in Ukraine as it is difficult for governments to block.

MISSIONARY RADIO AND AUDIO

Missionary radio, which is primarily nonprofit, donor-driven and cross-cultural started out with the use of massive shortwave transmitters in the 1950's and then spread to many other audio outreach strategies such as AM, FM and Internet radio.

Examples include:

Large transmitters: Voice of Hope, FEBC, TWR, Christian Vision, Reach Beyond

Radio Technical Ministries: Galcom

MP3 Players: Megavoice

Recording of Scripture and Bible Stories: Global Recordings Network

Audio Bibles: Faith Comes by Hearing

Over time missionary radio has moved away from a "West to the Rest" model to far more indigenous and culturally relevant strategy. For instance, FEBC only uses locals to create their programming, and SAT-7 uses native Arabic speakers to reach the Middle East.

National evangelists have embraced radio (as well as TV) and a vast diversity of Christian radio stations have grown up throughout the world. This includes "radio planting" of low-powered FM radio stations in many unreached people groups. These small FM transmitters are much easier to maintain than large high-powered transmitters.

A quick Facebook search of the term "Christian radio" brings up hundreds of stations in a wide variety of languages such as Telegu, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese. Instead of a few huge players with 500KW shortwave transmitters there are now thousands of Christian radio ministries of all shapes and sizes focused on reaching the nations of the world.

Most of these outreach-oriented radio stations rely on a unique financial model of broadcasters paying for their programs to go to air, plus donations from the listening audience, church and local businesses. Few rely on advertising for the majority of their revenue. This in direct contrast with local Christian radio in the USA which is highly commercialized and relies on advertising revenue as well as donations.

TYPES OF RADIO STATIONS

The first step in starting a radio station is to decide what type of station you want to create. The type of station you choose will determine the cost of starting and operating your business, the size of your potential

audience, and the types of programming you can offer.

For example, if you want to reach the largest possible audience, you will need to choose a station type that broadcasts on a powerful signal. But, if you are operating on a tight budget, you may need to choose a station type that requires less expensive equipment, such as an internet radio station.

1. AM Radio Station

An AM radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on the AM frequency band. AM stands for Amplitude Modulation and it was one of the first types of radio signals used for broadcasting.

AM radio signals are transmitted using a carrier wave that is modulated in amplitude. The amplitude of the signal is varied to encode the audio information that is being broadcast.

AM radio signals are affected by atmospheric conditions and they can only travel a limited distance before they dissipate. For this reason, AM radio stations typically have a smaller coverage area than FM radio stations.

- Operates in the Medium Frequency (MF) band, usually from 530 kHz to 1700 kHz.
- Large coverage area especially at night, hundreds to thousands of kilometers.
- Susceptible to interference, best for talk radio, news, sports broadcasting and preaching.

2. FM Radio Station

An FM radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on the FM frequency band. FM stands for Frequency Modulation and it is the most common type of radio signal used for broadcasting.

FM radio signals are transmitted using a carrier wave that is modulated in frequency. The frequency of the signal is varied to encode the audio information that is being broadcast.

FM radio signals are not affected by atmospheric conditions and they can travel long distances without dissipating. For this reason, FM radio stations typically have a larger coverage area than AM radio stations.

- Operates in the Very High Frequency (VHF) band, from 88 MHz to 108 MHz.
- Clear sound quality, not subject to interference, good for music and entertainment
- Smaller coverage area (less than 100km radius), line of sight only.

3. Shortwave Radio Station

A shortwave radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on the shortwave frequency band. Shortwave signals are transmitted using a network of high-frequency radio waves.

Shortwave radio signals can travel long distances without dissipating. However, they are substantially affected by atmospheric and ionospheric conditions and can "hiss and crackle".

- Typically operates in the frequency range of 3 MHz to 30 MHz. It is part of the HF (High Frequency) band.
- Variable sound quality (sometimes subject to interference)
- Very large coverage area, can broadcast internationally into creative access nations.
- Requires more expensive equipment and sometimes consume large amounts of power.
- Requires a frequency license

4. Microbroadcasting Radio Station

A microbroadcasting radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on a very low power FM signal.

- Low cost
- Reaches up to 15km, so they can be helpful in a dense crowded area such as a slum.
- Requires a low-power FM signal
- May or may not require a broadcast license, depending on the nation.
- Have been covertly used in UPGs

5. DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) – key points:

- Requires a broadcasting license
- Broadcasting distance depends on how many multiplexes a radio station belongs to
- Multiple radio stations can be broadcast on one signal
- Has no interference
- Can transmit metadata like song names
- Mainly used in Europe, UK, Australia and Asia

6. Satellite Radio Station

A satellite radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts via a satellite signal. Satellite radio signals are transmitted using a network of satellites in orbit around the Earth.

Satellite radio signals are not affected by atmospheric conditions and they can travel long distances without dissipating. For this reason, satellite radio stations have a very large coverage area.

- Clear sound quality
- Very large coverage area
- Requires a subscription to receive the signal
- Difficult to jam or intercept so has been used to share the gospel in areas where it is normally restricted.

7. Internet Radio

- Does not require a broadcasting license
- Can broadcast anywhere in the world
- Unlimited number of radio stations possible
- Wide range of genres and types
- Can transmit metadata like song names
- Available on a wide range of devices such as smartphones, computers, and other connected devices.

STRUCTURING YOUR CHRISTIAN RADIO PROGRAM

Every program should have a strong intro, strong outro with a call to action, and an interesting topic that fits the time, genre and the audience. The intro and outro should be lively, upbeat, brief pre-recorded segments that are attached to the start and the conclusion of the program after editing. Here is a sample structure but feel free to create your own:

Intro (25 seconds): (Music rises, then drops) Welcome to PROGRAM TITLE with RADIO HOST where we discuss GENERAL THEME (music increases, and fades out) show starts

Outro (45 seconds): (Program concludes, music rises, music fades as voice starts) Thank you for listening to PROGRAM TITLE with RADIO HOST please go to our website where you can CALL TO ACTION and FINAL BLESSING (Music briefly increases, then fades)

The first fifteen seconds of the actual program after the intro must create desire, interest and connection. It must create the thought in the mind of the listener such as: "I really need to listen to this broadcast, right now!" You can do this by:

1. Vividly describing a problem that listeners want solved
2. Asking a curious question about something people want to know
3. Making an outrageous assertion and then proving it in the program
4. Speaking about a highly interesting niche topic that is relevant to your audience
5. Giving a great sermon illustration or story that gets listeners engaged with the topic
6. Illustrating an error and then saying you will show them the actual biblical truth: "you have heard it said, but I say unto you..."
7. Read a brief but powerful Bible verse, especially one with a great promise from the Lord
8. State a symptom, e.g. "are you ever anxious about money", elucidate the symptom so that they can feel it for themselves, then promise them relief (think headache pill advertisement)
9. Create light tension, banter or conflict between the radio hosts (if you have multiple people on the show)
10. Say something relatable and human that leads in to the topic: "Well, it is really hot here in Atlanta and we have a sizzling hot program for you today where we will be addressing the topic of..."

Once you have got the audience interested then you have to structure the radio program in a way that maintains interest throughout the broadcast. There are many possible formats such as: playing Christian music, doing in-person interviews, responding to

listener submissions (vetted beforehand), Biblical exposition, topical sermons, Christian commentary on the news, human interest situations, prayer and worship, evangelism, deliverance, healing, listener call-in with problems and questions, giving a Christian take on business and finances, cultural events: food, travel, Christians and technology, "agony aunt" relationships questions, and niche programs such as interesting topics from church history.

You can mix these formats, for instance you can play some music then take a phone call from a listener with a question for the local pastor.

Your audience determines your format. In Uganda programs with evangelism, healing and deliverance are popular, however I would probably keep a church history segment for an audience in a university town in Europe!

Music can be very local. Listeners will turn off if the music is strange to them. I know of a Christian radio station in Francophone (French-speaking) West Africa that broadcasts classical music and old hymns in English. The local Christians think it is terrible!

You cannot just broadcast whatever you like, whatever you think is good. You have to broadcast what the audience thinks is good and will listen to! This means that you have to research your audience demographics beforehand!

We are seeing the rapid rise of local AM/FM stations and Internet radio that allows local Christians in emerging nations to create their own radio programs at a fraction of the cost. Even if a Western preacher is given radio time to help fund the station, the local station still has the power to insist on certain topics or types of content.

It is a good idea to have a clear call to action which may be doing an evangelistic call, praying a prayer, phoning in on a certain number, sending an email to the radio station, sending in a donation or visiting a website and leaving questions and comments.

Of course, you should also close with something along the lines of "remember to tune in next week, same time, same station". You may need to check your calls to action with the radio station if you broadcast in the USA, as some FCC regulations ban calls to action for public radio and college campus and community radio.

Just a quick note: you may have to check for copyright issues, especially if you are broadcasting contemporary Christian music.

LIVE OR PRE-RECORDED?

I pre-record my shows because it allows editing, is less stressful and I can then upload them to my website later on. This is fine since I mainly do Bible teaching and do not have guests or call-ins. That said, I prefer being a guest on a live program than pre-recording something in my studio. There is better “energy” to it and I think the audience prefers it. The Radio King blog has a good post about this issue: <https://www.radioking.com/blog/is-pre-recorded-or-live-radio-content-better/>

Live is more authentic, has better engagement, has real time interaction and is less time-consuming because there is no post-production editing. However, it is prone to gaffes and mistakes, has less audio quality and is high pressure. It also has an inflexible schedule because you have to be on-air at a certain time.

Pre-recorded audio has a more flexible schedule (you can record at any time), is generally of a higher audio quality, allows editing and post-production to remove gaffes and glitches. However, it can lose timeliness if say, political issues and new events are being discussed. Pre-recorded allows you to schedule ahead and to control availability, for example, I can have shows lined up for when I am travelling.

ENCULTURATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

It is my view that it is totally inappropriate to directly translate well-known American preachers and call it missionary radio! Fortunately, this practice is rapidly changing! We are seeing the rapid rise of local AM/FM stations and Internet radio that allows local Christians in emerging nations to create their own radio programs at a fraction of the cost. Even if a Western preacher is given radio time to help fund the station, the local station still has the power to insist on certain topics or types of content.

The current plague of prosperity gospel preachers on radio is slowly being addressed, not just by the church but also by various national governments in emerging nations that want to control religious scams operating on their soil. The goal of sound theology and biblical teaching in a highly-contextualized local format with indigenous broadcasters is slowly being realized!

SOFTWARE, EQUIPMENT AND AI

The cost of producing a good radio program has dropped! It is possible to buy affordable microphones, podcast mixers and record directly to a computer. You just need a quiet room and some sound cushioning tiles. There are numerous articles online about the kind of equipment you require, such as: <https://live365.com/blog/what-is-a-radio-studio-what-equipment-does-it-need/>

A photo of my setup is below:



Audacity, which is a free audio editing program has recently improved to the point of being a commercial solution so that I have been able to move fully away from paid software. You can download Audacity from the following link: <https://www.audacityteam.org/download/>

There are AI voice generators and AI music generators that can help you with producing intro and outro clips, background music and advertisements. You just enter a text prompt and the AI software will generate the audio clip or music clip for you! It does take some practice though.

These AI programs are constantly changing and it is best to do a bit of research before settling on which software you will use. I use some AI programs that I purchased through AppSumo which is an outlet for discounted software.

CONCLUSION

Radio can play a vital role in Great Commission outreach, especially outreach to oral learners. Radio is affordable, universal and well understood, and does not require the purchase of special equipment. New forms of radio such as Internet radio and radio apps on mobile phones are breathing new life into a one-hundred-year-old medium of gospel communication.



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Optimizing Discipleship Groups for Fulfilling the Great Commission

David S. Lim

How can we fulfill the Great Commission in our generation most effectively? Gladly many of us have learned that multiplying discipleship groups (DGs) is the most effective way to grow and expand the Kingdom of God.¹ It is the best strategy that would produce mature Christians, radical disciples, sacrificial servant-leaders, holistic ministries, contextual theologies, rapid church multiplication, and effective global missions to reach the remaining unreached people groups (UPGs) effectively.

This article will show that to be fully effective and strategic, DGs have to be optimized into disciple making groups (DMGs). We will cover the theological basis, historical background, key principles, optimizing DGs, and optimization options of DGs to become DMGs.

THEOLOGICAL BASIS

The main purpose of DGs is to make disciples who make disciples (2 Tim 2:2). This concept was popularized by the megachurches who formed DGs as their tool in church growth through cell multiplication, following the models of Moses in the Old Testament (Exod 18:21-25) and the early church in the New Testament (Acts 2:42-47).

At the same time among mission agencies, DMGs were being formed as the effective units of the Disciple Making Movement (DMM) strategy. Entire villages and tribes may be reached for Christ through multiplying DMGs for church multiplication and kingdom expansion, following the models of Jesus (Mark 3:13-15) and Paul (Acts 19:8-10).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the church-based side, is the rise of megachurches in the cities around the world in recent decades. They started as “churches with cells,” mainly following the model of Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) founded in 1958 by Yonggi Cho in Seoul, Korea.² This model spread in the ‘80s to major cities in the North and Latin America, Africa and Asia, as he promoted this through his Church Growth seminars and conferences, and later also by the Prayer Movements worldwide led by Peter Wagner

1. This has been confirmed by the American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead who said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

2. David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Seoul: Seoul Logos Co., 1997); and Paul Yonggi Cho, *More Than Numbers* (Waco: Word, 1984). Also see Young-gi Hong, “The Background and Characteristics of Charismatic Mega-churches in Korea,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3.1 (2002), 99-118.

of the School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary.³

Then in the ‘90s, “seeker-friendly churches” (like Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek⁴ and Rick Warren’s Saddleback⁵ in the U.S.A.) combined with the “cell church” (two-winged: celebration on Sundays and cells on weekdays only). They aimed to grow “churches of cells,” popularized by Lawrence Khong in Singapore as taught by Ralph Neighbor, Jr.⁶ More recent models have focused on developing leaders for these cells, called “Government of 12” (G-12) developed by Cesar Castellanos in Bogota, Colombia, or “Discipling of 12 (D-12)” by Christ’s Commission Fellowship and Victory Christian Fellowship in Manila, Philippines.

At the same period, among mission mobilizers, inspired by reports of the “gospel explosion” of the house churches in China, Jim Montgomery founded the Discipling a Whole Nation (DAWN) movement in the Philippines with Nene Ramientos of Philippine Crusade (now changed to Challenge), which propagated the Christ the Only Way (COW) Movement in the late 1960s through Lay Evangelistic Group Studies (LEGS). It had the initial mission to have 10,000 LEGS to initiate saturation church-planting.⁷ In 1982, DAWN initiated this same strategy (called 50,000 churches by 2000) with planting at least one Bible-believing church in every barangay to achieve saturation evangelism. By August 2001, DAWN reported that the target number was achieved by including preaching points and house churches in the count.

By 1999, David Garrison reported on the “Church Planting Movements” (CPM) that he had been researching on, and highlighted DMMs as the way forward in missions. This validated what Ralph Winter compiled into the “Perspectives” course that featured how disciples of McGavran and Patterson have been doing to reach UPGs. With his US Center for World Mission, Winter propagated Frontier Missiology that emphasized that DMGs have to be highly contextualized to effectively result in saturation evangelization among UPGs.

3. C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura: Regal, 1998).

4. Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

5. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

6. Ralph Neighbor, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here?* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990).

7. From 1971-1974, I was applying what I was trained on how to grow and multiply DGs, as a student leader of a college campus chapter of Inter-Varsity Philippines.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF DGs

1. The main purpose is to make disciples who grow into mature spirituality. It's not just building friendships and have intimate Bible studies, but to also spur one another to spiritual growth unto Christlikeness (Col. 1:28-29). "Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else," as C.S. Lewis says. This requires intentionality in the curriculum, discussion questions and overall direction.
2. Prioritize relationship-building through sharing, prayer & group activities, providing an open space to know one another deeply, share life together and walk through joys and struggles side by side. DGs are a way to live out the "one another" commands to love, encourage, bear burdens with, and even confess sins to. They serve as the context for "every member ministry," where all believers use their spiritual gifts to build the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-16).
3. With healthy accountability, DGs provide a context where members feel safe to share about their spiritual life, temptations, growth areas and personal goals/plans. Members should have become best friends to each other who they can carry happy memories of their time together.
4. Equip and empower leaders - With such a high expectations, DG leaders need to be identified and trained, given opportunity to apprentice to lead discussions, to host the group and eventually to multiply the group.
5. Keep the group small; limit up to 6-12 members only. The largest megachurch YFGC has aimed to limit membership to only 6-8. Members are usually also encouraged and trained on how to evangelize their kin and friends to join their group. As Francis of Assisi said, "Every Christian should give birth to another Christ." So, when the DG grows larger, it can multiply into two or three groups, or encourage some members to start a new group.
6. Provide structure and consistency. DGs meet regularly (weekly or bi-weekly) at the same time and place, or rotate among a few homes. They need to have clear agenda with time for fellowship, Bible discussion, prayer and vision-casting. They should be provided resources like discussion guides, or trained to find materials through the internet and automated intelligence (AI).
7. Multiply and reproduce - from the start, cast the vision for the group to multiply; regularly discuss what it would look like for the group to divide into two groups and what it would require (just do this once in a while). When the time is right (usually six to twelve months), guide the group through multiplication process, and celebrate the launch of a new group. Then repeat the cycle again.

OPTIMIZING DGs

Most cell churches could not achieve the success of the megachurches because they have lacked in organizational development, particularly institutionalizing evangelistic, replication and holistic programs into their DG vision and structure. Even megachurches will gradually decline if they neglect integrating these three programs into their DG structure.

Evangelistic programs. For recruiting new members to multiply DGs, the YFGC uses altar calls in most of their large gatherings, including most of their Sunday worship services. This is a constant source of potential members who can form new DGs. At the same time, there is active recruitment and training of new potential leaders in the DG system: each DG leader disciples one or two apprentices who are also being training in their Cell Leaders' Training School.

In the early years of the cell church movement led by Khong and Neighbor from Singapore, they avoid adding other activities, such as prayer meetings and fellowships. Each church member must be a member of a cell; hence church members have only one other involvement in the church: the Sunday worship services.

With their centralized structure to meet more needs from their increasing membership, most of them have slowly added many other evangelistic projects and fellowship activities. Because of their size, they have the financial capacity to develop any program that the central leadership decides is necessary or feasible, even if these new projects would later become huge budget outlays. In the end, they are no longer strictly cell churches.

Since most of these churches are theologically Pentecostal-charismatic, they also emphasize "power evangelism" or "signs and wonders" as they pray for the miraculous healing and other spiritual manifestations (like tongues, "resting in (or slain by) the Spirit," etc.). In association with other independent (and mostly also with the same theological bent) ministers and churches, they wage "spiritual warfare" through prayer walks as they seek to evangelize and make disciples in their locality, such as the "Prayer (or Harvest) Evangelism" program of Ed Silvano in Argentina.⁸

Replication programs. Each church has limited reach to only a few kilometers radius from its location. Hence the number of DGs it can multiply can be restricted, too. The church leadership needs to plan for church multiplication, too, especially to other towns and cities. In the years 2000s, most megachurches began their church replication programs. For instance, VCF planned to plant one church nationwide in at least a shopping mall in each capital city per province

⁸ Ed Silvano, *That None Should Perish*. Ventura: Regal, 1994.

as well as in the capital city of each country in Asia. They have done this by sending a church-planting team of a pastor and a group of recruits from among their youth and professionals. Actually it can be done just by casting the vision for any DG to grow into a church in their neighboring locality.

Holistic programs. Many of the DGs have lost their effectivity in growing and multiplying capacity mainly because they missed the “servant evangelism” aspects of the regular life of the earlier DGs. In YFGC, the DGs had been led mostly by women, who enjoy visiting and serving the families of their members and friends. In Ed Silvoso’s “Prayer Evangelism,” their DGs go to bless and supply the needs in their neighbor’s homes. In CCF, DGs are encouraged to serve in their communities.

Holistic ministries are demonstrations of spiritual maturity (Christlikeness) through doing justice & loving mercy (Mic 6:6-8; Isa 58). The sheep who inherit eternal life are those who minister to the needy people (Matt. 25:31-40), even if they didn’t realize that the spiritual discipline of almsgiving (6:1-4) done privately has eternal reward, besides its transformational impact in realizing Jesus’ reign on earth. Through the servant evangelism of DGs, the church fulfills its role to be salt and light in their world, so that their neighbors will glorify God (Matt 5:13-16).

OPTIMIZATION OPTIONS FOR DGs TO BECOME DMGs

Yet from the perspective of the missiological community, there are more spaces for optimizing DGs into disciple making groups (DMGs), which aim to win entire communities and people groups strategically. As the DGs enhance their vision and activities to developing into DMGs, they can become more effective ambassadors of God’s kingdom among the nations, in at least these three ways: become entrepreneurial through cooperative development, become viral through disciple multiplication movement, and become incarnational through indigenous movement.

Optimization #1 = Become entrepreneurial DMGs (cooperative development). First, DGs can become holistic DMGs through cooperative development. Jesus-followers can be the solution to the poverty areas and the economic inequality in the world today. Gladly, last April 18th 2023, the vast majority of the United Nations’ General Assembly officially resolved to build the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) to help achieve their 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. SSE is built mainly on cooperativism, which is coordinated globally by the International Cooperative Alliance founded since 1895, which consists of at least 12% of the world’s population in three million coops which contribute to sustainable economic growth and stable, quality employment

worldwide. There are now about one billion coop members in the world today, that’s about 12.5% of the world’s population. If we double every 2 years, we’ll be 25% by 2026, 50% by 2028 and 100% by 2030.

Our DGs can be mobilized to join the SSE from the bottom up as we propagate economic koinonia (cooperativism) as “law of the land.” This legislation exists globally in the form (with various names) of social democracy or welfare state. It aims for each citizen to enjoy Jubilee “from the cradle to the grave,” which for us means reviving bayanihan (solidarity) and walang iwanan (leave no one behind) in the Filipino way of life.

Thus all Jesus-following DGs, churches and organizations should teach their constituents to turn their homes & buildings into ministry centers and do Matt. 25:31-40 services, implementing the laws of Jubilee to fulfill Jesus’ mission Those blessed with intelligence, health, talents & wealth should share their lives and possessions with those with less— because everything we have are God’s gracious gifts meant for the common good and not for private use only. Freely we receive, freely we share. We are created in the image of the Triune God who is eternally sharing generously as equals.

Isaiah 65:21-22 shows a New Jerusalem on earth where justice prevails, where each one’s labor is rewarded accordingly, following the ideal of “each man sitting under his own vine and fig tree” (Mic 4:4) and the Mosaic laws of gleaning (so none will be poor, Deut 15:1-6) and Jubilee (when every fifty years all lands are returned to the original families, Lev 25). In the NT, the DG of Jesus shared a common fund (Judas was their treasurer), and so did Paul’s (Acts 20:33-35), following the practice of the earliest church in Jerusalem (2:42-45; 4:32-37). Paul taught that caring for and sharing with one another for equality manifests in full the mutual love ethic among the Jesus-following communities (2 Cor. 8:7-15).

Thus all Jesus-following DGs, churches and organizations should teach their constituents to turn their homes & buildings into ministry centers and do Matt. 25:31-40 services, implementing the laws of Jubilee to fulfill Jesus’ mission (Luke 4:18-21). Those blessed with intelligence, health, talents & wealth should share their lives and possessions with those with less— because everything we have are God’s gracious gifts meant for the common good and not for private use only. Freely we receive, freely we share.

We are created in the image of the Triune God who is eternally sharing generously as equals.

The best (or even the only) structure of cooperativism where out of love for neighbors, people contribute towards a common fund which they democratically save, plan and work together to entrepreneurially do business together for the common good. Following the Exodus 18:21-25 structure mentioned above, each group of 5-10 families can go into business together by saving, planning, working and sharing profits together. Each DG can link with about four other groups (coordinated by leaders of fifties) to form primary coops and organize secondary coops (federations led by leaders of hundreds) and tertiary coops (confederations led by leaders of thousands), like in the structure .

This is happening nowadays among house church networks (HCNs) in China, India & Philippines, too, and a few are starting to cooperativize.⁹ In the Philippines, anyone who wants to learn about economic DMGs just needs to connect with any of us and we will find someone to disciple them in person or online, or just refer them to our website: <https://stargrass.dalipuga.com/housechurch>.

Optimization #2 = Becoming viral DMGs (DMM).

The second direction is to multiply DMGs virally or exponentially through disciple making movements (DMMs). The four-step process for disciple making is: Model, Assist, Watch, and Leave (MAWL), like what Jesus did. First, he ministered and his disciples watched him. Second, he allowed the disciples to assist in the ministry. Third, the disciples did the ministry themselves. Finally, he just watched as the disciples ministered to others. The modern version of intentional discipleship is "I do, you watch"; "I do, you do"; "You do, I watch"; "You do, I don't watch."

To transform the world, Jesus just trained his disciples to evangelize the villages of Galilee (eventually to all nations) by simply sending them two by two without bringing outside resources into the community (Luke 10:4) to build any new structure there. They just had to find a local "person of peace/shalom" (vv. 5-6) and disciple that person to disciple their kin, friends and neighbors (vv. 4b-9), transforming them from "wolves" into "lambs" (cf. V .3) from house to house (not by the outsider, but by the insider, v. 7). If there is no such person in a community, they can just leave and go to another one (vv. 10-16), as simple as that.

And that's how the apostles and the early church extended the kingdom, through forming house (oikos) church networks (HCNs) in each place.¹⁰ across

9. On HCMs, see my "Asia's House Church Movements Today," *Asian Missions Advance* 52 (July 2016): 7-12. Cf. Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), and Rad Zdero, *The Global House Church Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2004).

10. *Oikos* is best translated as "household" for it is composed not just of the family, but also of friends, tenants and slaves, as seen in the instructions given in Eph.5:22-6:9 & Col.3:18-4:1 (cf. my "God's Kingdom as Oikos Church Networks: A Biblical Theology," *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 34.1-4 (Jan-Dec 2017), 25-

the Roman Empire and beyond.¹¹ The formation of house-based DMGs was the practical outcome of the "priesthood of all believers" as each Jesus-follower was empowered to use their homes to serve and bless their neighbors where they lived and worked. It's simply discipling every believer to become "mature in Christ" to serve as God's priest (minister) in and through their household.

How then is the earthly New Jerusalem to be organized globally as it is implanted as small groups (family-size) in society? Jesus did not form a formal structure, but introduced a cellular system that subsists in the constant reproduction of "new wineskins" (Mk.2:22) in the structures of society. Each DG forms a part of a HCN, where authority rests on the lowest units ("leaders of tens") which are consulted and assisted (but not supervised nor controlled) by the "higher" coordinating units, as they become leaders of their local community.¹² In the NT, these local leaders were simply called "elders." This is different from the denominational hierarchies of local churches with episcopal, presbyterian or congregationalist structure.

In a DMG, to disciple means to equip someone with just three spiritual disciplines: (a) hearing God through prayerful meditation (lectio divina) to turn His word (logos) into a personal word (rhema) to be obeyed (2 Tim.3:16-17); (b) making disciples through facilitating a 'HC' in praying and Bible sharing, thereby each one learns how to do personal devotions with fellow believers (Heb.10:24; 1 Cor.14:26); and (c) doing friendship evangelism to share what they learn of God and His will with their non-believing networks of friends.

This is what the mainstream of the Philippine Missions Association (PMA's) flagship program has focused on mobilizing the Filipino diaspora (mostly migrant laborers and immigrants) to help fulfill the Great Commission through multiplying DMGs in the world.¹³ We have aimed to raise the largest and perhaps the most effective Evangelical mission force among the nations since 2001 until now,¹⁴ through training and deploying a million tentmakers -

35. This means that each oikos church crossed many cultural barriers, particularly gender, age, class and ethnicity as they gathered and "broke bread" together around the same table as equals (cf. Gal. 3:28).

11. Interestingly, Paul also started with only 12 disciples to reach the whole Asia Minor in two years (Acts 19:1-10).

12. This is commonly called the "subsidiarity" principle.

13. As the main missiologist of PMA, here are three works on my DMM missiology, see "Towards a Radical Contextualization Paradigm in Evangelizing Buddhists," *Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World*, ed. David Lim & Steve Spaulding (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 71-94; "Catalyzing 'Insider Movements' Among the Unreached," *Journal of Asian Mission* 10.1-2 (March-September 2008), 125-145; and "Effective Tentmaking Made Simple," *Blessing OFWs to Bless the Nations*, ed. Ana Gamez (Makati: Church Strengthening Ministries, 2012), 108-113.

14. At the Lausanne Forum at Pattaya in September 2004, the Filipino delegation publicly declared their commitment to deploy 200,000 missionaries (mostly OFWs as tentmakers) into the 10/40 Window by 2010; and in 2009 PMA extended it to 1,000,000 (with 3,000 career missionaries) by 2020, which would constitute 10% of OFWs. Evangelicals and Pentecostals have been about 10% of the 110 million Philippine population since the start of this century.

“Overseas Filipino Workers” (OFWs)¹⁵ – to catalyze DMMs among the unreached people groups (UPGs).¹⁶

Our DMM strategy is multiplying DMGs in the form of “Company-3” as our flagship program.¹⁷ Like what Jesus did in equipping and sending his disciples into their world as “apostles” (Mk.3:13-15), “disciple multiplication” is God’s simple strategy to “disciple all nations.” Every Jesus-follower can be mobilized and equipped to multiply disciples where they live and work.¹⁸ Anything more is a diversion from God’s simple plan to disciple the world speedily.

Company-3 consists of three parts per session: First is “Sharing our lives” when each one shares their praise and prayer items. Second is “Hearing from God” when each one answers questions to a biblical passage about God, people, what to do, and who to tell the lessons learned. And the third is “Conversation with God” when they pray for each other’s needs, and for opportunities to bring specific others one-step-closer to Him and start a DMG with them. It’s just like what happens in ordinary DGs, but can now be used to make DMG multiply virally.

Optimization #3: Becoming incarnational DMG (indigenous movement). The third direction for DGs is to become incarnational DMGs through indigenous movements. In the Statement “Reimagining Missions: Discipleship in Asia” issued by the recently held 11th General Assembly of the Asia Evangelical Association in Ulaanbaatar, Chansamone Saiyasak averred that discipleship must be culture-friendly or culture-sensitive. In order to advance the Christian mission in Asia, we should be: “Nurturing indigenous Christians to develop their identity within the Asian context, equipping them to effectively share and adapt their faith to local cultures, raising up leaders who understand and can navigate local traditions while discipling new believers,” and “ensuring the church becomes more locally sustainable and culturally relevant.”¹⁹

We need to relearn how Jesus trained his disciples to do his mission contextually (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-17), which he also illustrated cross-culturally among the Samaritans in Sychar (John 4) and among Gentiles in Decapolis (Mark 5:1-20; 7:31-8:10). When entering other cultures, Paul practiced “becoming all things

to all people” (1 Cor 9:20-23), in fact “making himself a slave (doulos) among them” (v. 19). As for the local converts, his mission – now called “Insider Movements (IM)”²⁰ – included three dimensions: incarnational (1 Cor 7:17, 20, 24), contextual (vv. 18-20) and transformational (vv. 21-24).²¹

Through the “person of peace” in each community, people begin their faith journey by contextually remaining in the majority religion (or non-religion) of their family and community (esp. vv. 18-20). They simply developed their faith with a simple spirituality, with each one learning how to live a “love God and love everyone” lifestyle (Matt 22:37-39; Rom 12:1-2) in their society. Jesus did not (nor trained his disciples to) set up any structure separate from the existing homes, communities and structures where they lived and worked.

The rich harvest that Jesus expected from his disciples are being reaped nowadays through simply multiplying indigenous DMGs. By just following Jesus in his “zero-budget missions,” every disciple just leads someone (usually a relative or a new friend) to trust and obey King Jesus in love and good works. As they serve one another, the people (esp. community leaders) around them will take notice of “how they love one another” (and their neighbors) and will soon also ask for their help. They then naturally rise to become leaders in the community.

Moreover, our DMG members need to understand that all secular things – including all natural (God-created) places, assets and talents, and cultural (human-made) ideas, artifacts, gadgets, traditions, customs, worldviews, etc. – can be redeemed and sanctified through faith expressed in prayer to God in Jesus’ name and obedience to His word (1 Tim 4:4-5, cf. Jas 1:17). So there is no need to build religious facilities, for all properties of Jesus-followers belong to (and can be used for) His kingdom (John 4:21-24; Acts 7:48; 17:24-28),²² for true worship can be done anytime and anywhere (cf. Rom.12:1-2; 1 Cor 10:31), even in Buddhist temples, Communist classrooms and Muslim mosques.

Therefore, we should be teaching a biblical spirituality which requires less and less religious practices. Following Christ does not require public displays of religiosity – in fact, Jesus literally discouraged such (Matt 6:1-18), which included almsgiving, praying and fasting, which are all to be done in private.²³ As each walks humbly and simply for God’s glory (Col 3:17; Mic 6:8), their community will experience shalom and enjoy life with love and justice (1 Tim 2:1-2). Their spirituality does not need

15. The International Labor Organization lists 11 million Filipinos living abroad as of March 2022, which is 10% of the population. “Why are OFWs Heroes of the Philippine Economy?” at <https://www.bria.com.ph/articles/why-are-ofws-heroes-of-the-philippine-economy/>.

16. On PMA, see my “History and Ministry of Philippine Missions Association: Leading the Global Shift to Tentmaker Missions.” *Asian Missions Advance* 41 (October 2013), 2-6.

17. For the missiology and strategy of “Company 3,” see Robert Claro, *A Higher Purpose for Your Overseas Job* (Makati City: Church Strengthening Ministries, 2003).

18. This was first popularized through Dawson Trotman (since 1933) & the Navigators. I think that the main reasons why this movement has not achieved its goal of world evangelization is due to the same weaknesses that we encountered in PMA (see below), which are to have church-supported staff and to become literate (depending on printed materials like Bible Study materials).

19. <https://weamc.global/aea-contextual-discipling/>.

20. On the IM of Jesus, Paul and the early church, see my “God’s Kingdom as Oikos Church Networks: A Biblical Theology,” *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 34.1-4 (Jan-Dec 2017), 25-35.

21. Paul claims he teaches this universally in all the churches (v. 17b).

22. Israel had only one temple, not one in each village, city or region. The Jews began to build synagogues only circa 200 BC to serve as their community centers in their diaspora.

23. The Sabbath was for rest, not public worship.

to develop elaborate theologies, ethics, liturgies and hierarchies (cf. Amos 5:21-24; Ps 131). It will simply be “more generosity, less religiosity.”

As our world modernizes and globalizes further, as science and technology advance rapidly, and as we form DMGs contextually, the socio-religious traditions in our pluralistic world will lose relevance and will be reduced and/or transformed into less religious forms. Through high-tech and social media, people even in still fully oral cultures will become more and more secularized (and materialistic and hedonistic), and will overcome their fears and guilt feelings, which have been the roots of superstitious practices, lucky charms and elaborate religious rituals.

The rich harvest that Jesus expected from his disciples are being reaped nowadays through simply multiplying indigenous DMGs. By just following Jesus in his “zero-budget missions,” every disciple just leads someone to trust and obey King Jesus in love and good works. As they serve one another, the people around them will take notice of “how they love one another” and will soon also ask for their help. They then naturally rise to become leaders in the community.

We just have to focus on promoting “more Jesus, less religion.” “More Jesus” means simply practicing the simple spirituality (three habits of holiness/discipleship), in low-key ways, amidst the busyness and noise of urban and cyberspace. This applies also to the over-supply of online Christian programming that add to the multiplicity of chats and services in Facebook and YouTube. We need to be reminded that historically all “gospel explosions” and spiritual revivals were high-touch and hardly high-tech. We just need to focus on “gossiping” the essentials (prayer and the Word) relationally and not be diverted by the media (print, radio, TV and internet) for spiritual formation and transformation. Online ministry will work only when friendship and trust have been established first. Can high touch “friendship” (in DMGs) happen in Facebook or any social media? Perhaps possible with lots of time (man-hours) invested in personal and group chats, as I have done more and more since the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

We have shown that our existing DGs (Discipleship Groups) in our churches and mission-fields can still be optimized to multiply Jesus-followers who can multiply disciple-makers more effectively, so as to transform whole communities and workplaces Christward – with contextualized, holistic and transformational sustainable communities that are truly replicable: self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating and self-theologizing.

We will be multiplying DGs and planting churches that will be copied by future generations of Jesus-followers, so we should avoid transplanting denominational churches (= complex Christendom) which are often decontextualized (= foreign-looking, if not actually foreign), hence have almost always produced marginalized believers who are separated from their communities – despised and rejected by their family and friends, not because of the Gospel but because of their extra-biblical forms.

Through optimized DGs in DMMs, Christianity will then return to what Jesus Christ originally intended His Kingdom to be: every human having a personal *relationship* with God through simple faith in Him (liberated from sin and the complexities of both primitive/animistic/folk religions and major/great organized religions), which results in works of sacrificial love for Him and His creation/creatures (liberated from sin’s effects on the poor bound to their poverty and on the rich bound to their prosperity). No more need for elaborate *religiosity* with elaborate theologies, liturgies, temples or clergies. His kingdom and mission is to bring forth a *spiritual* (read: moral) transformation rather than just a *religious* reformation.

May God use each of us to multiply optimized DGs and DMGs, so that God’s kingdom can expand in powerful ways. May we be faithful to the vision of kingdom expansion through DMGs, so that the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the earth as waters cover the sea.



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Reverse Missions: The Nigerian Christians' Experience in Re-Evangelizing Europe and North America

Humphrey Iheukwumere Okerefor

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the phenomenon of reverse missions, concentrating on the re-evangelisation of North America and Europe by Nigerian Christians. First, a historical synopsis of Christian missions to Nigeria is considered, emphasizing the early European missionary endeavours in Africa and the subsequent expansion and advancement of Christianity in Nigeria. An analysis of the emergence of missionary movements led by Nigerians reveal a change in the dynamics of missionary work. Examining the reasons behind these reverse missions reveal a focus on socioeconomic, cultural, and spiritual elements. The strategies and tactics used by Nigerian Christians are examined in depth, demonstrating creative and culturally appropriate techniques. The difficulties and obstacles encountered, including cultural disparities, practical problems, and opposition from nearby communities, are also covered in the paper. Despite these challenges, Nigerian Christians' reverse missions have had great success and influence, revitalizing local churches, promoting intercultural understanding, and adding to the worldwide Christian landscape. This study offers an in-depth examination of modern Christian missions' dynamic and reciprocal aspects.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the phenomenon of reverse missions has drawn much attention, as it has changed the face of Christian missions worldwide. From the eighteenth century, the West has been the source of missionary activities to continents such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Nevertheless, this pattern has reversed at the turn of the twenty-first century, with nations previously thought of as mission fields now sending missionaries to North America and Europe. Nigeria is one of the leading countries in this reverse-mission movement due to its burgeoning Christian population. Nigerian Christians are actively involved in re-evangelising areas that are seeing a rise in secularism and a decline in religious adherence. However, despite their apparent dynamism and growing involvement in reverse missions, there is still a lack of thorough scholarly research that critically examines their experiences, challenges, and impacts. This lapse leaves a gap in our knowledge of how Nigerian missionaries traverse North America and Europe's socio-cultural and religious landscapes and how the local communities respond to and view their efforts. To fully understand the relevance of this reverse-mission phenomenon in the modern global

Christian mission activity, a thorough examination of its theological and missiological consequences is necessary.

This study aims to fill a vacuum in the literature by examining the Nigerian Christians' experience of re-evangelising North America and Europe. It seeks to comprehend the reasons behind, tactics used, and results of Nigerian reverse-missions and the difficulties and opportunities Nigerian missionaries face in these areas. By doing this, the paper will shed light on the larger consequences of reverse-missions for Christianity worldwide and provide an understanding of how these missionary endeavours support the resuscitation of the Christian faith in environments characterised by religious plurality and secularism. The paper will also examine how Nigerian missionaries modify their evangelistic strategies to fit in with their areas' spiritual and cultural contexts.

The paper is significant because it can potentially improve missiological practice and scholarship. The study will add to a more thorough understanding of worldwide mission trends by offering insightful perspectives on the dynamics of reverse-missions through an examination of the experiences of Nigerian missionaries. Additionally, lawmakers, church leaders, and mission agencies involved in or supporting reverse mission programmes will find value in the practical insights this paper will provide. It will also show how Nigerian missionary efforts have the power to transform the Christian faith in North America and Europe and how religious communities in the Global South influence the direction of Christianity worldwide. In the end, this paper will highlight how crucial it is to acknowledge and value the contributions made by non-Western missionaries to the Church's ongoing work, encouraging increased cooperation and mutual learning across national and cultural barriers.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS TO NIGERIA

Through a historical lens, this section of the paper reviews Christian missions in Nigeria by considering the early Christian missions from Europe to Africa, the growth and development of Christianity in Nigeria, and the rise of Nigerian-led missionary movements.

Early Christian missions from Europe to Africa

Christian missions to Nigeria started in earnest in the middle of the nineteenth century and were a part of the larger European missionary endeavor in Africa.

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) led the first major attempts, sending its first missionaries to the Yoruba region in 1842. These early missionaries aimed to disseminate Christianity and Western education because a strong evangelical fervor and a feeling of civilizing mission propelled them. They encountered many challenging obstacles, such as severe weather patterns, tropical illnesses, and opposition from the native populace who followed indigenous religions. One of the trailblazing individuals was the former slave Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who rose to become the first African Anglican bishop. As a result of Crowther's translation efforts, Christian doctrines were able to proliferate throughout Yoruba and other indigenous languages. His actions were a crucial turning point in developing Christian missions in Nigeria by symbolizing the meeting point of European missionary zeal and African activity.

Another significant player was the Roman Catholic Church, which established missions in southern Nigeria through the work of French and Irish missionaries. They made contributions by building schools and hospitals, which not only introduced Western education and medical procedures but also served to advance Christianity. These pioneering missionaries faced initial opposition, but their work eventually paid off as Christian communities were established and the number of indigenous clergy increased. Nigeria had become firmly Christianized by the early twentieth century, which helped to create the dynamic Christian environment that exists there now. The legacy of these early missions is evident in Nigeria's robust Christian institutions and the country's role in contemporary global missions.

The Growth and Development of Christianity in Nigeria

The rise and evolution of Christianity in Nigeria from the nineteenth century to the present, is a complex story characterized by notable expansion and change. This dynamic religious environment was made possible by the foothold that early European missionaries created in the mid-1800s. Together with Roman Catholic missionaries, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was instrumental in advancing Christianity through healthcare, education, and translating sacred scriptures into local languages. Their efforts were complemented by other mainline churches that came on board. However, due to the desire for Christianity connected with African cultural contexts, indigenous churches were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The emphasis on spiritual healing, prophecy, and dynamic worship styles of the indigenous churches, such as the Aladura churches attracted adherents and helped believers grow quickly.

After independence, the number and diversity of Christian denominations increased in Nigeria. Pentecostal and charismatic churches first appeared

in the 1970s and 1980s, bringing fresh doctrinal emphases and worship approaches. As a testament to the widespread influence of Nigerian Christianity, these churches have kept growing both domestically and abroad. Nigerian Christianity's growth has also been distinguished by its sociopolitical involvement. Churches have made significant contributions to national development and the resolution of social challenges through their work in advocacy, healthcare, and education. Today, Nigeria is home to some of the largest Christian congregations globally, symbolizing the enduring legacy and dynamic future of Christianity in the region.

The Rise of Nigerian-led Missionary Movements

A notable change in the worldwide mission landscape is the emergence of Nigerian-led missionary movements typified by a reversal of conventional North-to-South missionary flows. As a result of Nigerian churches- especially Pentecostal and charismatic denominations- leading missionary efforts throughout Europe, North America, and other regions of the world, these phenomenon gained speed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. One of the key organizations driving this movement is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), established in 1952 and has a substantial following across many countries. The RCCG plan for worldwide expansion, which is motivated by establishing churches in every country, is a prime example of the organization and boldness of Nigerian missionary work. Nigerian missionaries provide a unique style of evangelism marked by dynamic worship, a focus on the supernatural, and flexibility in dealing with different situations. These missionaries help communities in the diaspora find spiritual and material support, which helps Nigerian expats feel a feeling of identity and belonging. Furthermore, Nigerian-led missions revitalize Christian faith in regions experiencing secularization and religious decline, particularly in Europe and North America. Examples of such Nigerian-led missions include Kingsway International Christian Centre, African Congregational Evangelical Mission, The Church of Pentecost, Deeper Life Bible Church, Mountain of Fire and Miracles, Christ Embassy and Redeemed Christian Church of God.

The development of international networks that promote cross-cultural interaction and intercommunal assistance among Christian communities is another indication of the influence of Nigerian missionary organizations. Among such networks include Redeemed Christian Church of God Mission Network, Deeper Life Bible Church Global Missions, Christ Apostolic Church Worldwide, African Independent Churches Network, Nigerian Baptist Convention Global Missions and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. These networks propagate theological ideas and practices that impact outside of Nigeria,

increasing the influence of Nigerian Christianity worldwide. The rise of Nigerian-led missionary movements underscores the dynamic and reciprocal nature of contemporary Christian missions, highlighting the role of the Global South in shaping the future of global Christianity.

The Motivations for Reverse Missions

The divine mandate to revitalize Western Christianity in decline, the socio-cultural difficulties faced by the diaspora, the financial support of church communities, and powerful personal accounts that highlight the transformative power of faith and arouse missionary zeal are the main drivers behind reverse missions among Nigerian Christians. Before delving more into these reasons, it is important to take a broad view of the Nigerian Christian diaspora.

In their reverse missions, Nigerian Christians use various evangelistic techniques and strategies firmly anchored in the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. The emphasis on individual salvation stories, frequently communicated through impactful narratives of change and supernatural intervention, is fundamental to their evangelism. These stories effectively bridge cultural divides and humanise the gospel message for African and Western audiences.

Overview of the Nigerian Christian Diaspora: Over the past few decades, the Nigerian Christian diaspora has expanded greatly, settling in North America, Europe, and other continents. Socioeconomic issues like the pursuit of better jobs and educational opportunities, political unpredictability at home, and the desire for a higher standard of living are major causes of this dispersion. The Nigerian diaspora is distinguished by its intense religious zeal and close-knit communities, with churches serving as vital hubs for social assistance and cultural preservation. This thriving Christian community overseas is the foundation of reverse missions, in which Nigerians feel compelled to evangelize and revitalize Christianity in their home nations. The motivations for the reverse missions are to be discussed as follows:

Spiritual and Theological Motivations: A strong spiritual and theological foundation underpins Nigerian reverse missions, which many Nigerian

Christians see as a divine mandate to revive the Christian religion in the West, which they see as becoming more and more secular and spiritually apathetic. Pentecostal and charismatic beliefs that highlight the necessity of evangelism and the ability of the Holy Spirit to change people's lives frequently serve to strengthen this sense of mission. Their dedication is further strengthened by their belief in prophetic visions and dreams, as many missionaries share firsthand accounts of God's calling to particular areas.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors: Socio-cultural and economic factors also significantly influence reverse missions motivation. Nigerian immigrants frequently encounter difficulties in their new countries, including prejudice, cultural shock, and financial hardship. Constructing churches promotes a sense of community and belonging and offers a spiritual refuge. These churches frequently act as social and financial assistance hubs, providing programmes like counselling, language instruction, and help finding a job. Tithes and offerings from Nigerian Christians provide the financial support these churches need to continue their missionary work and increase their outreach. Furthermore, Nigerian-led churches' success in attracting African and non-African congregants highlights the appeal of their vibrant worship styles and community-oriented approach.

Personal Testimonies and Narratives: Narratives and personal testimonies play a significant role in reverse missions. Several Nigerian missionaries encourage others to get involved in the cause by telling moving stories of personal growth and supernatural intervention. These accounts frequently emphasize liberation from spiritual oppression, healing miracles, and repairing damaged lives, which confirms the perceived effectiveness of their mission and faith. A personal story of faith and resiliency may fuel missionary fervour, as demonstrated by Pastor Agu Irukwu of Jesus House London, a congregation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). His transition from a legal career to becoming the pastor of one of the biggest African-led churches in the UK is evidence of the life-changing power of one's conviction and divine calling. These testimonials also help close cultural gaps, which allows the gospel message to resonate with various listeners. Nigerian missionaries frequently modify their evangelistic strategies to fit the cultural milieu, effectively conveying their message through drama, music, and storytelling. This cultural adaptability, combined with their fervent spirituality, makes Nigerian-led missions uniquely positioned to address the spiritual needs of multicultural societies.

STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES OF THE NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS' REVERSE MISSIONS

Nigerian Christians use diverse strategies and approaches in their deployment of reverse missions.

Some of those are discussed as follows:

Evangelistic Methods and Practices:

In their reverse missions, Nigerian Christians use various evangelistic techniques and strategies firmly anchored in the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. The emphasis on individual salvation stories, frequently communicated through impactful narratives of change and supernatural intervention, is fundamental to their evangelism. These stories effectively bridge cultural divides and humanise the gospel message for African and Western audiences. Furthermore, open-air crusades, including lively worship, engaging preaching, and visible displays of faith through healings and deliverance services, are a common tool Nigerian missionaries use. These gatherings frequently draw sizable audiences and present chances for evangelism to spread far. Small group gatherings and house fellowships are essential components of their evangelistic approach. These small-scale events create strong community ties and offer an ideal atmosphere for in-depth Bible study and spiritual development. Nigerian Christians can effectively reach new populations through interpersonal connections and word-of-mouth evangelism.

Establishment of Churches and Religious Communities:

The foundation of Nigerian reverse missions is building churches and religious communities. Two well-known Nigerian-led denominations, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), have established churches across Europe, North America, and other continents. These churches provide a comfortable cultural setting and spiritual and pragmatic requirements, acting as social and spiritual centres for the diaspora. Also such churches form a platform of communicating the gospel to the people of their host communities. Nigerian churches frequently have an accepting stance, encouraging multicultural congregations and welcoming individuals from various backgrounds. Culturally flexible worship styles that include upbeat music, dance, and enthusiastic praise and worship that appeal to a wide range of people help foster inclusivity. These churches' attractiveness and influence are further enhanced by their emphasis on social services and community engagement, including support for the underprivileged, healthcare efforts, and educational projects.

Use of Media and Technology in Missions:

Technology and media have greatly enhanced the efficiency and reach of Nigerian reverse missions. Nigerian Christians use radio, television, and the internet, among other media outlets, to spread their message far and wide. For instance, millions of people receive daily spiritual support from the RCCG's

"Open Heavens"- devotional, shown worldwide. Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are frequently used for live streaming, testimonies sharing, and online evangelistic efforts. Through these channels, missionaries can reach people who might not normally attend church by connecting with a worldwide audience that transcends geographic boundaries. The creative application of digital technology, including prayer groups and Bible studies on mobile devices, increases participation and strengthens ties between members who are spread out. Examples of these are Pastor Chris Oyakhilome's Christ Embassy that uses platforms like YouTube and Facebook to broadcast events such as the "Global Day of Prayer," which attracts millions of participants worldwide. Also, The Synagogue, Church of All Nations (SCOAN), has a strong online presence, with millions of subscribers on YouTube, where they share live services, testimonies, and healing sessions, reaching a global audience.

Furthermore, churches in Nigeria frequently use high-calibre media products for their outreach initiatives. This involves making inspirational stories of faith and transformation for use in documentaries, music videos, and Christian films. These media creations are effective evangelism tools because they engage the audience's emotions and intellect.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS OF THE NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS' REVERSE MISSIONS

Challenges and barriers exist and they hamper the efforts of the Nigerian Christians' reverse missions. Some of those include:

Cultural and Linguistic Obstacles:

Overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers is one of the most significant issues Nigerian Christians face when engaging in reverse missions. Many Nigerian missionaries find it challenging to fit in with their host nations' subtle cultural differences and social mores. This cultural difference may make communicating effectively and establishing trust in the community challenging. Language difficulties also present a significant obstacle, especially in areas where English is not the primary language. Although many Nigerian missionaries speak English fluently, understanding other languages is necessary to interact with local populations because of the linguistic diversity in Europe and North America.

Legal and Institutional Hurdles:

Another significant obstacle for Nigerian reverse missions is the presence of institutional and legal impediments. Host nations frequently impose tight laws on religious activity, such as prohibitions on assemblies in public, proselytizing, and establishing new religious organizations. A comprehensive grasp of local laws is necessary to navigate these legal systems, and legal aid is frequently required, which

may be expensive and complicated. Furthermore, for missionaries, securing visas and residency permits can be difficult, with many encountering red tape and protracted waiting times. The missionary work is made more difficult by the ambiguity of the surrounding immigration laws and the possibility of restrictive modifications. Furthermore, obtaining registration and accreditation for educational programmes and religious establishments started by Nigerian missionaries can be difficult, as it frequently requires strict adherence to regional laws and norms.

Resistance and Reception from Host Communities:

The host populations' reaction and resistance significantly influence how well Nigerian reverse missions work. Growing suspicion and opposition to foreign religious influences are observed in some areas, especially in nations with strong secular ethos or a predominant religious tradition. This resistance can take many forms, including being shunned by society, being negatively portrayed in the media, or even having laws restricting religious activities. Moreover, preconceived notions and assumptions about Africa and African religious customs frequently impact how Nigerian missionaries are received. These misconceptions may cause local communities to reject and become unsupportive of the mission, which makes it difficult to get traction and expand it. Therefore, Nigerian missionaries must put great effort into dispelling these prejudices, frequently highlighting the benefits of their work to the community and encouraging cross-cultural communication and understanding.

SUCCESSSES AND IMPACTS OF THE NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS' REVERSE MISSIONS

Despite the challenges faced by Nigerian Christians' reverse missions, their efforts have recorded successes, and impacts have been made. Among these include:

Case Studies of Successful Missions:

In Nigerian reverse missions, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a prominent success story. Since its founding in Nigeria, RCCG has expanded rapidly, founding thousands of parishes across the globe, notably in North America and Europe. For example, the RCCG has developed over 800 churches in the UK, offering social and spiritual assistance to the Nigerian diaspora while drawing British congregants with its dynamic worship and community outreach initiatives. The Deeper Life Bible Church is another such church that has effectively established branches in significant Western cities and provides comprehensive programmes that meet both practical and spiritual needs.

Contributions to the Revitalization of Christianity in Europe and North America:

Reverse missions from Nigeria have been vital in

reviving Christianity in North America and Europe. These missions' vibrant worship styles, emphasis on personal development, and active community involvement have revitalized nearby Christian towns. Jesus House London, the RCCG's main church, has become a centre for multicultural worship and community outreach, illustrating the influence of missions conducted by Nigerians on the British Christian scene. These missions often collaborate with local churches, organizing joint events and outreach activities that rejuvenate the Christian faith and attract new converts.

Influence on the Religious Practices and Beliefs of Host Communities:

Despite the Western churches' contact with Pentecostal ideas from 1906 during the Azusa revival in Los Angeles, their religious practices and beliefs are greatly influenced by Nigerian reverse missions. With their dynamic music, dancing, and unplanned displays of faith, Nigerian missionaries infuse worship with a flavour that appeals to many Western Christians looking for a more engaging and dynamic style of worship. As a result, these components are now widely accepted and incorporated into conventional Western Christian activities. In addition, the focus on prayer, fasting, and healing in Nigerian churches has given host populations new perspectives on their spirituality and increased dependence on divine intervention.

Future Prospects for Reverse Missions:

Reverse missions from Nigeria have bright prospects. There is a greater chance to broaden and enhance the missionary effect of the Nigerian diaspora as it grows and integrates into Western societies. Nigerian missionaries are well-positioned for future expansion due to their adaptability, capacity to engage various populations, and creative use of media and technology. Moreover, the increasing global interconnectedness facilitated by digital platforms allows Nigerian missions to reach a broader audience, transcending geographical limitations.

CONCLUSION

One notable and influential development in the history of global Christianity is the phenomenon of reverse missions, which Nigerian Christians pioneered. This movement has effectively closed the spiritual and cultural divide between Africa and the West and is typified by Nigerian missionaries' strategic and impassioned efforts. Nigerian Christians have made significant progress towards reviving Christianity in Europe and North America through lively worship, effective evangelical strategies, and the development of strong religious communities. Spiritual, theological, socio-cultural, and economic issues drive Nigerian reverse missions. The strong sense of divine calling, reinforced by personal testimonies and charismatic

practices, drives these missionaries to rekindle the Christian faith in increasingly secular societies.

Furthermore, the tenacity and social connections of the Nigerian diaspora have made it easier to create welcoming and encouraging church environments that serve both the local populace and African immigrants. Nigerian missionaries have shown amazing flexibility and tenacity in the face of enormous obstacles, including linguistic and cultural impediments, institutional and legal constraints, and host community resistance. Their creative use of media and technology has increased their outreach efforts, allowing them to interact with a worldwide audience and overcome geographic boundaries. The countless flourishing churches and reinvigorated Christian communities throughout Europe and North America are testaments to the achievements and effects of Nigerian reverse missions. In addition to offering social and spiritual support, these missions have shaped regional religious customs and beliefs, fostering a revitalized feeling of belonging and faith. The prospects for Nigerian reverse missions are quite bright going forward. There is a greater chance of the Nigerian diaspora's missionary impact growing as they assimilate into Western societies and flourish. Nigerian reverse missions are positioned to play a significant role in influencing the direction of global Christianity, promoting intercultural understanding, and reviving the Christian faith in the West because of their ongoing adaptability, strong sense of mission, and creative approaches.

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The Heart of Serving God As A Family

Jenni Ho-Huan

The world has changed tremendously in the last few decades. This can cause us to lose our bearings about our faith and how to live it out. In particular, the old days of a family that goes to church together and find ways to serve in the same church is becoming less common. There are many reasons for this, from the availability of online sermons to the rift between the generations. Additionally, life has become much busier these days such that even the basic mealtime is a challenge for many families.

But isn't it God's will that families grow and serve together? It is undoubtedly so, and we shall unpack this healthy desire by looking at the key words in the phrase 'families grow and serve together'.

To Grow and Serve

Let's begin with 'grow and serve'. This is central to the Christian view of life: we are created to flourish under the watchful care of God. This is a teleological view that gives us a sense of purpose and a framework to order our lives. Thus, parents are entrusted with the holy task to disciple their children to embrace the gift of life, the gift of who they uniquely are and to develop life skills and a worldview that aligns with the revelation in Scripture.

This primary and ongoing task through the seasons of parenting takes deliberate and disciplined effort. While some may moan that this task is made more challenging today as children become more empowered and informed, we can see this difficulty as a gift - because the light shines more distinctly when it is dark.

While we tend to see serving as taking on specific tasks in church or ministry, and this is important, the posture of servanthood is something Christian parents are to model and teach through the way the family operates. Is serving each other and making allowances and sacrifices a part of daily life? This faith-in-action provides a formation process that is what discipleship is all about.

I remember struggling with my teens over chores. Unlike me, they have grown up in a home where someone took care of the chores. It was a headache to decide how to train them to have a team spirit, sense of ownership and consideration for our shared space. Naturally I nagged at them to little avail. They were comfortable with the messes they made and failed to see why I was so upset. In the end, I had to share openly why I valued their contribution. As I had this conversation, I helped them see that something greater than a clean laundry basket was the concern. It was about whether we supported and served each other through taking the effort to upkeep the home. While

they may be okay with the mess, it was necessary for them to see why cleanliness was important to me and learn to be supportive of my values. Over time, the nagging decreased as we talked about the nub of the issue. It also helped them to think about their own values. This leads us to the next part, 'together'.

Togetherness

Most of us, especially in Asia, value communal experiences deeply. This is good and to be upkept, but it must not be narrowed to 'being in the same place doing the same thing'. For reasons God has not fully revealed, he delights in diversity. Our tolerance for diversity is often a limited range we can manage emotionally and control practically. Yet if we were to ponder, the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17 and which the Psalmist describes so beautifully in Psalm 133 carries a force unknown in this world, one where we can bear with and honour each other, to the extent that Paul calls us to in Philippians where we esteem others over ourselves. In a world bent by sin which causes each one to seek the self as a mini-kingdom, a posture that serves and values the other is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. It is only by the grace of the indwelling Christ that we can hope to mature towards this attitude and lifestyle.

This kind of togetherness, of sharing a vision and being united can be expressed in various ways. The family that runs a business but sends the firstborn into the field, the family that may worship in different church communities due to calling and the young family in a cross-cultural context can all be fiercely united and serving God together.

The key is whether their hearts are set on the LORD's will and each are turned towards the rest and learning to support each other.

Habits That Foster Growth And Unity

To grow and serve with a sense of unity require deep roots that have grown over time. These roots are nourished through regular family devotions, prayer, play and healing.

Family devotions are times when a family prioritises the worship and discovery of God together. This is something that adjusts as the family goes through different seasons. Young children, school-going children, teens and adolescents have different needs and different capacities to seek and know God. The parenting task is to take these seasons seriously and embed a regular time of meaningful family devotion. Many families use a time of Scripture reading and prayer. But if this is done in a cold, legalistic manner, it will backfire. While children can be fed stories and

told a clear right or wrong, teens will begin to question some of the stories (did Noah really build an ark?), and it will be imperative to engage these questions. Parents who fear this can turn to many wonderful resources and embrace this needed growth.

Prayer is critical as it helps us to step away from our reflexes or stereotypes to seek God's perspective and power. Parents need to pray for insight into their children's unique makeup and for the provision and wisdom to love them towards wholeness and full faith. Our children will give us many opportunities to get anxious and have to turn to prayer for solace and assurance. The prayers of a parent soften the ground and allow the roots to penetrate and anchor.

Being a performance-oriented specie, play is rarely prioritised, and in fact often devalued in families in ministry and mission. This is counterproductive. There is plenty of evidence that rest and recreation help us to be more creative, generative and healthy. God instituted the Sabbath to give us a healthy rhythm so that we will not burn out. Alas, many ignore this to their peril. Naturally there are seasons when a full-day Sabbath may be difficult or times when a family may be stretched due to illness or crises. But it is foolhardy to not implement regular times of rest that will enable us to slow down, enjoy our relationships and refill our emotional tanks. Where there has been strain in relationships, seeing a counsellor and getting help is a form of Sabbath rest that is clearly needed. Another dimension is being too serious or severe. While we do deal with weighty matters of eternal consequence, we must not confuse our participation with the power to effect change. God alone can transform lives and societies. Our role is to partner him in a sphere where he has called us to by developing the capabilities he has given us and growing a humble loving heart while at it.

All families will experience tension and conflict. It can be unsettling to imagine that each household can be filled with such drastically different personalities! This is where families that give space and time for different ones to heal is also important. Sometimes, this may indeed mean that the parent or child needs some time out. This must be an intentional process as far as possible. God wants our homes and families to be spaces and places each person gets to mature and flourish. This takes a good degree of management and leadership, and while the parents' play a primary role, the growing children must be given the empowerment to disagree and contribute to the process and experience. This is what makes the 'together' happen, and this is a blessedness God desires his children to have.

Finally, the family unit is under assault today and we have many forms of family: nuclear, extended, single parent, blended and so on. This calls us to rethink what a family means. When asked about this, Jesus prioritises those who seek God as constituting family over biological origins (Mark 3v33-34).

Thus, for a biological family to seek the Lord, to learn how to grow deep roots so that they are growing

and serving together is clearly a sign of the Kingdom of God. But we must beware not to stereotype and limit how that can look like and miss the heart of it.

Reprioritizing Family

There is clearly a need for the church and ministry agencies to relook at how the family is understood and supported, especially when it is being threatened today. While we may focus on the more obvious breakdowns in terms of divorce of the current liberal climate regarding gender, it can be said that these are outcomes rather than causes. Unless we reach a depth understanding of the family and wrestle with how society may be undermining it, we may see even more fractures and perilous outcomes in the coming days.

There is an urgent need for the church to arise to teach about a theology the human body, relationships, marriage, family and ministry. This must be taught from the perspective that each has intrinsic value and are meant to flourish by God's design.

The earlier paragraphs describe the values and practices that we need to reconsider to have a more robust view and expression of a family that is united and fruitful in Christ. These must be undertaken at theological institutions, denominations and local congregations. These must work collaboratively with other partners who may bring other capacities and gifts.

In Singapore, Trinity Theological College in Singapore has been providing a core course on the Family for their undergraduates. These has helped the students reflect on their own family histories and reflect on their convictions regarding the dynamic of family and ministry. Whether the students are single, married or parents, the course is crucial for them to sort through a fundamental dimension of life and ministry. After all, we all began life in our families, and they will continue to influence us.

Most local churches focus on the Sunday worship service, and often have followed the secular trend of separating parents from children by sending children off to their own Sunday School or Children Ministry. In recent years, it is recognised that this may not be the most helpful way to help the family grow spiritually. Among many reasons, it tends to perpetuate two weaknesses: parents' lack of confidence in the spiritual upbringing of their children, persistent consumer attitudes of personal ease about being in church. Many have a low tolerance for the 'noise' children make, and this reinforces a faulty and low view of children.

A vibrant attempt to address this was begun by a young couple through their ministry called The Treasure Box. They seek to equip those who serve children and families to develop spiritual habits and inculcate godly values through their training, curricular and coaching.

Other parachurch organisations have also played a significant role in strengthening families. Some of these are local adaptations of established organisations like Focus on the Family (USA) and the Durano School (Korea). These provide training, education,

preserving this supernatural harmony is through the spiritual help of the religious tagapamagitan between God and the indigenous group.

TAGAPAMAGITAN ROLES IN INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Various indigenous religious communities under folk Christianity have different ways of expressing their concepts of *tagapamagitan* in their vertical relationships. Covar gives a sampling of these different *tagapamagitan* names and roles: the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* has an “invoker” (*tagatawag*), who performs the needed ritual to establish direct communication between the *Banal na Tinig* (Holy Voice) and the *kapatiran* (congregation); the *Sagrada Familia de Rizal* has a “medium” (i.e., *Aling Gloria*), who goes into a trance before being spiritually possessed by *Apo Asiong*, who despite his having “left” (not dead, in her view), speaks through *Aling Gloria*; the *Union Christiana Espiritista* has a *talaytayan*, who performs the function of casting out devils and healing the sick; the *Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios* and *Rosa Mistica* have *supremas* (priestesses), who are ritualists, saying the mass and leading the *kapatiran* during religious ceremonies and rituals; and the *Kapatirang Pag-ibig sa Diyos*, *Sambahang Kaamaamahan at Kainainahan*, and *Bathalismo* have *Nana Teta*, *Inang Adarna* and *Inang Mahiwaga*, respectively to bless and enlighten the believers.²¹

Millenarian religious communities within the area of Mt. Banahaw (a sacred site in the country) also possess *tagapamagitan* names and roles for their spiritual leaders: the *Ciudad Mistica de Dios* has a *suprema* (the current living one is *Suprema Isabel Suarez*), takes charge of calendrical rituals that include the *paglangkap* (i.e., trance-like possessions and dream visions); the *Cofradia de Sto. Niño ni Aling Vecing* has a “medium” (*Aling Vecing*), who receives prophecies of coming disasters from the *Sto. Niño* or the Nazarene; the *Buklod-Diwa* has the *Lingkod-Busilak* (Pure Servant), who leads the healing sessions, consisting of the laying of hands, herbal drinks, and herbal topical applications; the *Darasa Catholic Mission Group* has Sr. Fe, the charismatic leader who interprets visions and goes through *paglalangkap* (possession/trance) by the spirits of the *Sto. Niño* or the *Mahal na Ama* (Beloved Father); and the *Union Adoradores Cristianos al Espirito Divino* (UNACAED) originally had *Maestro Severino Deang*, the founder who was a guru or learned mystic, communicating with the spirits. The group is later led by his wife, *Inang Goring* or *Popo*, who trances and preaches to the *kapatiran*.²²

Moreover, the *Pinagkaisahan Sambahayan sa Bandilang Bundok*, a spirit cult of the Santo Niño in Majayjay, Laguna has a *kasangkapan* (instrument), who is

21. Covar, “Contemporary Religious Movements,” 88.

22. For a sampling of these nativistic movements see Guillermo Pesigan’s *Dulang Buhay ng Bunbok Banahaw: Karanasan ng Ciudad Mistica* (Quezon City, Philippines: Bahay Saliksikan ng Pili-pinolohiyang Simulain, 1992).

possessed by the Santo Niño in the *gamutan* (chapel). Other spirit cults of the Santo Niño with their own *kasangkapan* (or instrument for spirit possession) include the *Samahang Santo Niño de Praga ng Makati*, *Santo Niño of Bulusan*, Sister Baby and the Company, and *Samahang Santo Niño*.²³

In summary, the *tagapamagitan* roles of the spiritual leaders in indigenous religious communities focus on the key medium-like tasks of their leaders. As spiritual mediators, the religious leaders are able to initiate communication between God (or the spirit world) and the religious group. As messengers of the spirits, they receive major visions and warnings about incoming dangers and disasters. As dispensers of supernatural powers, they heal the sick and cast out evil spirits. As teachers of God, they preach and instruct the *kapatiran* (brotherhood) about purity, enlightened living, and the will of God.

So far, we have covered the first goal of this article; namely: to present some initial insights on the indigenous Filipino religious concept of *tagapamagitan*. The second goal is to give a proposed approach in linking New Testament themes on the role of Jesus Christ as God’s ultimate *Tagapamagitan* and the indigenous Filipino roles of the religious *tagapamagitan*. This approach connects the four functions of the religious *tagapamagitan* to the four roles of Christ, the ultimate *Tagapamagitan*.

PROPOSED APPROACH TO LINK CHRIST AS GOD’S ULTIMATE TAGAPAMAGITAN

The Filipino religious concept of *tagapamagitan* revolves around four functions: (1) as a dispenser of supernatural powers; (2) as a spiritual mediator; (3) as a messenger of God; and (4) as a teacher of God. A viable approach to link Christ as God’s ultimate *Tagapamagitan* is to show that Christ fulfilled to the full what it was to be God’s dispenser of supernatural powers, God’s spiritual mediator, God’s messenger, and God’s teacher. In other words, these four functions can serve as the potential links in verifying the *tagapamagitan* roles of Christ between God and the people.²⁴ This final section will survey these four roles in the Gospel of Mark.

CHRIST AS ULTIMATE DISPENSER OF SPIRITUAL POWERS

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was vividly portrayed as the miracle-wonder worker. He cast out demons; he healed the sick; he performed miracles. Mark brims with such phenomenal examples of spiritual powers

23. For details on these religious groups, see Takefumi Tera-da, “The Spirit Cult of Sto. Niño: An Anthropological Study of Popular Religiosity in the Philippines,” unpublished dissertation, University of the Philippines, 1987.

24. Another way to approach the link to Jesus as the ultimate *Tagapamagitan* is to show that Jesus possesses the qualities that make a *tagapamagitan* effective (e.g., compassionate, humble, sincere, approachable, and sociable).

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Understanding Ekklesia: An A3 Community Reflection and Expression of Faith

A3 Ekklesia Task Force with Joseph Handley

One of the key changes we will need to wrestle with for mission strategy will be what biblical *ekklesia* looks like today. As will be seen below, our mission (A3 formerly known as Asian Access) is actively exploring this concept as we seek to equip leaders for the Church of tomorrow. As will be readily apparent in reviewing the article (our ongoing discovery process), *ekklesia* looks quite different than what it has been traditionally known to be since the era of Constantine's empire. Of course, this has been true for many areas of the world for some time, but today, the issue is paramount for us as a global community to grapple with and understand.

PROLOGUE

A3 envisions a vibrant community of people seeking to both be personally transformed and transform our world by accelerating Christ-centered movements around the world. Our mission is to equip and unify visionary Christ-centered leaders to influence Spirit-led change.

In its 2025 strategic plan, A3 identified several targets for the movement. One of the targets is to understand *ekklesia* (vis-à-vis the term church) as it relates to our 4th outcome in different spheres.¹ Our 4th outcome is to see, over a lifetime, each kingdom leader catalyzing Christ-centered movements in their various spheres of influence.

A3 is currently facilitating leadership development cohorts for church and marketplace leaders. We anticipate moving into additional spheres of influence, such as education, government, and entertainment. Because we want to see every kingdom leader catalyzing Christ-centered movement, we desire to understand (rather than define) how *ekklesia* relates to every sphere of human interaction.

The *Ekklesia* Task Force was called to meet from October 15-16, 2022, in Bangkok. As a result, a document was forged that we hope would contribute to the thoughts and ideas of the A2 movement in the understanding of *ekklesia*.

As part of the wider A2 community, we seek your input into this document in order to reflect a more nuanced understanding of *ekklesia* for our generation.

Other outputs we hope to do in the near future are

1. We choose the word to understand intentionally over define. A focus on defining can lead to setting boundaries. Instead, our desire is to understand the center of gravity of *ekklesia*. Though we all can agree that Jesus is the chief cornerstone, what purpose(s) and values of Christ's *ekklesia* can we discern that remain constant in any sea change? Also, can we surface clues based on scripture, history, and what we hear the Spirit of wisdom and revelation saying that might give the A2 movement insight as we foster expressions of *ekklesia* in a new era and in different spheres?

blogs, podcasts, short video teachings, etc., that make the ideas available to the movement.

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16, ESV)

A PRELIMINARY SKETCH

*Ekklesia*² as God's Elect and Holy Community

Ekklesia is a community of people (not a place or a building) of diverse backgrounds and ethnicity journeying together towards faith, love, and obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah of the community.

Ekklesia is a holy community called out by the Father to be his possession in order that through it, His excellencies are proclaimed to the whole earth in every generation (1 Peter 2:9). This new community (Ephesians 2:14-15) consists of God's elected people, adopted, loved, and called out to do good works that He prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 1:5, 2:10, 1 John 4:19).

Ekklesia is where the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are experienced, expressed, and embodied. Members of the *ekklesia* have received God's gift of salvation and offer of love through faith in Jesus Christ as a result of God's love for the world (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 4:19).

Ekklesia and the *Missio Dei* (Mission of God)

Ekklesia is first God's community before it is God's instrument in inaugurating his Kingdom and Mission to the whole of creation. The *missio dei* refers to God's desire to reconcile the whole world to himself in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), and it is the *missio dei* that birthed the *ekklesia* as the first fruit of God's redemptive work for the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:12).

The *ekklesia* is a community of people who were reconciled to God through Christ. It is called to participate in the love of the triune God (1 John 4:19) and in the *missio dei* as ministers and ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) in every sphere of human interaction and influence, be it physical or virtual.

Through the *ekklesia*, the personal calling of God's ambassadors of reconciliation is declared, the spiritual gifts are discovered, the characters are developed, and

2. We recognize both the universal and local dimensions of *ekklesia*: the body of Christ universal as well as the local church expressions of this word.

the competencies are disbursed for the *missio dei*.

The *ekklesia* affirms each member's design, calling, and role in recognition of and in relation to the greater *missio dei* to usher the Kingdom of God in every sphere of human interaction as ambassadors of reconciliation toward a belief and profession of Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Ekklesia and the Holy Spirit

The *ekklesia* as a community is imbued, with the Spirit of God, enabling each member to live intentionally and incarnationally in love, grace, and hospitality toward each other as the Triune God enables them.

The Spirit of truth leads and empowers the *ekklesia* and its members to fulfill its mission (*Missio Ecclesiae*), that is, to bear witness to Jesus Christ as God's Messiah (John 15:26) and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, the *ekklesia* must rely on the Spirit for direction and discernment in relation to the life of the community and the *missio ecclesiae* in order that God might work through the *ekklesia* in fulfilling his *missio dei*.

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The Spirit of Truth, sent by the Father in Christ's name, serves as the *ekklesia's* counselor, comforter, guide, and helper who teaches the community and each member all that Christ has taught in the Scriptures in order that the *ekklesia* might bear witness to Jesus (John 14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).

Ekklesia in Contemporary Expression

releasing people into their purpose and calling

For centuries, history of global mission has been history of the advance of the church from the West. The majority of those who are in evangelical mission movements remain largely those who came through the conventional pathway of vocational ministry and think with a binary mindset of spiritual vs secular, hence naturally perpetuating a more institutional ecclesiastical mindset.

But, in fact, since the Reformation, when the priesthood of all believers became an important point of teaching in Martin Luther's theology, it was both an attempt to challenge the sole authority of the church and to rectify the misunderstood teaching about the

role of the ordinary believers.

Luther argued that there is no spiritual divide between ordained and lay people, and there is only "one estate" where all baptized believers belong.³ There is no tier differentiation of spirituality in anyone coming before God. By pronouncing such teaching, Luther rehabilitated the once de-sanctified temporal earthly realm and put it back in its rightful place. In the process, he also sought to debunk the belief that the spiritual world is over the temporal realm. British church historian Roland Bainton commented, "The repudiation of ordination as a sacrament demolished the caste system of clericalism and provided a sound basis for the priesthood of all believers . . . what the priest does any Christian may do, if commissioned by the congregation, because all Christians are priests."⁴

It is about embracing the diversity of spiritual gifts endowed in the body of Christ. While some are called to public ministry of teaching God's Word authoritatively, all believers are called by God to witness that which ultimately would build upon their faith from all walks of life. Paul Althaus made a fair observation, "Luther recognizes no community which is not a preaching community and no community in which all have not been called to be witnesses. Each one is to care for his brother with the consolation of the word which he needs in trouble."⁵ Within the community, each believer should be sensitive to live out the role and ministry of priesthood, to care and to witness in all circumstances. Through all believers' fleshing out their faith and witnesses in the community, a new understanding of *Ekklesia* has emerged.

A further implication of doing away the divide between spiritual and secular realm is that Luther has invested an unprecedented value and dignity in what used to be called "earthly vocations" among the laity, henceforth encouraging a life of sacrifice and worship of the "ordinary believers". While everyone remains staying in their lane, yet there is no longer just an earthly pursuit of the mundane, the material and the remunerated as all believers would lead a life to worship and glorify God as priests.

As individuals, such calling to reach out to our neighbors at various touch points of our work life and general lifestyle is like calling laity-priests to have their lives being poured out. Believers no longer just hide in their work lives and lament of the irrelevance of their Monday to Saturday to their spiritual faith lives. Faith and work do not belong to two different realms or two separate boxes. *Ekklesia* is no longer an enclave to run away from the world, but an outpost right on the frontline of the harvest field. We might be in unfriendly territories, yet our existence there

3. Luther differentiated between two estates and one estate in "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," in Luther's Works, 44:129.

4. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 106.

5. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 315-316.

remains relevant and engaging.

We are being prepared and called to the fallen world. It might look like as an easier path to keep faith matter private and personal from Monday to Saturday, and just to go back to enjoy the Christian experience and the fellowship on Sunday at and after the worship. Yet, this is an abdication of our identity and our purpose. We are being forgiven and redeemed so that we may become a conduit of peace and love to those who are still looking for hope and healing. We are all called to be priests to proclaim the good news for the lost, the marginalized and those being oppressed, right in the middle of the community. We are being placed in different places and circumstances in this fallen and broken world as the Incarnate Jesus. When our lives cross paths with others in this new sense of *Ekklesia*, the Holy Spirit in us will work through us, so that we are blessed and would become blessings to many.

This is not about the ecclesiastic order strategizing the evangelization of the world. This is not about the invading of the spiritual realm onto the secular. This is about the full engagement, the dwelling with, and a full immersion as Jesus came to the world and lived in our midst, and to be a transforming participation and presence among our neighbors.

If we were to go all the way back to the origin of global mission movement set off by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:2-4) even before the ecclesiastic order was founded and way before the mission societies were launched, we would appreciate the authentic flavor of the *Missio Dei*. Cross-cultural mission did not begin by the church sending out professional evangelists, but by the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of ordinary socio-cultural interactions (Acts 2:5-13) and by Christ-followers moving to different geographic locations and living as witnesses of Christ (Acts 8:1; 11:19). Even the early missionaries Paul and Barnabas were not full-time missionaries in today's sense of the term. They were in fact workplace professionals who stayed in their lanes to continue to carry out their business practice and yet actively engaged in opportunities to share the gospel in the marketplace (Acts 17:17; 18:3; 1 Corinthians 9:6).

This means we may actually help to advance God's Kingdom in and through the daily grind that is my life, and not just through the church's communal life or mission program as it operates in its given community. It is imperative to know that any average person in the pew may be a part of how God's Kingdom works itself out in ordinary life, both on personal level (at home or work), or more corporately (in church life and ministry). We are the instrument of making God's Kingdom to show for itself whenever we proclaim the good news, heal the sick (spiritual and physical healing), and let the Holy Spirit work through us to bring transformation to lives around us. In fact, whenever we are in the midst of people bringing forth the presence in the ministry of Jesus we bring the Kingdom on earth.

The Christendom ecclesiastic model of parish based community is increasingly irrelevant in the 21st century mission context. In a much more connected world via convenient transportation or even on the digital superhighway, the commuter church has replaced local parish communities. Some would even go for a mega-church model that gathers strangers from all corners of a metropolis that rarely share intimate fellowship. It results in an insular approach to church community formation to offer consumer comforts, entertainment, and convenience. Yet, the "love thy neighbors" calling seems to be left by the wayside.

Reaching out to the "neighborhood" is in fact Biblical and Christ-like. It enables people to develop deeper relationship and plant firmer roots in place. And, the local presence is a tangible incarnate practice to embody from which good news and witnesses can be communicated. The focus is not about the extension of the *Ekklesia's* form but to reach people at where they are. The *Ekklesia* will happen when mission is being body forth through the neighborhood – the workplaces and the local communities.

In order to live out this new *Ekklesia*, believers have to be conscious of their identity; their gifting and design (sense of call); their being and doing in their context; as well as their positioning while being in the midst. Because of Jesus' incarnational presence on earth and His death on the cross, those who believe in Him would have a clear identity change. Believers are now "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession," and that they may now "declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Pet 2:9-10) This is not just a new identity in the abstract sense. This needs to be an identity with a new *modus operandi* as believers live their lives on earth.

We need to be constantly reminded that we are a people with a new identity. And, this new identity comes with qualitative change in our lives because of the transforming power of Jesus. Oftentimes Christians are contented to live in a patch-up world complacent to be still trapped in the old self and longing for the New Heaven and New Earth to come in the distant future when Jesus comes back again. We are so easily forgetful of the promise in 2 Corinthians 5: 17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!" The fact is not only that we are already being transformed, but that as we have already received the power of the Holy Spirit we can also bring witness and the transformative power to the rest of the world. (Acts 1:8) The apostles have demonstrated that our faith, when put into action, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can turn the world upside down. With the new identity, we now also live with a new purpose. Or, even more aptly say, the purpose and design that is created in us even before we were born finally finds its expression in this new identity of mine.

To live a vibrant faithful lifestyle, it is not about

impartation of more information or knowledge; or an instruction of methods or techniques of how to be religious. It is about asking believers to be vulnerable and to move outside of their comfort zone. It is also about asking them to take Jesus' teaching by face value and practice what Jesus had done during His earthly ministry. Jesus brought about qualitative change of the lives of those people who had encountered Him. This is about reaching out with our humanity, our natural giftedness as created in the image of God, to impact more lives, to reach out to the needy and the marginalised so that their lives can be transformed as well.

The foundational building block for anyone who desire to live with an engaging faith is the understanding of his or her identity; design and calling. To prepare individual believers to live authentically, and to be effective at wherever they are, they need to ground their identity at the right place and manifested through their being and their doing. The individuals need to re-acquaint with the attributes and personalities of God to learn of their own self-image.⁶ This self-image and identity is closely connected to God's calling for individuals; and have a direct implication on the understanding of *Ekklesia* in our new missional context.

The new understanding of *Ekklesia* has to live beyond the conventional sacred-secular divide. Believers are to make aware that the spiritual is not to stay on the sideline of the secular arena, and to cocoon themselves in their spirituality so that they would not be compromised by the world. Indeed, this might just be a misconceived spirituality if it chooses to be powerless beyond its own realm. Believers need to know that they are being kept in the world for a calling and the strategic reason of their earthly role. They are to engage the world in the new *Ekklesia*, but not belong to the world.

We are saved by grace through faith, and now our presence, our identity and our vocation (being and doing) communicate our redeemed humanity. Paul writes in the Epistle: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph 2:10) This is not just about sharing the spiritual truth through the act of evangelistic outreach program. This calls for a consistent and coherent expression of our redeemed humanity through the different spheres of our lives: our family, our work, our economic activities, artistic expression, and worshipful lifestyle. Bearing witness is not an exclusive church statement through the old ecclesiastic structure. Bearing witness is a holistic expression which should cut through the manifold facets of human activities. It is the consistent and persistent witnessing Sunday to Monday and the rest

of the week through the different life aspects that one may testify to the authenticity of the witness, and hence amplifies the impact permeating through our daily lives, our workplaces, and our communities. This has to be one of the most important values to be communicated through the renewed understanding of *Ekklesia*.

This indeed is a very important segment of the new understanding of *Ekklesia*. The conversation is no longer a conceptual exercise. When the rubber meets the road, this is about burning and expensing one's life with conviction. Work is still work, but for those who understand their calling and purpose and stay in the lane, work is no longer just work anymore as it bears missional and eternal values.

The ultimate positioning of a new *Ekklesia* is when faith and mission has become believers' lifestyle expression. The question to contemplate is how one's faith can be vibrant and alive on Monday to Saturday in both private and corporate settings. Faith is not just to be articulated ecclesologically, but missiologically. When we pray the Lord's prayer and utter the words "Thy Kingdom come" and "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven", we need to actually understand it and mean it. The words have to be more than just mere wishes but guiding lights for us to actually live by. In fact, as called followers of Christ and as the royal priesthood and the holy nations, we are to testify the truthfulness of those claims through our daily lives.

For too long the Christian faith has been tamed in a stagnant *Ekklesia* which finds in many of our local churches and too many has been so content to be just sheep to be fed and to be cared for. Christians look for the comfort of the sheep pen and the gentleness of the shepherd, and even become forgetful of those lost sheep out there in the woods and wilderness. A lot have forgotten the promise of their identity being royal priesthood and holy nations, and empowered by the Holy Spirit and to become potent to bring forgiveness, transformation, life, and hope.

The dynamic expression of an *Ekklesia* is a Christian community being called into mission with equipped and committed followers of Christ ready to step out and to adopt a missional lifestyle to go and proclaim the Jubilee. (Luke 4:19) It is a holistic transformation when redeemed people who live in the midst of the lost with the joy of forgiveness, reconciliation and justice. And, this *Ekklesia* is manifested through any ordinary believers who are willing to reach out and touch people in their own context. The sending is not just the calling for a selected few. And, apparently, this is not just about the charge to foster spiritual change. Just like what they would do in their own hometown or neighborhood, such *Ekklesia* becomes a dynamic, engaging community of believers who are not afraid of venturing out into the world and bringing the battle to the kingdom of darkness until they bring holistic transformation to the people they reach out to, from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the end of the world.

6. Business as Mission Global Think Tank. "Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done ... In Business" Issue Group Report: Biblical Models of Transformation Through Business Practices Report, October 2013, bamthinktank.org accessed <http://bamglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BMTT-IG-Biblical-Models-Final-Report-October-2013.pdf>.

***Ekklesia* an Incarnational witness**

A few examples of these fresh expressions of *ekklesia* may help us discover what this looks like today. Recently, through one of our cohorts in the Philippines, Rei Crizaldo shared on Holistic Integral Mission about a coffee shop business run by Pastor Ian de Ocampo that emerged as a new form of church that is making quite an impact.⁷ Crizaldo also shared about Hybrid churches using digital mediums to worship.⁸ He states, “‘hybridity’ promises to bring the church to a more integral mission or a stronger holistic ministry of God’s people.”

In other more traditional settings, people have been experimenting with new forms of faith communities for a few decades. Fresh Expressions is a network, mostly within historic traditional church structures and denominations, trying *ekklesia* via special interest gatherings: bike clubs, musical hubs, reading clubs, etc.⁹

David Dayalan, from our team, starting using hybrid forms of church several years ago as the political environment became more challenging. The local government started putting pressure on business owners so their church rental property jumped drastically. As David and his team saw what was happening in their country, they shifted to house groups and today by and large meet in homes across their city.

Jason Tan, on the team here, was inspired by Discovery Bible Studies through one of our A3 modules. During the pandemic, he started training members in his community to launch these studies and today over 130 different forms of *ekklesia* have spawned. Nearly half of them joined a denomination and the hybrid nature of these expressions is exciting to watch unfold.

Over the past few years, Elliott on our team, has led an *ekklesia* community group in his home alongside of attending a traditional church. They gather for worship, body life encouragement and equipping and share about how God is working in their places of influence.

For many years, David Wendorff on our team has led weekly gatherings in his home where people gather to share life, witness and testimony plus have creative discussions about theology. Similar to what Elliott is doing, they experience life together and inspire one another for witness in the workplace. Beyond this, David sees his daily life and experience as a form of *ekklesia*. No matter where he is, he tries to embody the Spirit of Christ and employ the gifts God has given him to ‘be the church’ to those around him.

David Lim lays out an initial theological framework in his studies on House Church Movements. He

7. Pastor Ian de Ocampo’s faith community expression: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qggqNe0gqrB20LxkKFdb3ZuoHQ3ZhOSr5/view>

8. Half meant: Hybrid X Holistic Churches: <https://xgenesisrei.tumblr.com/post/706168697428049920/hybrid-x-holistic-churches>

9. Moynagh, Michael. *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. SCM Press, 2012.

reveals a framework that involved the following practical expressions of body life that are worthy of further exploration, especially as the creativity of *ekklesia* communities expands. He notes the functions of reproduction, production and simple religiosity.¹⁰

EKKLESIA AS A PRAYING AND WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

Implications for the Global Church Today

Ekklesia or the church today has a wide variety of expressions. No longer should we primarily say church is that place on the corner down the street where people gather on Sunday. Rather, the church is the body of Christ in the fullness of its presence. Whether people gather in a building down the street, start a pop up coffee shop as a mission outpost that becomes a church or *ekklesia*, or generate communities of faith in the workplace, all have their place in serving the Great Commission advance.

As the body of Christ manifests itself in this post-covid world, the creativity of God’s people living out our faith is inspiring. We are eager to learn together so please share with us the various expressions of *ekklesia* that you are practicing or experimenting with. As we learn from one another, we will be better able to equip leaders (pastors, marketplace leaders, educational professionals, medical professionals, etc.) to shepherd the forms so that the Church can flourish and grow in embodying the faith and expanding the kingdom of God.

10. Lim, David “God’s Kingdom as Oikos Church Networks: A Biblical Theology.” *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 34.1-4 (January-December 2017): 25-35.



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Members of the A3 *Ekklesia* task force include: Rev. Dr. Jason Tan (from the Philippines), Dr. Francis Tsui (from Hong Kong), Rev. David Dayalan (from India), Thilini De Visser Kodikara (from Sri Lanka), David Wendorff, Elliott Snuggs and Rev. Joseph W. Handley, Jr., Ph.D. (all from the U.S.)

Christian Missions as Agents of Transformation: A Case Study of Baptist Missions in the Orashi Region of Nigeria

Samson Olugbenga Adebayo

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were great epochs in missionary and missiological histories. The centuries witnessed significant advances in cross-cultural missions and the development of missiological theories and experimentations with mission strategies aimed at making the gospel impactful in many cultural contexts. Significantly, missionaries from many different organisations travelled across borders of nations, engaging with other cultures. In those engagements, along with the proclamation of the gospel, technical and scientific achievements were projected. Such deployments have led to significant connections of local cultures with others around the world, birthing rapid development and transformation of culture. In many important respects, missionaries were not only agents of the globalization of Christianity, they also significantly contributed to the modernization of local cultures in several places around the world.¹

The history of Christian missions in Nigeria has been documented from several perspectives.² The earliest attempt at introducing Christianity into the region was in the mid-fifteenth century. That brand of Christianity fizzled out by the beginning of the seventeenth century. An enduring missionary impact began in 1842 when the Church Missionary Society began work in Abeokuta. Christian witness has spread into many locations since those years, resulting in significant societal modifications. The impact of Christianity on the nation has not been monolithic. However, there are many locations in the

country where the advent of missionary activities has permanently altered their identity. One such location is Orashi, where Christian witness began in 1909.³

This paper is an aspect of the author's PhD dissertation. Being a significant part of the overall missionary history of the Niger Delta, the author has done historical appraisal of Baptist missionary efforts in Orashi between 1904 and 2020. Hence, this paper shall provide a brief overview of the Baptist missionary history of the Orashi region. It shall also discuss the impacts of the activities of Baptist missionaries in the area to call a global Christian audience to the transforming power of the gospel in a specific location in Nigeria.

MISSIONS AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

The New Testament demonstrates that the gospel of Jesus Christ transforms people, nations and cultures. As a testimony to this, several works have been written about the transforming power of the gospel in many parts of the world.⁴ Two such works shall be discussed. Alvin Schmidt⁵ describes the historical development of Christianity and the changes it has brought upon the human race. The author illustrates the impacts of Christianity on cultures, law, education and social structures through schools, hospitals, orphanages and other social institutions. He argued that missionary efforts often increased literacy, improved public health, social reforms and societal transformation. Dana Roberts argued that Christianity has undergone cultural adaption to exert

1. Kim Christaens, Idesbald Goddeins and Pieter Verstraete, eds, *Missionary education: Historical Approaches and Global Perspectives* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021), 7.

2. There are several texts written from various perspectives. Readers who are interested in the history of Christianity in Nigeria may check the following J. F. A Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria (1841-1891): The Making of New Elites* (London: Longman Groups Ltd, 1965); Taye Adamolekun, "Main Trends in the Church Growth in Nigeria" in *European Scientific Journal* 8, (23, October: 1); E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1966); Michael Omolewa, *Certificate History of Nigeria* (London: Longman, 1986). Bulus Y. Galadima and Yusufu Turaki, "Christianity in Nigeria" in *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20 (1, 2001, 92); Ajayi, S. Ademola, *Baptists of Nigeria: Their Genesis, Identity, Doctrinal Beliefs and Practices*, Ibadan: BookWright Publishers, 2009.; Crampton, Edmund Patrick Thurman, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*. Burns & Oates, 1979; Ekechi, Felix K. "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915." *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): 103-115; Fafunwa, A. B., *History of Education in Nigeria*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979; Fleck, Ian. *Bringing Christianity into Nigeria: The Origin and Work of Protestant Missions*. Bukuru, Jos: African Christian Textbooks, 2013; Sanneh, Lamin. *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992; Shaw, Mark. *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A short history of African Christianity*. Baker Pub Group, 1996; Turner, H R. *African Independent Church: The Church of the Lord (Aladura)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

3. Samson Olugbenga Adebayo, *Historical Appraisal of Baptist Work in Orashi Region of Rivers State 1909-2020* (Ogbomosho: The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 125.

4. There are many great works on the history of Christian missions. A few of them are Kalu, Ogbu U., (ed.) *African Christianity: An African Story*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005; Kim, Sebastian and Kirsteen Kim. *Christianity as a World Religion*. London: Continuum, 2008; Isichei, Elizabeth, *A History of Christianity in Africa, From Antiquity to the Present*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995; Jenkins, Philip. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and How It Died*, New York: Harperone, 2008; LaGrand, James. *The Earliest Christian Mission to 'All Nations' in the Light of Matthew's Gospel*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999; Moreau, Scott; Gary R. Corwin and Gary B. McGee. *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bakers Academic, 2004; Neill, Stephen. *A History of Christian Missions*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1964; Oshitelu, G.A., *Expansion of Christianity in West Africa*. Abeokuta: Visual Resources; Pratt, Zane, David Sills and Jeff K. Walters. *Introduction to Global Missions*. Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2014; Shelley, Bruce L., *Church History in Plain Language*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008, Turker, Ruth A. *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1983; Walls, Andrew. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996.

5. Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

transformative power on local cultures.⁶ Towing the lines of Schimid's thought, he catalogued the efforts of protestant missionaries to Christianize local cultures through education and social justice. Roberts added that many missionaries included Bible translation, printing and distribution, which often go hand-in-hand with establishing schools to train people to read the bible and train leaders for local churches.⁷ She also noted that agriculture and medical work, from which specialised works dedicated to combating Tuberculosis and Leprosy and other social reform movements developed, were part of missionary arsenals. She illustrated that missionary health workers led movements against obnoxious practices in China, India and Africa.⁸

From the above mentioned, several inferences can be drawn about the history of Christian missions. One may infer that Christianity and its missions have significantly shaped the history of the world from the beginning. It can also be deduced that the past two centuries have experienced accentuation of missionary impacts across continents. The twentieth century has been rightly dubbed "the great century of Christian missions." One may also decipher that Christian missions have gone cross-cultural in a more dynamic way in the centuries under discussion. Another discovery is that Christian missionaries have deployed several strategies and methods to advance the course of the gospel in many lands. Such strategies included education, healthcare services, social justice, and agriculture, among many variations. It is equally significant to note that Christian missionary efforts have significantly impacted Africa, like many other continents, in the past two centuries.

ORASHI REGION

Orashi is a pseudo-political geographically delineated region consisting of four local governments in the Rivers State of Nigeria. The area was named after the bigger of the two major rivers in the region. The other river is called the Sombriero River. According to Ekiye,⁹ the political categorisation was done in the days when Peter Odili was governor of Rivers State. He explained that Kalabari land was distinguishable in several local governments. Ditto for Ikwere, Okrika and other political units in the state. The four local governments along the Orashi River had about seven different people groups. Their diversity placed them at a disadvantage. Hence, they had to create an entity that would match what other political units had. Since the Orashi River runs through the four local governments, the political leaders from the region agreed to name the area "Orashi."

Orashi region is located in the present Rivers State

6. Dana L. Roberts, *How Christianity Became a World Religion* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009).

7. Ibid, 48-50.

8. Ibid, 51.

9. Felix Ekiye, Interview by the Researcher, Udebu Community, 13/08/2021.

of Nigeria. It has four geographically contiguous local governments. The northernmost area is Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, a local government headquartered in Omoku. Its western portion is Ahoada West, with headquarters in Akinnima. The eastern flank is Ahoada East, with headquarters in Ahoada town, while the southernmost portion is administered by Abua/Odua local government from Abua Central. There are eight distinct but culturally related people groups in the region. They are Egbema, Ndoni, Ogba, Ekpeye, Ogbogolo, Engenni, Abua and Odual. Each of the people groups has several clans and subdivisions. According to the 2020 estimation, there are more than one million people in the Orashi region.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY HISTORY OF THE ORASHI REGION

Missionary activities in the Orashi began through indigenous witness. According to documented oral traditions, Buguma, a Kalabari settlement south of Okarki, had experienced the power of the gospel through the Baptist Missions.¹⁰ Atata George, a committed Christian from Buguma, was a trader on the Orashi River. He became friends with an Engenni man named Okiya. Atata George witnessed Christ to Okiya and his friend, Okorio, and the two were converted at Okarki in 1904.¹¹ Atata and his new converts started a Baptist Church in Okarki the same year.¹² From that tiny beginning, the Christian faith spread to every part of Orashi.

Baptist missions in Orashi have been indigenous in origin and initial growth. However, the fortunes of the work in Orashi were significantly influenced by the person and ministry of Miss Scagg, assisted by Miss Dale Moore. When anyone within that region mentioned the word "the missionary", 75% of the time, the reference was to Ma Joe Scagg. Her influence transcended the Orashi region. Miss Scagg was appointed missionary to Nigeria on April 12, 1939.¹³ She arrived on July 1, 1939. After a brief teaching career in the Ogbomoso Seminary (1939-40), she became a general evangelist and missionary advisor in the Benin area (1940-42) before she moved to the Port-Harcourt area as a general evangelist.

Miss Scagg moved to Joinkrama in 1942.¹⁴ Her stay in Joinkrama led to the opening of what was to become the Baptist Hospital in Joinkrama, in 1945. She also started the Pastor School at Joinkrama in 1963. The school moved to Ahoada in 1967. The Pastor School has become a part of the Baptist College of

10. C. T. T. George, *A Brief Baptist Work in Niger Delta 1893-1950* (Port-Harcourt: TMG, 2010), 29.

11. Chris Etiga, "A Brief History of Engenni Baptist Association" in W. O. Asita (ed) *A Brief History of the Rivers Baptist Conference* (Port-Harcourt, SAMAG, 2007), 31.

12. George, 29.

13. "Josephine Anna "Ma" Scaggs" in *A Century of Nigerian Baptist Convention: A Call for Celebration and Renewal* (Ogbomoso: The Publishing Unit, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 137-138.

14. Travis Collins, 41.

Theology, in Obinze, since the 1990s.¹⁵ Seeing the need to equip student pastors' wives, she began the Home Craft Center in Ahoada. The school was converted into a Vocational College in 2005.¹⁶ Miss Scagg's most significant contribution is in church planting and leadership development. Except for churches planted before 1945 in Orashi, all churches in the region until 1971 mentioned Miss Scagg in the history of their founding. In 1970, there were at least 95 Baptist churches in the area. Other missionary churches and para-church organizations were also significantly present.

IMPACTS OF BAPTIST WORK IN ORASHI

Education

Like most other missionary organisations, evangelism through educational institutions has been one major strategy of Baptists globally. In Orashi, Baptist missionaries introduced formal education early in their work. Primary schools were established in Okarki, Joinkrama, Emesu, and Biseni. Faith Opwuari¹⁷ and Apapa Eli¹⁸ indicated that those schools brought Western civilization into the region. Opwuari illustrated that several men and women who rose to prominence from the region were products of those Baptist schools. Suotor¹⁹ added that the school at Emesu was a very prominent institution that played a leading role in the educational history of several Niger Delta communities. It was observed that many older people from the region who had just primary school education, could conveniently and fluently engage with anybody at a deep intellectual level and in English language. Some such men, including Onita Okirie, Friday Eli, and Emmanuel John rose to become prominent businessmen.²⁰ Some young people, such as Christopher Osuampe, Carson Akiagba, and Imoru Jack, went beyond primary school.²¹ Others went to theological schools and became pastoral leaders within the region and beyond.

Apart from the primary schools, Baptist missionaries also started the Preliminary Training College (PTC) in Abua. The PTC was initially intended to serve as a preparatory school for those who wanted to attend Pastor School in Joinkrama. However, with time, the school became a feeder institution for Baptist Colleges

in Iwo and later Obinze. Many young men from the region trained in PTC, Abua became Headmasters in government schools and leaders of thought in their local churches and communities. Many young people who became university graduates from the region were children of people trained in PTC, Abua. Thus, the educational ministries of Baptist missions laid the foundation for the future educational progression of the region.

The missionaries also introduced theological education. The Pastors' School at Joinkrama (PSJ) was the oldest theological institution in the South-East and South-South of Nigeria. The school did not just train church pastors for the churches; many of such men who graduated from PSJ also became community leaders whose impacts on their communities were very significant. For instance, A. F Otoma was a pastor and a community leader in Omoku. His influence in the community was very significant. Gunn Dimogu, Michael Eluozo, Rueben Oku, Johnbull, and others did not hold traditional titles. They were pastors. Nevertheless, their leadership within their communities was significant. For example, in Engenni, most community decisions were taken in the church under the leadership of the pastors. In Obor, until his death, Michael Eluozo was a critical stakeholder in decision-making that affected the community. In Ahoada, Friday Anthony, who was trained in the Bible School, was a major key player in restoring normalcy to Ekpeye in the days when a rival cult gang war ravaged the entire region. Hence, the PSJ, which offered theological education, also significantly contributed to the positive morals in the society. Ken Enyubara²² observed that beyond the ministries in the churches, Pastors trained in the theological institutions became rallying points for the development of the societies.

Related to the PSJ was the Home-Craft Centre, Ahoada. The centre was created to respond to Pastors' wives' need for skill acquisition. Those women needed to be trained in craft making and basic home economics to be good wives providing financial and other material support for their husbands. A lot of Pastors benefited immensely from that intervention. However, the success stories from the centre made more young ladies in Ahoada and the rest of Orashi enroll in the institution. At some point, enrollment was as high as 200 trainees per semester. Their curriculum was expanded to include Basic English, Arithmetic, and Social Studies.

Furthermore, reports indicated that the school became a strong evangelistic institution. Several data from the school indicated that they had regular baptismal services before graduation. Therefore, the school served multiple purposes. It trained people in basic skills for homemaking and ministry. Therefore, the Baptist school contributed significantly to stabilising marriages across the region. It also

15. Minute of the Executive Committee Meeting of the Rivers Baptist Conference, Port Harcourt, 05/09/1996, 39-43.

16. Minute of the Advisory Board Meeting of the Baptist Home Craft Center, Ahoada, 17/07/2004, 1-3.

17. Faith Opuari, Interview by the researcher, Port-Harcourt, June 2022. Faith Opuari is an Engenni woman. She is a retired staff of the University of Port-Harcourt.

18. Eli Apapa, Interview by the Researcher, Ahoada, June 2022. Eli Apapa grew up in Okarki, one of the major towns of Engenni people. He is an Accountant and works with the Baptist Vocational Centre, Ahoada.

19. Suotor John B, Interview by the Researcher, Abua, June 2022. Suotor is a retired Baptist Pastor and a community leader in Abua.

20. Christian Fai, *A Brief History of First Baptist Church, Isua and the Spread of Baptist Mission in Joinkrama* (Omoku: Jeff Printing and Publishing, n.d), 15.

21. Ibid, 16.

22. Kenneth Enyubara, Interview by the Researcher, Obinze, June 2022.

contributed to the socio-economic development of the land. Furthermore, it became the channel through which many young women became Christians. Lastly, it became a civilizing agent for the communities.

One more way the Baptist missionary efforts transformed Orashi is through orthography. The history of Engenni, Ekpeye, Ogba, Egbema, and Abua orthographies bear bold Baptist imprints. Nicholas Baba²³ indicates that the Engenni language was reduced to writing by Baptist missionaries. He further indicated that the first materials translated into Engenni were portions of the Bible, tracts and religious literature. The NT, which Rueben Oku translated, is a standard linguistic work being used in Engenni churches. While the history of Ogba orthography has not been documented, records show that Obulor Ochogba, one of the young men who started the Baptist church in Omoku, spearheaded the translation of a few books of the NT. This researcher sighted copies of the gospel of Matthew and Mark in the Ogba language, bearing the signature of Obulor Ochogba. He was working with the late Oba of Ogba land to produce a standard book on Ogba orthography when he died. The manuscripts are still in his house. Richard Nwauafa, who converted the New Nation Church, Okwuzi, to Baptist with his family, single-handedly produced the first textbook of Egbema orthography.²⁴ From the above, one can see that apart from starting schools and training people, Baptists have contributed to reducing the local languages into writing.

Socio-Political

Baptists have been significantly involved in the life of Orashi. The contributions of Baptists have been enormous in the transformation of society. Baptists constitute one major force for the moral transformation of Orashi society. Respondents explained that the teachings in Baptist churches, the moral uprightness of people, and the contributions to eradicating poverty are some of the ways Baptists have moderated the social lives in the region. Ekiye and Odoya specifically illustrated that the teaching of Baptists through Sunday School and Church Training helped people to develop a sense of moral right and wrong. They added that Baptist schools and training centres were centres of moral development.

Furthermore, records show that Baptist people were the primary force that led to the abolition of the killing of twins in that region. In Engenni, each community had a forbidden forest where twins were disposed. However, two related events stopped the practice. First, the forbidden forest was allotted to Baptists for building their place of worship in the hope that something malevolent would happen to them. However, their survival defeated the claim of evil spirits eating up twins in that forest.²⁵ Secondly,

23. Nicholas Baba, Interview by the Researcher, Joinkrama, June 2022. Nicholas Baba was a Retired Headmaster.

24. Funeral Programme for the Burial of Late Richard O. Nwauafa, 07/11/2015, 4.

25. Eli Apapa, interview.

having understood the word of God, the Baptist people stopped surrendering their twins for killing. Having survived attacks with charms and other threats from the traditional communities, nothing else could be done about the twins' situation. A similar story has been reported in Oghora (Abua). So, it is to the credit of Baptists in the region that anyone born twins could live an everyday life and grow old. Baptists stopped the killing of twins and other obnoxious practices in many parts of the region.

Politically, Baptists are at the forefront of Orashi. Several Baptists have been groomed to perform leading roles in the political life of their communities and the state. They do these by being involved in monarchical leadership and democratic structures. In Ogba land, some notable Baptists who have been involved in political leadership included Richard Nwauafa, who was a palace chief in Egbema. Felix Adube, Isaac Akio and Eric Otoma were also traditional rulers. In Ekpeye, there are about six high chiefs who are Baptists.²⁶ They are making significant differences in their communities. In Engenni, most of the current traditional rulers of the communities are Baptists. The only part with least representation is Abua. More work needs to be done to get Baptists involved in the traditional rulership of the kingdom.

In democratic governance, several Baptists are making impacts. Several of them are active members of political parties. Ekpeye and Engenni are relatively better than the rest in this regard. A good number provide party leadership for political parties, while others are elected into significant political positions. At some point, there were about three members of Baptist churches in Ekpeye who were appointed Commissioners in Rivers State government. The current chairman of Ahoada West LGA is one of the children of a Baptist Pastor. Asita O. Asita, the younger brother of one of the past Conference Secretaries, and a Baptist was a Member of the National House of Representative. However, in Ogba land, the level of participation of Baptists in politics is relatively lower compared to Ekpeye. Baptists in Ogba and Egbema still feel that believers should not be involved in politics. In the same vein, the number of Baptists in high positions in government is very negligible. More works need to be done to get Ogba and Egbema Baptists to change their attitude to politics. Abua exhibits a relatively worse attitude and involvement in politics. As at the time of gathering data for this work, there is no single Baptist person known in high profile political position.

Health and Community Development.

The most famous contribution of Baptists to Orashi was probably in the area of health and community development. Miss Scagg, the prima missionary to the region, was significantly concerned about the health needs of the region. Orashi region, because of its location, was endemic with several disease vectors.

26. Ken Enyubara, interview.

The burden of morbidity for Malaria, Filariasis, Pneumonia, gastro-enteritis and other water borne infection was very high.²⁷ Hence, morbidity and mortality was high. Therefore, the siting of the Baptist Hospital in Joinkrama was a major contribution toward alleviating the health crises of the time. The hospital served a lot of persons, up to southern Ijaw and some island communities in the Atlantic.²⁸

The health care facility served more than attending to the health needs of the people. It also led to influx of commercial activities into the region. Nicholas Baba explained that the presence of the hospital attracted a lot of commercial activities and ventures into the community. Walking through Joinkrama, one noticed that there were several abandoned commercial buildings along the Ususu bank of the Orashi River. Those buildings, according to Becky were used as stores for consumables in the hay-days of the hospital. Laime²⁹ explained that as the hospital grew, more people were drawn from several locations to Joinkrama. Some of them had needs for items that were not available in the hospital. Hence, a market gradually grew on the river bank close to the hospital. Items like foodstuff, footwear, nets, and pharmaceutical consumables gradually found their way into the market. Some of the traders eventually settled in Joinkrama. The market was flourishing until the outbreak of the civil war, when the community was repeatedly sacked.

Baptist Missions also impacted the environmental health and development of transportation system in the region. Baba³⁰ and Obioma³¹ recalled that the missionary doctors and Nurses did not use only drugs. They emphasized on personal and community hygiene. They encouraged the community to drain swamp and open up creeks. Two very important creeks that were drained were Kolo Creek and Taylor Creek. Those creeks eventually became access for goods and services from adjoining communities into Orashi region. Regina Ukwosa³² reported that the creeks were the waterways they used in transporting their farm's produce to the markets of Joinkrama and as far as Nembe. Hence, the presence of the hospital enhanced both healing of the environment as well as improved waterway transportation.

One other way the Baptist brought development into the region was through introduction of agriculture. It is to the credit of the Baptist mission that new crops and fruits came into the region. Such fruits included Guava, several species of Mango, Cashew and Citrus. Many of those fruit trees are still

27. Kpulubor Lucky, interview by the Researcher, Omoku, 22/07/ 2016. Kpulubor was the Senior Medical Laboratory Technologist in charge of the Hospital at Joinkrama after the government took over the facility.

28. Baba, Interview.

29. Laime Monday, interview by the Researcher, Joinkrama, 12/06/2022.

30. Baba, Interview.

31. Obioma, Interview.

32. Regina Ukwosa, interview by the Researcher, Omoku, 11/06/2022.

in the hospital compound and several locations across the region. The significance of those fruits and crops were demonstrated in their use as non-pharmaceutical healthcare intervention. An illustration will be given here. According to Osuampe,³³ his daughter was the first person treated by the missionary Nurses. He narrated that she was treated with cereal and milk. And the girl recovered. That treatment shows that the girl may have suffered from nutritional deficiency, which was consistent with the status of many communities in those days. It will be recalled that a similar situation was what gave birth to the founding of Kersey Children Home in Ogbomoso. The introduction of those crops and fruits played significant role in the enhancement of nutritional health of the region. Some of those people took the seed or seedlings of those fruits to their communities, thereby contributing to the botanical richness of the region.

CONCLUSION

Christian missions has been a great agent of transformation. No culture remains the way it was when it came into contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Orashi region of Nigeria, the story of the transforming power of the gospel has been very great. The Baptist missionary adventure in the region began in 1904. The instruments for the proclamation of the gospel were church planting, educational institutions, and healthcare. Those instruments facilitated leadership development, improved healthcare, transformation of culture and other benefits. The fruits of the Baptist missionary efforts in the region is a great testimony to the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus.

33. Osuampe Brantley, Interview by the Researcher, Joinkrama, 12/06/2022.



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