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- Promoting the academic study of sociology and the ethics of religions in theoretical and practical perspectives.
- Applying sociological and ethical tools in studying religions vis-à-vis their place in African Society.
- Strengthening the teaching and learning of sociology and the ethics of religions as academic disciplines.
- Bringing religious scholars and religious practitioners together through conferences, workshops and seminars as fora for appropriating the relevance of religions to society.
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THE VALUES AND THE DEMONISATION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: AN EXPOSITION

BY

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Abstract

African Traditional Religion is the religious tradition handed down to Africans by their Forebears. The religion's ethics and values remain viable and are reflected across the entire African continent to date. However, it has no centralised authority and no dedicated temple, like churches, mosques, or pagodas, for the worship of God; every diviner and shrine is autonomous. They are checked by their conscience, their ancestors, and the divinities that God creates. But do not depend on him for instruction to sanction man. God has delegated such power to them. Reports about the religion are mainly from those outside its conclave, which has successfully and painfully painted a repugnant and sharply repulsive image of the religion before the outside world, as if there is nothing good about it. The emergence of the nineteenth-century missionaries was the genesis of this maligned media reportage of African indigenous religion. Ultimately, because these missionaries had a working mandate to spread, promote and root Christianity in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Thus, they demonised ATR by coating it with evil to the extent that some patrons of the modern Pentecostal movement and their followers in Africa were pressured to do away with their indigenous names, which they purported to have links with ancestors or a divinity. The paper argues that virtues promoted and protected by ATR are downplayed on social media. Findings show that unethical, immoral religious leaders and their adherents are found in all religions. ATR is therefore not an exception. The work recommends balanced reportage and seeks verification of facts by an outsider to the religion before any harmful claims are made public. The scope of the work is Idumabi Quarters in *Esan* Central Local Government Area of Edo State, South-South Nigeria. The paper deployed an exploratory research methodology and adopted Dominic Strinati's Postmodern theory for its theoretical framework.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Demonisation, Social Media, Pentecostalism, Outsider and Insider of a religious tradition.

Introduction

The traditional values of Africans shaped their identity and self-assertion on the continent and on the global stage. Non-Africans will be able to understand and evaluate Africans only after a careful study of their personal and group behaviour, customs, and the ways they organise their society. African values accentuated into an acceptable course of action that ventilates the enhancement of cordial relationship between God and man, on one hand and between man and his fellow man, on the other hand. These values include love, trust, obedience, justice, patience, gratitude, honesty, and appreciation. Africans always make concerted efforts to sustain these virtues that evolved from their values, since man is a social being that cannot live a solitary life; he depends on God through the divinities and ancestors, because of the inner yearning for God in a man, man seeks fellowship with God and clamours for his continuous favour. Moreover, man will give an account of his earthly stewardship to God at the end of his journey on earth. This realisation cemented his moral inclination and sustainable social values. These values are generally acceptable because they are good in themselves. Interestingly, these values have positively influenced African behaviour.

However, some people deliberately resist these values and are unwilling to change for the better; they would rather act out of self-gratification and satisfy their egoistic tendencies. These people are regarded as unethical; they exhibit disrespect for constituted authority, dishonesty, irresponsibility, and injustice, among other things. These characteristics are contrary to the values that are promoted by African traditional religion and other religious traditions. People who display the aforementioned character traits are often referred to as rude or stubborn. ATR is generally known as a problem-solving religion; people could approach its functionaries with all manner of problems. Ironically, some unethical diviners, in an attempt to offer a solution to the issues presented to them, could do the unprintable and the unthinkable. For instance, preparing charms to aid fraud is morally wrong, yet some diviners still engage in it for material gain, just as some pastors pray for the success of fraudsters and criminals. Rather than condemning the act and reprimanding those who engaged in such an ungodly vocation, people attack the religion of such religious functionaries and spare the individuals. By so doing, they succeeded in the demonisation of African traditional religion, despite its embraceable values. This ugly development needs to be addressed, as it has grossly diminished the religion. The paper is timely; it aims to educate the masses, remove the cobwebs of ignorance from Africans' eyes, and deliver ATR from the

effects of society's sledgehammer by correcting falsehoods about the religion and repositioning it to tap its inherent potential for the people.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is Dominic Strinati's Postmodernism theory, which he used to analyse popular culture and identifies the following as its features:

- i. Difference between society and culture; this involves the development of a media-saturated society that empowered the media in such a way that it created a societal sense of reality that is entirely different from reality. Computer technology is deployed to create virtual realities. This is used to replace their real-life counterparts; for example, buying and selling will be based on media-reflected images rather than physical products, as in online sales and other financial transactions.
- ii. There is emphasis on style rather than substance; products become popular because of their design. Thus, the society develops an attractive lifestyle. As a result, the following qualities have been undermined: merit, integrity, seriousness, authenticity, realism, intellectual depth, and a strong narrative.
- iii. This also downplays the distinction between the arts and popular culture. There is nothing spectacular about the arts.¹
- iv. People are generally confused about time and space: There will be rapid travel, instantaneous communication, as well as speedy capital and culture flow from one place to the other.
- v. Strinati holds that the faith of people in big stories or big ideas about the world will decline. Postmodernists are doubtful of any absolute, universal, or all-embracing claim to knowledge, such as those made by religion, science, art, or modernism.²

Invariable, postmodernism is a departure from the present, while the present is a distance from yesterday. But the features highlighted in his postmodern theory are the future of the present generation: unnecessary criticism and speculation about the future that humanity is already living with. Thus, this theory represents a reflection of how social media is manipulated and systematically used to diminish African traditional religion, to the extent that many Nigerians and Africans in general would not want to associate with the religion that has been bastardised.

¹ Haralambos, M. Holborn, M, Chapman, S. and Moor, S. 2013. Sociology: Themes and Perspectives. Harper Collins Publishers Limited 751-752.

² Ibid 751-752

Conceptual Clarification

- i. **African Traditional Religion:** It is the indigenous religion of the Africans. That is highly localised and serves as a perspective with which the Africans express their spirituality and worldview. ATR is primarily a belief system passed down to Africans by their ancestors and has since been transmitted from one generation to the next through oral tradition. Apart from Hinduism, African traditional religion is the most tolerant religion in the world. It only reacts against those who obstruct its activities. Summarily, it originated from African soil, people are born, nurtured and grow in it. Naturally, it is a non-missionary religion that has no provision to propagate its virtues and spirituality. Functionally, it permeates every aspect of Africans' lives. The religion has no known founder and no scripture like Islam or Christianity.³ Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. While quoting-Ekwunife (1990) Ibenwa stated that ATR are those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of African which are rooted in the past, African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African ancestors through oral traditions that manifested in (myths, folktales, songs, dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy saying and names) sacred specialist, persons, sacred space, objects and religious work of arts. It is a religion that is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in light of new experiences, through the dialectical process of continuity and discontinuity.⁴
- ii. **Demonisation:** It simply means to describe something or somebody in such a way that is intended to make other people think of them as evil or dangerous.⁵ In most cases, such a description illicitly arouses resentment of the person or thing among the general people.
- iii. **Social Media:** Social media enhances, strengthens and expedites information dissemination through virtual networks, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Recently, apps like TikTok, Signal, and Club have emerged as new entrants in the ranks of established social

³ Ibenwa, C.N. 2014. Religion and Nation Building. A critical analysis. International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions. Published by the European centre for research training and development. Downloaded from www.eajournal.org. vol. 1, No2.4 Retrieved on the 2nd of June 2023

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Hornby, A.S. 2010. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. Oxford University Press. 389.

networks.⁶ It succeeded in making the world a global village, mainly by disseminating accurate information and ideas and by developing new content for individuals and businesses worldwide. However, it is often used to spread disinformation that can lead to polarisation, which can gravitate into harmful psychological effects or disaffection among individuals and groups. Social media can be broken into social networking, bookmarking, social news, media sharing, microblogging, and online forums.⁷

- iv. **Pentecostalism:** It is a charismatic religious movement that led to the emergence of several protestant churches in America around the 20th century. They strongly believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is usually manifested in glossolalia (speech in an unknown language) or xenoglossia (speech in a language known to others but not to the speaker)⁸. The ability to speak in tongues is a gift of the Holy Spirit 1 Cor. 12v1ff. A good example is the Holy Spirit's encounter with the Apostles on Pentecost Day. Other spiritual gifts include: utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, faith, ability to heal, works of miracles, prophecy, spirit of discernment, and the interpretation of tongues.
- v. **Insider and outsider of a religious tradition:** As the word implies, an insider of a religious tradition is an individual who believes and practices the doctrinal teachings and tenets of a religion. An insider is a practitioner of the religion. An outsider is somebody who is not involved in the religion. They are not practitioners of the religion but would claim to know about it. In most cases, their opinion are distorted and a complete misrepresentation of the religion, which always betrays and injures the religion. An example is the biased opinion of the armchair foreign observers about African traditional religion.

The values of African Traditional Religion

African traditional religion is one of the three dominant religions in Nigeria, the others include Christianity and Islam. Unfortunately, critical observation shows that the majority of Nigerians, particularly the youth, find it difficult to associate with the religion openly. However, they secretly consult diviners, herbalist or

⁶ Dollarhide, M. 2023. Social media. Definition, effects and list of top Apps. Downloaded from www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social.retrived on the 21st May 2023

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Melton, J.G. 2023. Pentecostalism/Definition, History, beliefs, speaking in tongues and facts. Retrieved on the 21st of May

medicine men in times of crises and desperation, which shows that ATR is a pragmatic religion which cannot be completely detached from the Africans, despite the attempt of the Africans to separate themselves from it, it still-consciously reflects in their names, language and culture, because before diving into other religious tradition, Nigerians were first Africans.

The following are some of the values of African traditional religion:

- i. **Moral values:** Africans emphasise social conduct through the recourse to ancestral sanctions, the family, and the formidable council of elders, which enforces other related taboos and social legislation. These moral checks help guide society away from chaos and social confusion. Moreover, it promotes friendship, love, honesty, justice, self-control, bravery, courage, and compassion.⁹ Etc. It strengthens marriages, family responsibility, and an ordered life. Morality is embedded in various beliefs and customs that everyone is expected to uphold to live long and avoid curses. Immorality is strongly discouraged among *the Esan* people of Edo State, owing to the ever-watchful ancestors. This belief system provides a moral sense of justice, truth, and an understanding of the predominant effects of good and evil.¹⁰
- ii. African values strengthen marriage bonds among Africans; marriage is a sacred union between two adults (male and female), mainly for companionship and the continuation of human society. The refusal of a healthy individual to get married among Africans is abnormal. Marriage is strictly between two families; same-sex marriage is entirely foreign to the Africans. Once the two opposite sexes come together and the man pays the woman's dowry, marriage is established. Among *the Esan* people, adultery is a taboo that attracts deadly consequences as a result of the sanction of the ancestors.¹¹ There seems to be confusion regarding marriage among people in modern society, because they get the approval of the family, church and court, which accounts for the over-bloated marriage celebration among Africans. However, the traditional marriage, which attracts and cements parental and broader family approval, remains tenable.

⁹ Mbiti, J.S. 1975. Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd 175.

¹⁰ Umoh, J.O. 2005. Elements of Sociology of Religion. Ikot Ekphenes Iwoh Publishers 68

¹¹ Mbiti, J.S. 1975. Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd 100-102

- iii. **Religious values of Africans:** Religious leaders in ATR are diviners, sorcerers, herbalists and soothsayers who have vast knowledge of the religion; they lead others during religious activities. They serve as the link between people and the spiritual world. Some are trained, while others are gifted. Without them, African religion would have disintegrated into chaos and confusion. They are the keepers of religious treasures and knowledge. In most cases, they function as medicine men, healers, and counsellors. Their divine responsibilities categorise them as seers, diviners, mediums and officiate as ritual elders,¹² Who could interpret God's wishes to mortals, the knowledge of their spiritual ability, by this set of people, streamlines the behaviour of Africans. As such, the fear of being exposed deters people from committing crimes.
- iv. **Aesthetic values:** African aesthetic values are accentuated through their dressing, dance, religious symbols and festivals. For instance, in the great Benin kingdom. The Egue festival and its unique work of art stand out. These communicate about their culture and religion to the outside world. A society's aesthetic value influences the artist in his endeavour to produce aesthetically acceptable objects of immense value.¹³ Hence, the work of bronze in the great Benin kingdom.
- v. **Spiritual Communication Skills:** Man communicates with God through the channels provided by religion. ATR creates a platform for gathering and group interaction, either for worship or for sacrifice to God, divinities and ancestors.
- vi. **Spiritual values of religion:** ATR brings about spiritual satisfaction. It nourishes the spiritual aspects, yearning and aspiration of man. This is because religion provides spiritual avenues for insight, the development of the human psyche, prayer, meaning in rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, offerings, dedication, devotion, meditation, trust in God, and more. Moreover, inclination to ATR enable man to quench his thirst for peace, joy, comfort, security, hope, love, progress, protection,¹⁴ And self-awareness.

¹² Mbiti, J.S. 1975. Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 150-158

¹³ Idang, G.E. 2015. African culture and values. A journal of the South-African Society for Greek Philosophy and Humanities (SASGPH) Pretoria, Phronimon Vol. 16 No., 2

¹⁴ Mbiti, J.S. 1975. Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 200

- vii. **Philosophical Values:** ATR enable man to be assertive of his origin (all indigenous groups in Africa have their story of creation). Interpret the development of the World around them, as well as express and explain mystical and cosmic phenomena. This is of great significance to man because the comprehension of their cosmogony affects their life experiences; notably, it supplies man with answers to the questions that pertain to reality.¹⁵ God's existence, destiny, reincarnation, suffering, pain, success, failure and eschatology.
- viii. **Africans are devoted to their religion:** Africans cultivated the qualities of devotion or commitment to a life course through their religion (ATR). The best they give to religious activities is carried over to other aspects of life. Thus, the Africans hold religion so high and place a high premium on it, to the extent that they offer humans as sacrifice, which reveals that they value religion more than human life and property.
- ix. **Africans treasure their religion:** Africans treasure their religion; thus, they are ready to defend it. As such, a threat against their religion is considered a threat against their lives. Hence, African religion only fights those who attack it. Otherwise, it is a very peaceful religion.
- x. **African traditional religion is an emblem of African identity:** Africans value their religion to an immeasurable extent; they are ready to render voluntary services that can promote the course of their religion, inflict marks on their faces and bodies, deny themselves pleasure, and abandon a lucrative career to serve as a religious functionary in the services of a deity. However, the interpretation given is that the Africans are always elated about it.
- xi. **The government place a high premium on indigenous religion:** The constitution of many countries makes provisions for the protection of practitioners of various religions in their domain. The values the Osun State Government placed on religion came to light when the government declared Monday, August 22ND, a public holiday to mark the annual Isese Day, a

¹⁵ Mbiti, J.S. 1975. Introduction to African Religion Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 198

traditional worshiper's day. It is also known as Odun Nla, which means the peak of festivities among the adherents of traditional religion.¹⁶

- xii. **Acts of Charity:** Africans are ready to spend their hard-earned money on their religion; they could even build temples, shrines and other sacred places of worship that are rich in religious objects and treasures. This is reflected in various religious worship centres across the country.
- xiii. **Cultural Values:** Religion is laced with the culture of a people; it affects the totality of the life of Africans. African traditional religion cultivated the life of a group of believers from birth to death; thus, it is challenging to separate Africans from their religion, which is part and parcel of their culture. That is why Mbiti concluded that Africans are notoriously religious.¹⁷
- xiv. **Social Values:** African traditional religion is embellished with a lot of strings that enable man to celebrate life; this is done by dancing, singing, ritualising, drumming, shouting life, carrying ceremonies, organising festivals and so on, apart from the sorrows and joys associated with existence.¹⁸ The religious links with the supersensible world dovetail into the physical, which shows that the physical and the spiritual world are inseparable, e.g. the activities of diviners, the sanctions of the ancestors among the *Esan* people and so on.
- xv. **People are often ready to make a sacrifice for religion:** Africans value their religion, so they sacrifice their time, energy, fame, power, ambition, property and wealth for their religion. Thus, when a god requires an individual's services, many abandon their pursuits and devote themselves to their religion, though some resist. However, Monday Oboh, a native of Idumabi in Irrua, Edo State, was appointed to succeed his father, a diviner.

¹⁶ Ayantayo, J.K. 2017. Time and Timing of religion programmes in the spirit of change project in Nigeria in Ayantayo J.K. et al., Journal of African Society for the study of sociology and ethics of Religions (JASSOSER). University of Ibadan. Vol. 1 and 2. 12

¹⁷ Ayantayo, J.K. 2017. Time and Timing of religious programmes in the spirit of change project in Nigeria. In Ayantayo et al., Journal of African Society for the study of sociology and ethics of religion vol. 1 and 2. 1

¹⁸ Mbiti, J.S. 1975. Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann Education Books Ltd. 201.

He abandoned his studies and career to become a diviner, who is practising his trade in Lagos today.¹⁹

Derogatory remarks on African Traditional Religion: The religion is not in competition with any religion for space and membership. Thus, it does not evangelise but always solves the problems of those who come to it for a solution because it is convenient. Despite these embraceable qualities associated with ATR, some outsiders of the religion, who are foreign observers who are ignorant of the values and ethos of the religion, who have only heard and read about the religion, have concluded in a rather bias and erroneous manner that ATR is primitive, salvage, native, tribalistic, paganistic, heathen, fetish, animistic and adulatory.²⁰ Meanwhile, an insider description of the religion is nonetheless monotheistic.²¹ Just that it is heavily localised in such a way that different localities call upon the same god in different dialects.

Fundamentally, Africans believe in God, the divinities, spirits, the ancestors, magic and medicine.²² Interestingly, ATR is enshrined in the philosophy, theology and sometimes the history of the people. The armchair foreign investigators who described ATR in derogatory terms had a preconceived mindset and could not detach themselves from their religious convictions; moreover, they felt Africans were not philosophically mature and cognitively developed to conceive of a deity. But this was a conclusion in error. Africans had a religion that was completely different from that of the Europeans. The Europeans introduced their religion, which provided a lead way for them to campaign, castigate and misrepresent ATR and succeeded in diminishing it. Unfortunately, the religion and its adherents are not doing anything to get out of the woods. It is therefore not wrong to assert that ATR is a victim of Western incursion and the current wave of globalisation. For the influence of the Europeans, the activities of early missionaries saw to the introduction of Christianity that has dominated and influenced Nigerians in particular and Africans in general, this-alternative has made Africans to consult diviners for solution to life threatened challenges under the cover of the dark, thereafter, they go and share testimonies in their various churches, claiming rather hypocritically, that no man can share God's glory in their lives. This can only be

¹⁹ Interview with Eromosele Sunday, 62 years old. Retired teacher, a resident of Iduambi Quarters Irrua in Esan Central Local Government of Edo State.

²⁰ Idowu, E.B. 1973. African Traditional Religion: A Definition. SCM Press Ltd. 109-136

²¹ Jacob, A.B. 1977. A textbook on West African traditional religion. Ibadan, Aromolaran Publishing Company Limited 32-33.

²² Idowu, E.B. 1973. African Traditional Religion: A Definition. SCM Press Ltd. 85

adjudged a product of self-deception and spiritual delusion, and a significant blow to ATR.

Demonisation of African Traditional Religion on Social Media

The continuous demonisation of African traditional religion is the handiwork of outsiders in the religion, whose media reportage is inimical to the religion. Meanwhile, Christian converts, missionaries, Muslims, pastors and evangelists have turned away from traditional sources of supernatural succour represented by traditional religion and culture.²³ The sources of the negative image of African traditional religion spanned from the era of early 19th-century missionaries and the testimonies of self-acclaimed born-again Christians and pastors, who held that adherents of ATR have a pact with the devil, because the religion is embellished with the worship of demonic forces. Most of their posts on social media unleash their Venom on the religion, its functionaries, and followers.

Gerrieter Haar and Stephen Ellis stated that what we learn in the social media regarding ATR and its functionaries throughout Africa is rumours that people are being killed by politicians and business people who use their body parts through collaboration with diviners to prepare powerful medicines that will make them wealthy and acquire material success.

In marketplaces across African cities and communities, pamphlets on the problems of evil and their solutions are written by Africans and locally published. Africans are patronising this set of service providers.

There are stories of Witches, Frightful ghosts, spirits and ritual wealth that are dramatised in television, soap operas, home videos and discussed in radio programmes and phone-ins.²⁴ A good example is the current wave of yahoo-yahoo, which has gravitated into yahoo plus, i.e., blood or ritual wealth, which some overambitious young boys persuade and lure unethical diviners to prepare for them, while ignoring the consequences.

Social media has been used to publicise how people get wealthy by exchanging their manhood and womb for spiritual wealth, and later become impotent and barren. Some even go so far as to exchange their children for wealth and material

²³ Kwabena, J.A. 2011. The media demonised African Religion. Downloaded from www.religionunplugged.com.retrieved on the 2nd of May 2023.

²⁴ Kwabena, J.A. 2011. Media demonised African Religion Downloaded from www.religionunplugged.com.retrieved on the 2nd May 2023.

possessions. As a consequence, the child will later become mad, sick or an imbecile, according to the claims of the self-acclaimed righteous Christians. The aforementioned are tenable because ATR functionaries acquire dubious spiritual power through their allegiance to the devil. Meanwhile, these practices violate the religion's ethics.

Many Nigeria home videos has dramatized the neo-Pentecostalist rhetoric of deliverance, a good example is living in bondage, the storyline centered on young Andy an upcoming business man, that was counseled by his friend to go into blood money, he heeded and through the help of a unethical and material driven diviner, he exchanged the life of his newly married beautify wife for riches. He became stupendously wealthy, but his riches started reducing when his mother-in-law wept and cried at the grave of her daughter, asking her to avenge her death. The film ended up projecting ATR in a bad light. It amplified the righteous position of Pentecostal Christians, pastors and shows that such wealth from the devil is prevalent in our society today.

It was reported lately that a native doctor impregnated a pastor's wife in Onitsha, Anambra State. She was barren for many years, went to the spiritualist for help, and was exposed; the native doctor was identified as Ekwe-Baba.²⁵ Sadly, ATR is strongly against adultery.

In similar circumstances, two Pastors in Ghana drew their dagger at each other's throats when one accused the other of burying charms on the ground of his church to move his members to his church and neutralise his power. Again, through the assistance of a diviner, a pastor somewhere in Ghana had sexual intercourse with his biological daughter, cleaned up the fluids with a handkerchief that he waved in the church to demonstrate extraordinary power.²⁶ Painfully, rather than blame this pastor and the unethical diviner, people will again tongue lash ATR, as a situation that can be likened to blaming the cod and the ladder instead of the hanged man. This is a complete misunderstanding of the religion. Ironically, the pastors who consulted diviners are called fake pastors while their religion is carefully separated from them.

²⁵ Agholor, A. 2023. Drama as a native Doctor impregnates the Pastor's wife in Onitsha, Anambra State. Downloaded from legitibes.com.ng retrieved on the 6th of June 2023

²⁶ Kwabena, J.A. 2011. The media demonised African religion. Downloaded from www.religionunplugged.com retrieved on the 2nd June 2023.

Douglas Akwasi Owusu reported that a girl who confessed to scattering the fortune and wealth of her family, through the power and influence of witchcraft, gave birth to a live snake in the presence of hundreds of worshippers during a deliverance session organised for her liberation.²⁷

These stories, along with many others, are circulated on social media. This has contributed to the disturbing negative image of African traditional religion in the public space. Moreover, these stories are often used to promote public confidence in the powers bequeathed to young, vibrant Pentecostal pastors, which they claim to have acquired through the Holy Spirit's overriding influence. However, it should be made abundantly clear that African traditional religion does not endorse witchcraft, money ritual or unethical practices. Unfortunately, social media has presented religion in a repulsive way, downplayed its ethics and injured it by presenting its functionaries and adherents as dirty, demonic, evil and satanic. Painfully, the significance and the values of the religion to society and humanity are neglected. This is wrong because there are unethical practitioners in all religions; ATR should not be an exception and be singled out for condemnation. Moreover, a situation in which an individual's wrongdoing is used to evaluate the general character of ATR functionaries is fallacious and can be attributed to hasty generalisation. It is not healthy for the religion's development and advancement.

Recommendations

1. Practitioners of ATR must be guided by their conscience and the ethics of their religion, which is centred on love for humanity.
2. The rights and respect for all religions must be upheld in social media; nobody should post unconfirmed stories or statements that put a religion outside their own in a bad light.
3. A film that is religiously biased or designed to incite a group of people against a religion or its adherents should not be allowed into the public space.

²⁷ Kwabena, J.A.G. 2011. The media demonised African Religions. Downloaded from www.religionunplugged.com retrieved on the 2nd June 2023.

4. All sensitive publications must be carefully censored to avoid the corruption of public morals.
5. There should be laid down rules to guide the processes of brand endorsement, and corporate organisations must strictly adhere to them.
6. The government should establish a social media law enforcement commission that will be saddled with the responsibility to prevent the circulation of uncensored videos, films and publications on social media.
7. Laws should be enacted to regulate the posting of biased reportage in the social media space.

Conclusion

Social media, with its numerous advantages that range from faster and easier dissemination of information to the general public, through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and so on, to a media-driven economy that enables people to advertise their products, carry out their businesses on the social media platform, with an endless flow of income and increased patronage. This is the new normal in the business cycle and global economic activities. However, it came at a price for Africans in general and Nigeria in particular. Because anything can be posted on social media, some posts can undermine the highly prized and cherished African moral values, culture, and ethics. These problems can be mitigated by enacting enabling laws by the relevant authorities to regulate home videos, film productions, and broadcasting. The agency should be empowered by immediate laws and a sufficient workforce to enforce its codes and regulations and prevent the unwarranted dissemination of unhealthy content. Although some laws have already been enacted to address these ugly developments, unfortunately, they are not being enforced; as such, they have not yielded the desired results. Thus, the unregulated social media space is now an avenue that is carefully crafted to lower African moral and cultural values to the level that what used to be known as taboos have now become a norm. For instance, nude appearances that circulate on social media are not in coherence with African tradition, customs and religion.

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CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE OF NIGERIA NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

The common saying is that Nigeria is not developing, as evidenced by the breakdown and decay of infrastructure and the decline in living standards, among other factors. Then there is the insinuation that religion is mainly responsible for the situation. This paper seeks to set the record straight by examining the roles that religion, particularly Christianity, has played in the nation's development. It also attempts to explain what religion and Christianity are, based on scripture. The paper concludes that while religion is acceptable in itself, its practitioners, constrained by prevailing circumstances, are at fault. The managers (leaders) of the nation's affairs over the years are also fingered. Recommendations were made towards making sustainable progress.

Keywords: National development, Christian perspectives

National Development

National development, according to Munasinghe (2004), is a process of expanding the range of opportunities that enable individuals and communities to achieve their aspirations and realise their full potential over time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social, and environmental systems. Achimuga (2000) opines that the wealth of its income does not measure a nation's prosperity, or on the power of its army, nor on the elegance of its environment, but on its citizens, who are educated and religious and work for their country's growth. Gboyega (2003) said development is about improving the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. This implies improvement in the well-being of all citizens, not just the most powerful or the rich, sustainably, so that today's consumption does not jeopardise the future. It seeks to improve personal physical security, livelihoods, and the expansion of life chances.

Naomi (1995), Lawal and Oluwatoyin (1984), and others explain development as a process of improving and seeking the well-being of all, and as involving growth in all human endeavours. In defining development, Okechukwu (2012) brought in culture and environment. He said development is a process of economic and social transformation based on complex cultural and environmental interactions. Walter Rodney Akwalla (2009) classified development as comprising physical, cultural, and personal development. Physical development includes technological products; cultural development comprises society's values, norms, and traditions; and personal development includes individuals' psychological directions.

Common factors across scholars' definitions of national development include the well-being of citizens, infrastructure growth, security, hope, and the expansion of life chances. By well-being, we mean access to social amenities, quality education, potable water, medical care, and employment. The cultural aspect of national development brings about values, norms, traditions, and, consequently, religion. Man is always controlled by one religion or another, by the authority of deities or a supreme being called God. Man is central to the consideration of development, and he is also attached to and controlled by an invisible deity, religion. Development cannot, therefore, be fully defined without recourse to religion. By fate, Nigeria is a country of religious diversity. Religions existed on the ground before the advent of major foreign ones, such as Christianity and Islam. This paper discusses the influence of Christianity on Nigeria's development, examining where it has failed and how to address these shortcomings.

Christianity in National Development

Christianity is a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that he is the son of God, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 6th edition. The adherents of this belief are Christians. It is one of the largest religions in the world, and the behaviours of the adherents are regulated by the teachings of the founder, Jesus Christ. Christianity is an agent of transformation (Asudu, 2021). Its influences make a remarkable impact on human society (Asadu, 2015). Its contributions remain indispensable in terms of functional values. As a moral moderator, it is needed to facilitate national development (Eze, C. I., Oderotor, T. E. M., Akwue, S. O., and Abidemi, S. O.). Christianity teaches love of neighbours (Matt. 19:19; Rom. 13:10), help of the poor and needy (James 1:27), use of the correct scale in judgment (Amos 5:24), being hospitable (1 Pet. 4:9), and charity

(1 Pet. 4:8), to mention a few. The Bible, Christian Holy Scripture, is replete with instructions on the total well-being of man. It is about life and life after, and, as such, provides much-needed incentives to engage in productive activities during one's lifetime. It is therefore a promoter of growth, as it directs people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, and the like (Okechukwu 2012). Religion means "to bind together" or "to come together," from its Latin origin (Hastings, 2011). It essentially inculcates citizens' moral values, which are 'sine qua non' to national development.

Christians are thought to impact society by being hardworking and, consequently, making a profit (Deut. 18:8), paying taxes (Rom 13:5-7; Matt 22:21), eschewing laziness (Prov 6:6-11), promoting peace (Heb 12:14), etc. The scripture emphasises love and forgiveness of one's enemies and seeks reconciliation rather than revenge, non-retaliation or non-violent responses to aggression, justice, accountability and the like. In a society where these prevail, there will necessarily be growth and progress, and great room for national development.

Historically, Christianity's entrance to this part of the world predates the nation of Nigeria. Along with it came its objective: to 'evangelise the world', and the means of achieving this is development. Methodist Church and Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1842, Presbyterian Church in 1846, Baptist Church in 1850, Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in 1860, Qua Iboe Church in 1887 and Sudan Interior Mission in 1893 (Agha 2004). All came to establish their missions, schools, hospitals, orphanages, leper centres and the like in various parts of the country. These enterprises created new opportunities.

The missionaries established training schools, thereby contributing to human capital development. It may be that they have hands for other mission works, but it has consequently led to the development of human capital (Nwankiti 1996). They were equally responsible for developing national languages, which, in turn, led to the civilisation of the regions. The missionaries had little financial support from their mission base, and none from the government of their residents; they had many mouths to feed and projects to undertake. They therefore took agriculture seriously and trained Africans on commercial farming (Ngbemeka 1996). It can be seen that, over the course of history, Christianity has become a significant part of society and human experience, shaping how individuals respond to the environments in which they live (Fagbamila, David, and Issa in Ikechi-Ekpendu, Audu, and Chidi-Ephendu, 2016). Christianity is associated with human

development in Nigeria, as with other religions. The question one asks today is whether the religions remain as they were defined, or what went wrong that this degree of deterioration is so witnessed?

Despite all these teachings, there seems to be no apparent connection to societal experiences. There is a snap between the praxis of religion and religion itself (Makinde 2007). There is wickedness in the land, all forms of evil, corruption, violence and avarice. So much ungodliness around. It is therefore necessary to determine where things went wrong. The scripture is infallible. The fault is elsewhere. This must be either the interpreter/ teacher of the scripture or the practitioners. The obvious is that the contributions of earlier people are on the ground, namely in schools, hospitals, roads, and other infrastructure, to attest to the disconnect. The deterioration, decay and very slow development where there are any of these infrastructures, which form part of man, the centre and subject of development, is questionable.

Deterioration and Decay

There is deterioration indeed, and it is almost palpable. Dambisa (2010) opines that most African countries are confronted with significant developmental challenges revolving around leadership, corruption, insecurity of varied degrees like kidnapping, terrorism, child labour, ritual killing, armed robbery and the most endemic problem, which is poverty, is wreaking havoc. Suddenly, there seems to be a disconnect from the past, and almost every area of progress is affected. The reverse of the old society's values prevails today. Several things went wrong and are responsible for this.

Religion Disconnect

Foremost among various factors responsible for this is the religious disconnect. Religion, which teaches children morals, civility, and national commitment, was relegated to the background. The Holy Scriptures and the documents of the traditionalists remain untampered with and unfaulted. The principles remain solid; they have worked for past generations and remain valid for all time. Today, the leadership and the curriculum designers feel they are no longer relevant to modern Nigeria. Hence, it is considered optional for pupils in primary schools and students in secondary schools. The products of these school systems show no regard for God, work, or other human values. They kill and maim at will, and they engage in all sorts of violence and corruption. They want to enjoy the best of life at all costs,

and their ambitions are inordinate. This, of course, is because they are disconnected from God.

Religious Intolerance

Ours is a long-standing pluralism of religions. Diverse ethnicities and tribes are also our fate, and we have co-existed so much that we live within ourselves, and we are thoroughly mixed. Almost one hundred years of coexisting before we started identifying and majoring in our differences rather than what binds us. At the slightest provocation, we experience skirmishes that threaten the country's unity. It is neither the Bible nor the Quran that teaches this, but rather the interpreters of both and those who use it to settle scores in political arenas. Investigations into the cause of the problem, whether it arises immediately or remotely, show that it is the work of extremists and fanatics, and behind them are the politicians. It is not, therefore, the religion that is wrong but the practitioners.

Dearth of Good Leadership

Good leadership is the bane of Nigeria's national development. Nigeria has produced leaders who not only kept pace with past development but also sustained it. Mimiko (1998) asserted that past leaders were interested in access to power and privileges rather than development. These leaders have brought the nation to the brink of failure. It is now being maintained by force rather than by the free will of all parts of the nation. Neither Christian nor Muslim leaders are exonerated. Some areas feel self-sufficient and do not need others; therefore, they want to secede. There is division along socio-political, socio-economic, and regional lines, with no one attempting to galvanise these differences together, but each trying to amass wealth for themselves. Chuta (2004) said Nigeria is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interests of the citizenry. Corruption and development are opposed. The two cannot cohabitate. The culprits cut across tribes, ethnicities, religions, and even political parties.

Poor Economy

The combination of bad leadership and corruption cannot produce a healthy economy; leadership is rarely visionary. Wherever he is, corruption will hamper him, and he will lack the willpower to exercise control. The effect of a poor economy on the citizens is profound and can lead to all sorts of vices witnessed in the country. Terrible is the fact that the nation is import-dependent and a mono-

economy. No wonder Nigeria has gone on almost unsustainable loans around the world, which may further jeopardise future development, even the development of the unborn. The list of causes is unending, and each cries for urgent attention. One aim of this paper is to examine the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in promoting national development.

Promoting National Development

The issue of national development is complex, in which culture, modernism, technology, infrastructure, and growth interplay with man at the centre, as a player. Man is a religious being. Any programme, even at the planning stage, that does not carry man along is likely to fail. Hence, development must and should start with the training of man.

Education is foremost in national development. The education curriculum should be designed to address the mind and body of the person who will grow to implement national policies. In this sense, moral and religious education should not be downplayed. The introduction and integration of religious education are critical and must be given their rightful place. A genuine Christian is expected to have a value for work, morals, love for neighbours, and to have a peaceful co-existence with all. These should form the content of a sound education curriculum which citizens should acquire to create the right environment for development. The products of our school system should inculcate the values of equity, justice and fear of God. They should respect others' rights, detest corruption, and value the dignity of labour. We can then be talking of an egalitarian society where opportunities are available for citizens to explore and exploit their potential.

Corruption and Development

Corruption and development cannot work together. There is no nexus between them; one cancels the effect of the other. Corruption at all levels in Nigeria should be decisively addressed. This entails the leadership's willpower to entrench a sound policy and judicial system. When the police are incorruptible, and the judicial system is not subject to executive interference, the country will begin to find its footing. There must be dire consequences for policy violators. The worth of the law should be for all without exception. The Old Testament teaching that justice should roll in our society like water shows that justice and equity in the community are acceptable to God (Amos 5:24).

Economic Planning and National Development

Economic planning for the nation should be realistic and followed strictly. Other sources of income for the nation should not be merely on paper for academic discussion; this diversification of income must be explored and exploited. The country's inflation should be addressed, and the nation's GDP should increase. External loans, if and when taken, should be used to fund critical infrastructure that would make the money recoverable and the loans sustainable. There must be transparency in all financial matters. All these, if practised, will reduce poverty in the land, create employment, engage hands that hitherto have been jobless, and reduce insecurity in the country to a minimum.

Good leadership cannot be compromised for real, tangible development. Selfless leaders who are visionary, bold, and have integrity, whose lives are transparent and can be trusted by the populace, are the ones who can take Nigeria back on track. They must believe in justice, fairness and equity for all. They should have the willpower to effect necessary changes, even when such changes are unpopular, and their government would not set different standards for the rich and poor, or for people of different tribes, ethnic backgrounds, or religions. Such leaders should be seen to fear God and live personal lives accordingly. When this is in place, several other problems that beset the nation will begin to disappear. These leaders would ensure transparency in business in Nigeria, creating a favourable environment for investors. These leaders should also embrace dialogue in dealing with several issues besetting the nation, like the separatists, the religious extremists and fanatics, the herders and the insurgents. The nation's problems are unending. Just as solving one problem creates another, the ones solved would, in turn, solve several others. A serious government that addresses the key issues discussed above will see other ones begin to fall into place.

Conclusion

There is a means between the actual practice of Christianity and development. Man is at the base of both. Man's practice of Christianity and development is about man. In Nigeria, Christianity has brought about development to man in various spheres of life. It most especially creates the right environment for development. It is, however, a different experience from the wrong practice of the same. Greed, corrupt practices, selfishness, wrong moral values and the like are entirely disconnected from Christianity as a religion. Religion, even in its multiplicity, is practised elsewhere, and developments exist. The problem of national development should therefore be located elsewhere.

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THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITALISATION ON THE MATTHEW GREAT COMMISSION (MATTHEW 28:19-20)

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Abstract

This paper clarifies the challenge posed by digitalisation to the Matthean Great Commission. Existing works on Matthew 28:19-20 have focused mainly on disciples' identity, the trinitarian formula of baptism, the church mandate, theological study, and the Commission's target group, with little attention paid to the challenge of digitalisation for the Great Commission. This study, therefore, examined the challenge of digitalisation to the Great Commission in the text, with a view to establishing its impact on Christian discipleship. The study used a qualitative approach, in which published works on the subject were reviewed. The study was anchored on a grammatico-historical approach, while an interpretive design was employed. Data were exegetically analysed. The study reveals that the eventual aim of the Great Commission is to "make disciples of all nations" through the acts of going, baptising, and teaching. However, the challenge of digitalisation on the Great Commission includes the challenge of putting absolute trust in the effectiveness of digitalisation at the expense of Jesus' power, lack of bodily presence required in the communal aspect of baptism because water baptism cannot be performed through digitalisation, poor network connection, intermittent electricity supply, and inaccessibility in rural environments. Therefore, the study established that Jesus' model of discipleship cannot be fully realised through digitalisation alone, but that digitalisation can only function as a supportive tool. The study recommends that the Church not neglect bodily presence in discipleship, despite the availability of digitalisation. This will enhance the Church's spiritual development.

Keywords: Challenge of digitalisation, Matthean Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20, discipleship,

Introduction

Digitalisation is an effective and efficient method for Christians to disseminate the Gospel's message. This is because information and communication technology (ICT) is highly demanding and indispensable for the effectiveness of every human undertaking.²⁸ This suggests the universal significance of digitalisation in every sphere of life. The church in advanced countries has long used ICT to disseminate the message of the Great Commission. This is because they possess the required skills, knowledge, facilities, and competence to maximise digitalisation, and the scheme also permits churches to disseminate the Gospel's message effectively and efficiently.²⁹ And so, the need for digitalisation to disseminate the Gospel's message is inevitable not only in the advanced countries but also in the developing countries. For instance, the necessity of digitalisation for disseminating the message of the Great Commission became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many churches were shut down or forced to cease operations due to a lack of digital infrastructure. As Latif, Pangkey, Handayani, and Sarumaha rightly note, digitalisation is the best way for churches to maintain continuity and modernise services during the Covid-19 pandemic, when they can no longer hold activities such as worship and teaching.³⁰

Scholars like Gberevbie, Ayo, Iyoha, Duruji, Abasilim, Olaopa, Hai, Van, and Thi Tuyet have identified several problems that hinder effective digitalisation in Nigerian government organisations. According to them, these problems include an irregular power supply, insufficient information technology infrastructure, limited adaptability, incompetent workers, and ineffective leadership. While existing studies by scholars such as Ehiane, Adejuwon, and Goyayi, Okudolo, and Ojakorotu on digitalisation have examined ways to improve service distribution,

²⁸ U. D. Abasilim, J. O. Durojaiye and D. E. Gberevbie, 2022. Challenges of those in leadership in the digitalisation of Nigeria's Government Organisations *JPPUMA: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan Sosial Politik UMA (Journal of Governance and Political Social UMA)* 10:2, 281-298. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from DOI:10.31289/JPPUMA.v.8350.

²⁹ B. Lewis, 2014. The digital age: A challenge for Christian discipleship? *The proceedings of the European conference on social media*. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from https://www.academia.edu/8724570/The_Digital_Age_A_Challenge_for_Christian_Discipleship?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper

³⁰ H. F. Latif, J. M. T. Pangkey, D. Handayani, and N. Sarumaha, 2022. Digitalisasi sebagai Fasilitas dan Tantangan modernisasi Pelayanan Penggembalaan di Era Pasca-Pandemi: Refleksi Teologi Kisah Para Rasul 20:28, *Karismata Jurnal Teologi Pantekosta*, 4:2, 296-311. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from <http://www.ejournal.stajember.ac.id/index.php/kharismata>.

the works of Adeyanju and Akinyemi, Amaechi and Etoh, and others have³¹ focused on the problems confronting the process of digitalisation. Likewise, the works of Abasilim, Durojaiye, and Gberevbie have focused on the problems leaders encounter during the digitalisation of Nigerian government organisations.³² However, there seems to be very little research on the challenge of digitalisation on the Matthean Great Commission as enshrined in Matthew 28:18-20. This study is, therefore, designed to examine this challenge.

Previous studies on Matthew 28:19-20 have concentrated mainly on the identity of the disciples in the Matthean Gospel,³³ Trinity model of baptism,³⁴ discussing the church mandate,³⁵ theological study of the text as well as its relevance to Church ministry,³⁶ and the target group of the ultimate commission.³⁷ However, little attention is paid to the challenge of digitalisation in the context of the Great Commission. This study is therefore designed to examine the challenge of digitalisation to the Great Commission in the text, with a view to establishing its implications for Christian discipleship.

³¹ I. A. Akinyemi, L. I. Amaechi, and L. C. Etoh, 2022. Digitalization of education in Nigerian Secondary Schools: Benefits and Challenges. *Journal of Education and Humanities Research*, 13:1, 34-42.

³² U. D. Abasilim, J. O. Durojaiye and D. E. Gberevbie, 2022. Challenges of those in leadership in the digitalisation of Nigeria's Government Organisations, *JPPUMA: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan Sosial Politik UMA (Journal of Governance and Political Social UMA)* 10:2, 281-298. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from DOI:10.31289/JPPUMA.v.8350.

³³ E. O. Acheaw, 2021. "Make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). An exegetical study of the identity of the disciple in the Gospel of Matthew, *Thesis*. Department for the study of religions, College of Humanities, University of Ghana, Legon. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.25589.19683

³⁴ H. Kuncoro, Susanto, and R. Rimun, 2022. A study of the Trinity in form of baptism in Matthew 28:19-20, *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 6:2. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v6i2.525>.

³⁵ K. Stevanus, Y. A. Arifianto, A. Poluan and J. Tanhidy, 2023. Discussing the Church mandate considering Matthew 28:19-20, *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104:2, 1-11. Retrieved April 14, 2023 from <http://www.pharosjot.com>.

³⁶ J. Witoro, 2022. Theological study of Matthew 28:19-20 and its relevance to the role of the Church in the ministry of gospel preaching, *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science* 1:33. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from https://doi.org/10.31435/reglobal_ijitss/30032022/7761.

³⁷ K. Lee and F. P. Viljoen, 2010. The target group of the Ultimate Commission (Matthew 28:19), *HTS theologiese studies/theological studies* 66:1, 1-5. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from <http://www.hts.org.za>.

Matthew 28:18-20 is often considered Jesus' excellent assignment for the church. It involves the mandate to proclaim the good news to all the inhabitants of the earth. The commission to preach the good news is imperative because it was given only to the church, or to believers, before Christ's Ascension to heaven. And so, it is the mandate for the church.³⁸ The main content of Jesus' commandment to His disciples in the Great Commission is to make all people His followers through baptism and the absolute teaching of Jesus' message (Matt 28:19-20). Some of the questions that beg for an answer in this study include: What is the eventual aim of Jesus' Commission to His disciples? By what method or means does Jesus want His disciples or the church to disseminate the Gospel message? What is the challenge of digitalisation on Jesus' Commission to His followers in Matthew 28:18-20? These and other related questions are addressed in this study.

The study employed a qualitative approach, in which a literature review of relevant books, Journal articles, and the internet was conducted. The study was anchored in the grammatico-historical approach, and an interpretive design was used. Data were exegetically analysed. The grammatico-historical approach suggests that, to understand the biblical text's meaning in relation to the original author's intention, it must be interpreted through its grammar and syntax and in light of its historical context.³⁹ Understanding the challenge of digitalisation in relation to Jesus' directive to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 is essential to this study, as it will help Christians thoroughly practice Jesus' model of discipleship through the Great Commission.

The Concept of Digitalisation

Scholars have not yet reached a consensus or universal definition of digitalisation. However, the term focused on the renewable character and the encouragement of digital technology at every level of organisation.⁴⁰ This definition regards digitalisation as a current movement to maximise the use of digital artefacts, systems, and symbols within and outside organisations. As Reetz rightly notes, digitalisation centres on using current technologies to develop inventions and

³⁸ K. Stevanus, 2020. Karya kristus sebagai dasar penginjilan di dunia non-Kristen. *Fidei: Jurnal Teologi Sistematis Dan Praktika* 3:1, 1–19.

³⁹ R. T. Fuller, 2011. What do we mean by grammatico-historical exegesis? Retrieved September 10, 2022 from <https://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp?file=47911>.

⁴⁰ A. Bounfour, 2016. *Digital Futures, Digital Transformation*, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 3.

digital tools within an organisation, thereby enhancing its effectiveness, internal procedures, culture, and central leadership style.⁴¹ In the same vein, digitalisation refers to the process of converting an analogue system to a digital one.⁴² Besides, Imgrund and others argue that digitalisation entails significant developments in the use of information technology by commercial centres, the implementation of information technology initiatives, and the information processing capabilities of organisations.⁴³ Similarly, Legner and others argue that digitalisation is the socio-technical process of adapting to current technologies and to digital technologies at all levels of operation.⁴⁴ In a nutshell, digitalisation is the process of converting information from analogue to digital form. This form of definition allows for a broader sense, making it relevant to individuals, organisations, and society at large.⁴⁵

From all indications, the aforementioned definitions of digitalisation, as deduced from the works of Abasilim, Durojaiye, and Gbrevbie, indicate that digitalisation extends beyond the formation and maximisation of websites. It encompasses using cyberspace at the most critical level for the dissemination of plain web-based information, the delivery of services, and the conduct of online business, as well as the integration of information technology into the church system at all levels. The ultimate goal of digitalisation in the church is to effectively and efficiently disseminate the message of the Great Commission and to allow church members to participate in its work. As a result of digitalisation, connection and connectivity shift from bodily attendance to virtual communities and settings. This drift originates from the earthly world and extends into the spiritual experience. For instance, communities such as MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram emerged from digitalisation, which, in turn, promotes digital relationships and

⁴¹ M. Reetz, 2019. Digitalisation and leadership-an analysis of the effect of digitalisation on modern leadership characteristics and its current application in the leadership practices in the DAX 30 Companies, *Doctoral dissertation*, Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften Hamburg.

⁴² J. S. Brennen and D. Kreiss, 2016. Digitalisation, *The international encyclopaedia of communication theory and philosophy*, 1-11.

⁴³ F. Imgrund, M. Fischer, C. Janiesch and A. Winkelmann, 2018. Approaching digitalization with business process management. *Proceedings of the MKWI*, 1725-1736.

⁴⁴ C. Legner, T. Eymann, T. Hess, C. Matt, T. Böhm, P. Drews, and F. Ahlemann, 2017. Digitalization: opportunity and challenge for the business and information systems engineering community. *Business and information systems engineering* 59:4, 301-308.

⁴⁵ K. Bengler and M. Schmauder, 2016. Digitalisierung. *Zeitschrift für Arbeitswissenschaft* 70:2, 75-76.

friendships.⁴⁶ In the UK, as Lewis notes, effective digitalisation is being maximised in church settings by billions of digital users.⁴⁷ This provides evidence of the Church's implementation of digitalisation to achieve the ultimate goal of the Great Commission.

Exegetical Study of the Matthan Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)

As a way of introduction, the widely known passage, known as 'the Great Commission', makes up the climax of the whole of the Matthean Gospel.⁴⁸ The Commission's restrictiveness in the Matthean narrative is profound because the verses are unique to Matthew's Gospel.⁴⁹ The mandate to "make disciples" (v. 19), as recorded in the text, is squeezed between two Christological claims: Jesus being given all authority (v. 18) and Jesus being with his followers even unto the end of the age (v. 20a).⁵⁰ The author of this gospel concludes his gospel of the eternal assurance of his presence, with the disciples, especially with a view to understanding a promise at the beginning of the Gospel concerning the dwelling of God with man (Matt. 1:21). Before this commission, Jesus' disciples were restricted to preaching. Still, this commission gives them the authoritative order to teach, an exercise Jesus performed only while he walked with his followers physically on earth.⁵¹

In verse 18, καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ ^[a]τῆς γῆς· is translated in RSV as "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" This text records Jesus' response to His disciples' reaction. The clause at the beginning of this verse suggests that neither the worshipful nor the doubtful disciples were too close to Jesus at that moment. Προσελθὼν ("came to") is in the participle aorist active form and nominative masculine singular verb from προσέρχομαι, which means "come to, approach, come near to." It appears 86 times in the NT, and 51 occurrences are in Matthew. It occurs 5 times in Mark, 10 times in Luke, 10 times

⁴⁶ Todd J. Mullins, 2011. Online Church: A Biblical community, *PhD Dissertation*. Liberal Theological Seminary, 6.

⁴⁷ B. Lewis, 2014. The digital age: A challenge for Christian discipleship? *The proceedings of the European conference on social media*. Retrieved April 13, 2023.

⁴⁸ A. Stock, 1994. *The method and message of Matthew*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 439.

⁴⁹ D. Turner, 2008. Matthew, *Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 689.

⁵⁰ D. Turner, 2008. Matthew, *Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament*, 689.

⁵¹ E. O. Acheaw, 2021. "Make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). An exegetical study of the identity of the disciple in the Gospel of Matthew, 70

in Acts, 7 times in Hebrews, and once each in John 12:21, 1 Tim 6:3, and 1 Peter 2:4. In most cases, this verb refers to approaching in a spatial sense. In this context, it shows that Jesus came near to his disciples at His last commissioning before He ascended to heaven.⁵² The disciples' doubt was dispelled when He came near to them and declared that He had all authority in heaven and on earth.

The word ἐξουσία (authority) is the nominative feminine singular noun. It implies the official right to exercise power, which the Father gave to Jesus.⁵³ As the resurrected one, this official right or power concerns "his being entrusted with the eschaton, in which the salvation and judgment of the world come in Jesus." Thus, ἐξουσία is employed for the Risen Lord in his comprehensive position of power.⁵⁴ And so, He commanded the disciples to go in Christ's name.⁵⁵ The question is, who are the disciples who received this Commission from Jesus? Jesus' Matthean Great Commission was first given to the eleven disciples, who formed the nucleus of the Ecclesiastical assembly, as well as many brethren. As Paul notes, the brethren with the remaining eleven apostles numbered more than five hundred believers (1 Cor 15:6). This implies that Jesus' Matthean Great Commission is an assignment for all believers in Christ.⁵⁶ as a responsibility that must be carried to all human inhabitants of the earth through the preaching of the good news.

Jesus' Matthean Great Commission (vv. 19-20)

¹⁹ πορευθέντες ^[b]οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ^[c]βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, ²⁰ διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετείλαμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ ^[d]αἰῶνος.(SLBGNT)

⁵² E. Palzkill, 1990. Προσέρχουμαι, *dictionary of the New Testament*, H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), Grand Rapids: WB. Eerdmans Publishing Company, electronic version.

⁵³ J.V. Walvoord and R.B. Zuck (eds.). 2000. Bible knowledge commentary, Colorado: Communications Ministries, Electronic version.

⁵⁴ I. Broer, 1990. ἐξουσία, *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), Grand Rapids: WB. Eerdmans Publishing Company, electronic version.

⁵⁵ J.V. Walvoord and R.B. Zuck (eds.). 2000. Bible knowledge commentary, Colorado: Communications Ministries, Electronic version.

⁵⁶ M. S. Enslin, 1963. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Society of Biblical Literature, 645.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (RSV)

The primary mandate of the Great Commission is found in verses 19-20, particularly to make disciples of all the human inhabitants of the earth. As noted in verse 18, the Commission is based on Jesus’ authority. In verse 19, the word οὖν means “therefore.” As a connective conjunction, it links the preceding sentence.⁵⁷ And so, it indicates that the Commission flows from Jesus’s complete authority. This implies that, because of Jesus’s authority, the disciples are given the mandate: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” This suggests that the Great Commission can be carried out only by God’s power. No matter the usefulness of digitalisation in preaching the Gospel, without this power, it is not possible to make disciples of all nations.

The word Πορευθέντες (“go”) is the aorist passive deponent participle in the nominative masculine plural from πορεύομαι. It occurs in the NT only in the middle, and passive, often in the literal sense “to go,” “to travel,” “to journey” with no narrower definition (Luke 13:33; 19:36; Acts 9:3; 10:20; 24:25; 1 Cor 16:4, 6).⁵⁸ For being a participle, this verb carries less imperative force. According to Gaebelein, the verb, go’ has lost almost all of its imperative force.⁵⁹ However, Kittel and Friedrich note that in connection with the travelling preachers commissioned by the Risen Lord in the NT, πορεύομαι can become a term in the missionary command (Matt 10:6; John 20:17 and Matt 28:19). Thus, in Matthew 28:19, the disciples then go with the preaching of judgment and salvation to the whole world.⁶⁰ This implies that πορευθέντες in this context also shares imperative force from μαθητεύσατε. The command “go” is compulsory because water baptism, as one of the essential aspects of making disciples of all nations, cannot be achieved through digitalisation. Therefore, to fully practice Jesus’ model of

⁵⁷ H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), 1990. οὖν, *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

⁵⁸ G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), 1989. πορεύομαι, *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* 10 vol, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, electronic version.

⁵⁹ F. E. Gaebelein (ed), 1984. Matthew, Mark and Luke, *The Expositor’s Bible commentary with NIV* vol. 8, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 598.

⁶⁰ G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), 1989. πορεύομαι, *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* 10 vol, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, electronic version.

discipleship, virtual communities can function only in a supportive manner toward physical congregations.

The word μαθητεύσατε (“make disciples”) is the imperative aorist active second-person plural form of μαθητεύω, meaning “make a disciple.” Among the early believers, the term “disciples” was the most common. For them, this term went beyond being a convert or membership level. It involves training like an apprentice and being identified with Christ by learning at His feet and living according to His teaching. (Mark 3:13ff).⁶¹ In the New Testament (NT), the term “making disciples” occurs three times (Matt 27:57; Acts 14:21; Matt 28:19). In this context, auxiliary verbs such as go, baptise, and teach are employed to achieve the ultimate aim. Thus, it is the responsibility of followers of Christ to make every person they come across a follower of Jesus.⁶² This implies that wherever Jesus’ disciples are, there must be discipleship. This is because the disciples of Jesus followed Him from the beginning of His ministry until His resurrection. Now, Jesus’ Matthean Great Commission involves going forth and starting to raise people just as Jesus had been raised. This suggests that the disciples’ task is not limited to going into the entire world and proclaiming the good news to every creature (Mark 16:15), but also extends beyond mere baptising converts to include building other human beings to conform to the image of Christ.⁶³ By implication, the main task of the disciples is to reproduce others in the same way Jesus had made them through the acts of going, baptising and teaching.⁶⁴ Therefore, making disciples of all nations is the essence of Jesus’ Matthean Great Commission.

The scope is also attached to Jesus’ Matthean Commission. The word ἔθνη (“nations”) is the accusative neuter plural noun from ἔθνος, which means “people, nation.” In the NT period, according to Walter, the terminological distinction between ἔθνος and τὰ ἔθνη is firmly fixed in favour of Gentiles over Jews.⁶⁵ However, in this context, the term πάντα τὰ ἔθνη denotes all Gentiles and every

⁶¹ W. W. Wiersbe. 1989. *The Bible exposition commentary: New Testament*, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, Electronic version.

⁶² K. Lee and F. P. Viljoen, 2010. The target group of the Ultimate Commission (Matthew 28:19), *HTS Theologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 66:1, 1-5. Retrieved April 13, 2023 from <http://www.hts.org.za>.

⁶³ J. Witoro, 2022. Theological study of Matthew 28:19-20 and its relevance to the role of the Church in the ministry of gospel preaching, 33.

⁶⁴ David Turner, 2008. Matthew. *Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament* vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 669.

⁶⁵ N. Walter, 1990. ἔθνη, *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

person; Israel is inclusive. This indicates that the preaching of the gospel is for every human inhabitant of the earth, irrespective of language and tribe, without distinction.⁶⁶ A close examination of Matthew 10:5-7 reveals that the commission's jurisdiction was once restricted to "the lost sheep of Israel." Still, the expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in verse 19 implies that Gentiles are granted access to the Great Commission, as the Jews are. By implication, both Jews and Gentiles are now inclusive in the Great Commission. Thus, the task of making disciples involves all ethnic groups (of all nations).⁶⁷

The verb βαπτίζοντες ("baptise") is one of the methods to accomplish the eventual aim of making disciples of the entire human inhabitants of earth. In the NT church, the pattern of becoming a disciple begins with believing in Jesus Christ and expressing one's faith through baptism. Then, the person must devote themselves to the teaching of God's Word and to the fellowship of other believers in Christ (Acts 2:41-47). This, in turn, would qualify the person to go out, win others, and teach them (2 Tim 2:1-2).⁶⁸ The Greek word βαπτίζοντες is used in the present active participle and in the nominative masculine plural, from βαπτίζω, meaning "baptise." It occurs in the sense of "to immerse." In this context, βαπτίζοντες, as in the nominative case, serves in the position of subject. It is not used in the imperative mood. However, because of its association with the verb it influences (μαθητεύσατε – "make disciple"), the word βαπτίζοντες is well positioned to express the notion of being imperative. As Bieder rightly notes, "one cannot remove the final verse of Matthew from the total context. Although no other Evangelist has a command to baptise in its authentic parts, this silence does not argue against the authenticity of the baptismal command in Matthew."⁶⁹

He further notes that the assumption that the Risen Lord did not give a command to baptise is an uncritical bias related to a particular interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus. This is because the resurrected one "came ... to them" (προσελθὼν, Matt 28:18) with a view to accomplishing a movement toward them with his approach, hence he expected from his disciples the movement of traveling: "Go" (Πορευθέντες, v. 19). Jesus' disciples are summoned to the

⁶⁶ M. C. William, 2016. *Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)*, In the return of the theorists (pp. 67-73). Springer.

⁶⁷ B. Surgantoro, 2006. *Hati Misi*, Yogyakarta: Andi Offset, 26.

⁶⁸ W. W. Wiersbe. 1989. *The Bible exposition commentary: New Testament*, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, Electronic version.

⁶⁹ W. Bieder, 1990. βαπτίζω *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

journey to do the baptismal command as regards the call to discipleship. As a result of His right to exercise power, He considers it essential to use the element of water, which is ambiguous, as a symbol of the acceptance of a requirement for those who become disciples in the obedient service of faith.⁷⁰ The command “go” is essential because water baptism, as one of the vital aspects of making disciples of all nations, cannot be carried out through digitalisation. This is because, although virtual communities facilitate communication, they lack the physical presence and tactile involvement of the Eucharist, as well as the communal features of baptism. Therefore, virtual communities can function only in a supportive manner⁷¹ in fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission. In the same vein, Bietenhard rightly avers that the triadic baptismal formula, in the name of the Trinity, interprets an apparently original “baptise in my name.” “εἰς τὸ ὄνομα corresponds to the Hebrew word *l’šēm*, which calls for a causal or final understanding.”⁷² Thus, it is required that believers who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour be baptised and taught so that they can grow into disciples.

The next step toward the eventual aim of making disciples of all nations is teaching. The word διδάσκοντες (teaching) is the present active participle in the nominative masculine plural, derived from the verb διδάσκω, meaning “teach” or “instruct.” This verb appears 97 times in the NT. The verb διδάσκω and the noun διδαχή are used to describe a distinctive activity or function within the Church only in Matthew (23:8; 28:20 and 5:19). Unlike Mark, Matthew states the content of the teaching of Jesus “in the sense of a teaching of the law or making known the will of God, as is indicated programmatically in the Sermon on the Mount (5:1 f. and 7:29).”⁷³ Thus, the expression διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετείλαμην ὑμῖν is very important in discipleship because the emphasis of the teachings should be all that the disciples heard from Christ while they walked with him.⁷⁴ The word τηρεῖν (“to keep”) is the infinitive present active verb from τηρέω. As used in this context, it means “to keep, to observe, to pay attention to” all that Jesus has commanded His disciples. Therefore, the word of God that the disciples are to teach consists of all the messages that Jesus taught and

⁷⁰ W. Bieder, 1990. βαπτίζω, *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

⁷¹ A. Potgieter, 2019. Digitalisation and the church – a corporeal understanding of church and the influence of technology, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5:3. Retrieved May 6, 2023 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2019.v5n3.a26> .

⁷² W. Bietenhard, 1989. βαπτίζω, *Theological dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* V, 275.

⁷³ H. F. Weiss, 1990. Διδάσκω, *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

⁷⁴ E. O. Acheaw, 2021. “Make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). An exegetical study of the identity of the disciple in the Gospel of Matthew, 76.

demonstrated in His earthly ministry. To this effect, teaching is a mandate that ought to be taught at large for the spiritual growth and perfection of the body of Christ (Col 1:28; 2 Tim 3:16). Besides, in verse 20, Jesus gives the assurance of his presence with his disciples wherever they carry out the work of the Great Commission. The last conjunction καὶ (and) in verse 20 indicates equality. This implies that Jesus is equally present with His disciples as they carry out the Great Commission.⁷⁵

The Challenge of Digitalisation on the Great Commission in Matthew

28:18-20

In fact, digitalisation is an indispensable tool for the Great Commission in the contemporary church, as we are in the digital age. However, as effective and efficient as digitalisation is in discipleship, it can only serve in a supportive manner in the Great Commission. This is because, when engaged only in digitalisation within the Great Commission, there would be gaps that the contemporary church may not address in Christ's model of discipleship. As Dyer rightly warns about the contemporary making of disciples, incorporating current technological advancements should enhance this process, grounded in our biblical convictions and values. This suggests that the biblical model of Jesus' Matthean Great Commission should dictate our methods while implementing digitalisation in the propagation of the Gospel.⁷⁶

As noted in the exegetical study of Matthew 28:18-20, the ultimate purpose of the commission is to make disciples of nations under the complete authority of the Risen Lord. Using a grammatico-historical approach as its framework, the study reveals the methods for achieving the ultimate aim of Jesus' Matthean Great Commission. These methods include going, baptising, and teaching. Before discussing the challenge of digitalisation on these three methods as noted in the exegetical study of the text, there is a need to note that one of the challenges of digitalisation on the Great Commission is the challenge of putting absolute trust in the effectiveness of digitalisation in preaching the Gospel at the expense of the power and authority of the Risen Lord (v. 18; cf. Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1; Acts 1:8). As noted in the exegetical study, the Great Commission can be carried out only by God's power. No matter the usefulness of digitalisation in preaching the Gospel,

⁷⁵ J. Witoro, 2022. Theological study of Matthew 28:19-20 and its relevance to the role of the Church in the ministry of gospel preaching, 7.

⁷⁶ J. Dyer, 2011. *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 25.

without carrying God's power along with this tool, it is not possible to make disciples of all nations in line with Jesus' model of discipleship. Thus, the church cannot achieve the ultimate goal of the Great Commission solely with digitalisation without receiving God's power. This power can be received by waiting on God for power and His message for His Church, rather than relying on digitalisation.

Another challenge of digitalisation in the Great Commission is the neglect of the command to "go" as absolute. The study reveals that "going" is the first auxiliary verb used to achieve the ultimate goal of the Great Commission. Although the verb πορευθέντες ("go") is a participle verb in this context, the position is taken in this study based on Kittel and Friedrich's view that in the connection with the travelling preachers commissioned by the Risen Lord in the NT, πορεύομαι can become a term in the missionary command (Matt 10:6; John 20:17 and Matt 28:19).⁷⁷ This suggests that the verb πορευθέντες ("go") in this context also shares imperative force with the verb μαθητεύσατε ("make disciples"). Therefore, absolute neglect of the verb "go" in the Great Commission amounts to failure to keep the complete command of the Risen Lord. The command "go" is essential because water baptism, as one of the vital aspects of making disciples of all nations, cannot be carried out through digitalisation. Besides, neglecting the act of "going" makes disciples lack dedication. This is because discipleship is likened to that of an apprentice, who must be identified with the tutor for the sake of consistent learning, reflection, and practical work, with a view to becoming like Jesus (Mark 3:13ff).⁷⁸

As mentioned, a key challenge of digitalisation for the Great Commission is the lack of bodily presence required for the tactile knowledge of the Eucharist and the shared aspects of baptism. This is because although virtual communities facilitate communication, they lack bodily presence.⁷⁹ As noted in the exegetical study, the verb βαπτίζοντες (baptise) is not used in the form of a command. However, as a result of its rapport and place to the verb that influences (μαθητεύσατε – "make disciple," which is imperative), the word βαπτίζοντες, it stands in a position to

⁷⁷ G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), 1989. πορεύομαι, *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* 10 vol, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, electronic version.

⁷⁸ W. W. Wiersbe. 1989. *The Bible exposition commentary: New Testament*, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, Electronic version.

⁷⁹ A. Potgieter, 2019. Digitalisation and the church – a corporeal understanding of church and the influence of technology, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5:3. Retrieved May 6, 2023 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2019.v5n3.a26> .

express the notion of being imperative.⁸⁰ This shows that the baptismal command is necessary in the call to discipleship because it symbolises the requirement that those who become disciples serve faithfully in obedience.⁸¹ However, water baptism, as one of the vital aspects of making disciples of all nations, cannot be carried out through digitalisation. Therefore, if the church fully practices Jesus' model of discipleship, virtual communities or churches can function only in a supportive manner⁸² in fulfilling Jesus' command.

Despite the effectiveness and efficiency of digitalisation in teaching, there are various challenges to teaching as a method for achieving the ultimate goal of the Great Commission among Christians in developing countries. These challenges include the scarcity of trained and competent church workers and members, an irregular power supply, the absence of information technology infrastructure, poor network connectivity, human reluctance to change among church members, computer illiteracy, and inaccessibility in rural areas, among others. These challenges concur with the findings of Gbervbie, Ayo, Iyoha, Duruji and Abasilim.⁸³ Olaopa⁸⁴ Hi, Van, and Thi Tuyet, regarding digitalisation in secular organisations and government.⁸⁵ As a result of these challenges, some churches were unable to maximise digitalisation in teaching to achieve the ultimate goal of the Great Commission. For this reason, if the message of the Great Commission is to produce Jesus' model of discipleship, digitalisation can support it.

As Potgieter notes, rapid digitalisation is creating an opportunity for congregants who are unable to attend church in person for one reason or another to feel a sense of belonging to the church by following its teachings and services via Skype and SoundCloud, which is accessible through Facebook. However, digitalisation calls for moral parameters and the formation of fresh definitions. Consequently, the Church has the duty to guide its congregations on Christian ethical standards for digitalisation. Moreover, digitalisation is a one-way means of communication in discipleship because virtual participants cannot be heard or seen by the rest of the congregation. And so, they can be easily forgotten. Hence, this opens the door to

⁸⁰ W. Bieder, 1990. βαπτίζω *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

⁸¹ W. Bieder, 1990. βαπτίζω, *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic version.

⁸² A. Potgieter, 2019. Digitalisation and the church – a corporeal understanding of church and the influence of technology, 3.

⁸³ D. Gbervbie, C. Ayo, Iyoha, M. Duruji and U. Abasilim, 2015. *E-Governance: strategy for militating non-inclusion of citizens in policy making in Nigeria*.

⁸⁴ T. Olaopa, 2014. Seminar on sharing success stories and challenges in e-Governance/administration.

⁸⁵ T. N Hai, Q. N. Van, and M. N. Thi Tuyet, 2021. Digital transformation: Opportunities and challenges for leaders in the emerging countries in response to covid-19 pandemic, 21-36.

the vital question of individualism versus collectivism. Besides, due to online church viewing, a person may choose to focus on whatever they please and make acquaintances with people who share similar ideologies.⁸⁶ The aforementioned are the challenges of digitalisation on the Great Commission.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the ultimate aim of Jesus' Matthean Great Commission is primarily to make disciples of all human inhabitants of the earth. It also shows that actualisation of this goal requires the acts of going, baptising, and teaching. The study identifies various challenges posed by digitalisation to Jesus' Matthean Great Commission. Given the identified challenges, the study concludes that if the Great Commission's message is to produce Jesus' model of discipleship, it should not be pursued solely through digitalisation. Thus, digitalisation can function only in a supportive manner.⁸⁷ in fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission. This is because if it is engaged only through digitalisation, more converts than disciples would be produced among Christians. The study recommends that the Church not neglect the physical presence in discipleship, despite the availability of digital tools. This will enhance the church's spiritual growth.

⁸⁶ A. Potgieter, 2019. Digitalisation and the church – A corporeal understanding of church and the influence of technology, 3.

⁸⁷ A. Potgieter, 2019. Digitalisation and the church – A corporeal understanding of church and the influence of technology, 3.

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CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ON DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: ISSUES, TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Digitalisation, which is a non-analogue technology, has captured the interest of many Nigerians. Therefore, there is a need for Religious Education, which promotes positive values. Hence, it requires emphasis in a country like Nigeria, which is religiously inclined and categorised as a developing third-world country. The revolution in science and Technology and the Digital Communication, a breakthrough that present a fantastic access to information in our world, some of which are alien to the traditional African lifestyle namely; invasion of private life, false freedom, artificial life styles, internet fraud (yahoo yahoo), sex and drug related issues, that are contrary to the voice of reasoning. To address this affliction, this paper offers insights from a Christian religious perspective, drawing on the views of some experts on the subject. Furthermore, there are many questions from the religious community about the appropriate use of Digital communication. Some have banned their wards from watching some social media apps; they are worried because today's digital world thrives by selling sex as a commodity, and some youth who are inexperienced and want to explore become victims. Despite these discouraging aspects of digitalisation, Christians should not be discouraged from using it, as the benefits far outweigh the inherent dangers. The research is expository, as it will provide helpful information to address the problems of digitalisation and communication.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, Digital Communication, Issues, and Challenges

Introduction

To keep pace with the lightning speed of online transactions, it is essential to highlight the importance of Digitalised Communication. Digitalisation, a non-analogue technology, has captured the interest of many Nigerians, who enjoy watching a variety of films and videos. The importance of digitalisation is numerous, as captured in the epistemology of the Nigerian cinema. Committed artists use it to showcase Nigerian heritage. Security Personnel are increasingly finding CCTV and drones helpful. Adherents of different religious bodies use smartphones, iPads, and video CDs and DVDs, among other devices. The use of ATMs and POS is quite familiar to almost everyone in their daily transactions. These items are helpful to them because they promote human development and knowledge acquisition. According to Terri Cole, the words that will echo in your house are: “When am I going to have a smartphone?” Everyone else has one! Parents, on the other hand, want to know at what age their wards should be allowed to use smartphones. Some parents have been searching the Bible; they want to know what the scripture says as a clue before permitting their children to do so, because all sorts of things pervade social media. There is therefore a need for Religious Education that promotes positive values and moral dimensions in the context of digitalisation to meet the needs of the Christian Vision Stewardship Model.

Christian Religious Education.

Education is different from learning, which involves acquiring information from outside. For proper education, all that one learns must be appropriately assimilated to reform the individual. Education is Dynamic, with new trends and approaches developing almost by the day. Through education, the human mind is enlightened and is directed towards self-fulfilment. It is the acquisition of wealth for human development. The Latin word for education is “Paideia”, and it means training and instruction. St. Basil the Great asserted that “it is a guidance beneficial to the soul, frequently cleansing it painfully of its defilements from evil” (Trench 2000:125)³. According to the Webster’s online Dictionary⁴, “Education is instruction or training by which people (generally youth) learn to develop and use their mental, moral and physical power”. Qualitative Education makes the abstract real. To make the abstract real, according to Oyebisi⁵, means bringing out the potential, talents and inbuilt traits of the Engineer, Lawyer, Doctor, etc. There is no single passage in the Bible that mentions electronics. However, there is no single passage

in the Bible that mentions electronics. However, the views of related passages provided insight into their usage in Exodus 31:1-5. The Lord said to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bezalel⁶ the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft”.

Communication gadgets are just physical gifts. The organs of the senses that help produce speaking, reading, writing, hearing, and listening require love to transmit the truth, as a dirty mind is akin to catastrophe. Thus, Christians must work very hard to restore and retain the sanity that echoes in the Gospel according to Kakaba; God gave the Decalogue to regulate conduct positively. Francis (2019)⁷ said that Digital Communication is a basic human tool that helps us connect with others and fulfil essential human desires. Using social media in the digital age requires dialogue and respect for others. It should not be an instrument for highlighting differences and heightening divisions. The Pontiff issued this warning against the backdrop of the increasing narcissism and ‘spiral hatred’ found on the social media networks in which we define ourselves, starting with what divides us rather than with what unites us, giving rise to suspicion and the venting of every kind of prejudice (ethnic, sexual, political, religious, etc.). As Christians, we should all recognise ourselves as members of the one body whose head is Christ, thereby enjoining the faithful not to allow social media to trap them. Pope Francis clarified that the Catholic Church sees the internet as “a tool that can be used for the betterment of humanity.” Ever since the internet first became available, the Church has always sought to promote its use in the service of the encounter between persons, and of solidarity among all. Just like the Church network woven together by Eucharistic communion, where unity is based not on likes but on truth, on the Amen”

On the occasion of 2019 World Communication Day, the Catholic Bishop of Kaduna, Mathew Ndagoso, admonished the faithful to use social networks wisely, noting that they can spread falsehoods and that data are being manipulated to obtain political or economic advantage without due respect for people’s rights.

History of the Digital System

The Digital Revolution is the shift from Mechanical and Analogue Electronic Technologies of the Industrial Revolution towards Digital Electronics, which began in the latter half of the 20th century. The Digital System is a set of Digital Hardware and Software Components, including hardware, software, and networks, and their use. This was first introduced in 1946 by J. Presper Eckert and John W. Mauchly of the University of Pennsylvania¹¹, who built a Digital Machine called the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC), and they were the first to obtain a patent. It was conceived by Professor Vincent Atanasoff, who built the first digital system, the Atanasoff-Berry Computer (ABC), between 1937¹² and 1942. According to Hyman¹³, the father of The Computer was Charles Babbage. And in Wikipedia, another person whose work was of great importance in the evolution of the digital computer was the English Mathematician George Boole¹⁴, whose logic is the basis on which computer switching theory and procedures are grounded. The microprocessor and semiconductor memory were discovered in the 70s¹⁵, which saw advances in computer hardware due to their fast access speeds and large storage capacity, leading to the development of the personal computer, small and inexpensive enough for ordinary consumers. The use of personal computers grew throughout the 1980s and 90s, 16 and the spread of the World Wide Web during this period brought millions of users online.

Before this Era, the analogue system was in vogue. The advent of digital systems has led to many transformations in how ideas, facts, opinions, thoughts, messages, and writings are shared on electronic media. Achir (2019, 17) defined communication as the process of exchanging or transmitting information between people. He also defined communication as “that which helps us to send messages and ideas from one place to another”. Modern means of communication include posts, telegraphs, telephones, radio, television, telex, fax, pagers, email, video conferencing, newspapers, and cinema.

Digital System in Nigeria

Olatunde and Olugbenga (2011)¹⁸ observed that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be traced back to Nigeria to 1886, when the colonial masters connected a cable between Lagos and London. The service was extended to Ilorin and Jebba in the present Kwara and Niger States, respectively. Since then, it has grown steadily till independence and beyond, to various parts of the country.

Then it was managed solely by Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL), and the telephone and telex lines they issued increased to 90,000 and 2,000, respectively. These grew further till the 1990s with the introduction of mobile phones. The explosion in telephone services began with the introduction of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), as telephone lines grew to millions. Relatively cheap internet services now cover remote villages that depended solely on satellite phones. The emergence of new technologies in the last quarter of the 20th century brought waves of change that permeate every aspect of our lives. It has brought new opportunities in knowledge gathering on one hand and increased entrepreneurial activities in mobile phones, internet, personal computer (PC), etc. (Ahmad, Xavier, Perumel, Nor and Mohan, 2011)¹⁹

Digital Communication

According to the Online Dictionary, "Digitalisation is the adaptation of a system, process, etc. to be operated with the use of computers and the internet". The Internet uses an address scheme that differs from that of the telephone network. Muhammed Abdullahi and Anwal Gambo²⁸ (2015) stated that the word 'Internet' means an international computer network connecting other computer networks from other companies, and they define Café as a place where you can buy something; therefore, the word Internet Café means a place where people are doing transactions with networks through a computer. Ed Tittel defines the World Wide Web as one of the many services available on the Internet and on private networks. Information about the web can be found at [http:// www.wz.org](http://www.wz.org) using a browser application to navigate it. The www, for example, has a server, which is a computer program or device that provides a service to another computer program and its users. A web server is a computer that uses the HTTP protocol to send web pages to client computers when clients request them. Ed Tittel²⁹ said that HTTP stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol, which specifies the communication protocols for browsers and web servers. It is used to request a document or item from the server. The overall effect of a web service is to provide an interactive environment where users can access, manipulate, and navigate information.

Some Popular Electronic Devices

(a) Television

Perhaps the most popular electronic device is the television. According to Dominic (2019), television took several decades to develop. The inventors and engineers associated with the invention are Vladimir Zworykin, Philo Farnsworth and John

Logie Baird²⁰. Baird, a Scot living in England, was the first to demonstrate an operational television. He transmitted the first televised images of moving objects in 1924, but Philo is credited with inventing the first electronic television. Vladimir was the first to apply for patent rights in 1922. The difficulty in deciding who invented the first television centres on the fact that several discoveries were made to complete the TV set. Television is suitable for everyone because of its importance. While television programmes can be educational, if not monitored, children can watch too much of them, pick up negative habits, and not be emotionally ready for what they watch. Parents must screen the programmes their children watch. Experts advise that children under 2 years old have no business watching television. Parents should watch television with their children to provide guidance and explanations when needed.

b. Video

The video was first designed for television systems. In 1951²¹ the first videotape recorder captured live images from television cameras. Video recorders were very expensive, selling for as much as US\$50,000 during this period. In 1972, Sony began selling video cassette recorders, and prices dropped drastically. Today, we have a clear picture thanks to advanced digital techniques.

c. Phone

The telephone uses a hierarchical system that assigns every telephone in the world a unique number. Each country of the world is assigned a code, which it divides into its areas²³.

The term phone is known to Greek grammarians and natural philosophers. The term phone is an inarticulate cry of a person or animal, according to Socrates²⁴, extracted from Aristotle's 'Problemata' 2.55. Only people participate in logos (use of words), while all other things use phonics (sound). Logos is a term in Western philosophy, psychology, rhetoric, and religion derived from a Greek word meaning ground, opinion, expectation, word, speech, account, reason, discourse. Still, it became a technical term in philosophy beginning with Heraclitus (c. 535-475BCE).²⁵ Ancient Greek philosophers used the term in different ways. Plutarch, a Greek philosopher, defined the term phone as "sound that is irrational and without meaning" (Trench, 2000, 26).

1. **E-learning**, which is any form of instruction that is delivered electronically, is an integral aspect of Digitalisation as it uses computer gadgets and internet media to communicate instructions. Uzoh (2020)³⁰ said that the use of computers and the internet forms a significant component of e-learning. Okigbo and Ndolo (2011)³¹ stated that e-learning is another way of teaching and learning, encompassing instruction delivered via electronic media such as the internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcasting, audio/video tapes, interactive TV, and CD-ROM. Ofor-Douglas (2020)³² states four types of e-learning: webinars, mobile learning, virtual classroom and CD-ROM-based learning
2. E-learning offers the ability to manage and to share information across networks; its greater flexibility and provision in time and place make it suitable for every user, and with the rise of the digital age, more children are creating online accounts. Without adequate supervision, they are subject to harassment and predators.
3. **Social Media** refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It is a broadcast, sales, and marketing tool, and the office of communications and marketing is responsible for accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace, LinkedIn, email, Messenger, Pinterest, Tumblr, and YouTube. Social media is about conversation, community, connecting with the audience and building relationships. WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok Lite, YouTube, Gmail, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace

Issues in Digitalisation

1. **Inter Mirificum – In this Council**, a decree was made concerning the use of social media in the church. According to Dominic Adeiza³³, *inter mirificam*, a Latin word meaning social communication, a decree issued on December 4th 1963, urges the church, without delay and with the greatest effort, to make effective use of the media. The Council's primary concern was to make known to all Catholics the importance of using social media responsibly for the common good and to enhance the Church's apostolic ministry.

2. **Today's Developing world** - traditional media (old media) such as magazines, television, cable and radio has merge with new media that is commuter, android, to deliver digital content which is easy, fast, instant, portable borderless and create instancy, followership, sharing, content reproduction, influencers media rating, cross references and legitimacy (Adeiza Dominic 2019:19).
3. **Ethics of Social Media** – Dominic refers to social media as a set of moral principles and guidelines that govern the behaviour of individuals and organisations while using social media platforms. This is to ensure that users conduct themselves in a responsible, respectful and ethical manner. Perhaps the most far-reaching issue in digitalisation is security. The term security evokes a range of concepts related to data protection and the prevention of unauthorised access. The individual who attempts to gain unauthorised access to a network or threatens a network is called a hacker. Attempting to take undue advantage of or to exploit someone is very wrong. Users must observe the 21 rules of social media ethics.
4. **Things to avoid** – illegal downloads, porn sites, illegal websites, illegal file sharing, cyber hacking and cyber kidnapping.

Challenges

Today's digital world thrives by selling sex as a commodity. The inexperienced youths who want to explore become victims. The ignorant youths who see the traditional social conditions as old-fashioned are trapped in the web of today's social conditions of false freedom and artificial lifestyles in an unreflected materialistic world.

It is pertinent to re-engineer the youth to sustainable responsibilism; otherwise, corrupt practices like spamming, hacking, and prostitution will continue, as these inordinate transactions are done from the comfort of their homes. Pope Benedict XVI reiterated that the remedy lies in Jesus Christ, the Church, and its Liturgies, as visible in his book "Introduction to Christianity"³⁶.

When is one old Enough to use a smartphone?

Research from the University of Michigan, conducted by Nielsen, found that 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, either their own or a parent's. Experts believe that deciding an appropriate age for your kids to have a smartphone is more

about a child's development than about how many years they have reached. A book which parents having issues determining should consult is '*Raising Humans in the Digital World: Helping Kids Build a Healthy Relationship with Technology*' by Diana Graber. Experts acknowledge that there is intense social pressure among children to have a smartphone and that teenage social life is hard without one, but believe the potential problems outweigh the benefits.

The formation of Children is delicate, and experts have described adolescence as a period of storm. All that the youth need from their parents at this period is love, solidarity, peace, faith and not unhindered access to social media.

Television and Children

Television is suitable for everyone because of its importance. While television programmes can be educational, if not monitored, children can watch too much of them. This means they can pick up negative habits and are not emotionally ready for what they watch. Parents must screen the programmes their children watch. Experts advise that children under 2 years old have no business watching television. Parents should watch television with their children to provide guidance and explanations when needed.

Benefits of Digitalisation

Pope Francis 37 clarified that the Catholic Church sees the internet as a tool for the betterment of humanity. He launched an app called 'Click to Pray' which connects Catholics to a global network to share prayer intentions via smartphones. It also does the following:

- It reduces the vast cost of printing materials, and it can be accessed at their convenience, or anywhere they intend.
- It does not require the provision of message boards, charts, email and teleconferencing, which are potential drawbacks.
- It provides an opportunity to meet distant friends.
- It gives room for interaction among individuals and a sense of belonging
- It stores and creates greater access to information.
- It reduces barriers such as economic status.
- Users can meet people they may not have met in a real-life situation

Challenges

- (1) Lack of sufficient power supply.
- (2) The challenge is with effective internet connectivity
- (3) Effective skills to drive the technology are lacking
- (4) There is also the challenge of buying data at a high cost.

Conclusion

No place in scripture explicitly addresses the use of electronics. This is because they are modern gadgets. Clergy members and experts in the relevant discipline must provide instructions regarding their use. It is not wise to ban your children because of the negative aspects of the media. The parable of the wheat and tares readily comes into mind in the natural world.

Good and evil lie side by side: there are snakes, sheep, scorpions, ants, and lions, all of which help depict the nature of the world we live in. Parents must properly instruct and guide their wards. This must not mean a ban from social media.

Recommendation

From the foregoing, the following recommendations are proffered.

1. Good parenting involves close monitoring in school, place of worship, social gatherings and in and out of the house.
2. Parents must not forget that evil communication corrupts good morals. Religious groups to which they belong should also contribute to their spiritual upbringing through catechism, Sunday school, group meetings and appropriate sermons.
3. Parents should study and know the abilities of their wards.
4. The giving of a phone to children must not be based arbitrarily on age but on individual ability.
5. The progress of any country depends on the strength of its family life, because a healthy family is a healthy society.
6. Parents must socially engage their children in the use of electronics.

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INFLUENCE OF DIGITALISATION ON WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA (ANGLICAN COMMUNION)

BY

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ABSTRACT

Digitalisation is the use of modern technology that has become widespread in Christian worship centres, and the church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) parishes are not left out of this trend. This paper examined the influence of digitalisation on the worship life in the Anglican Church, especially in Nigeria. No doubt that digital device usage has provided new innovative ways to connect their followers at worship centres. The motivation for this paper tend towards mis-use of digital gadgets and its influence on the modern technology known as digitalisation on the worship life among the Anglican faithfuls where ethical virtues and varices are been taught and disseminated to the larger society of Nigeria has become a place of entertainment through distraction of attention on the part of social media users, internet crimes, looting of church treasures and members properties instead of the respect, awe and reverences expected in the church during worship service. All these are coming to the fore to offer possible solutions to the digital menace and to bring back moral values and church etiquette as a panacea to sanitise the unethical and immoral digital abuses that have destroyed values in divine worship and the actual propagation of the gospel of Christ among the people of God. This paper, therefore, compared digitalisation in Anglican Worship life and its positive and negative influences on worship standards, using ethical methods of descriptive analysis. This paper concluded that digitalisation in church worship is not inherently immoral but should be wisely utilised to foster authentic and free-flowing moments in the presence of God.

Keywords: Digitalisation, Influence, Church of Nigeria and Anglican Worship.

Introduction

Digitalisation, or Modern technology, is an indulgence that has become ubiquitous around the world. Billions of people use various digital media platforms to connect with the rest of the world. According to the World Digital Reports, there are 3.8 billion social media users worldwide, and 4.5 billion people use the internet daily.⁸⁸ Technological accessibility and advancement have revolutionised how humanity communicates in the contemporary world, while Nigeria and its places of worship, i.e., the Anglican Communion, are not left out.

People have embraced the online space to connect and engage with people from different races and continents, and religion is increasingly prominent in cyberspace. Over the years, industrial and technological digitalisation has drastically changed the moment of many religious practices. Believers can now effortlessly immerse themselves in the digital world to engage and connect with their spiritual worship Being. Anglican faithfuls from time to time utilise various digital tools for faith activities such as Sunday services, synod meetings, vigils, prayer sessions, church meetings, church account record-keeping, church bank accounts, and clergy and family day-to-day devices in their vicarages and within the church. However, it is worth noting that online faith engagement is not a new concept. The church has been implementing different media platforms and crews (e.g. live streams, projection, Television, phones, iPad, laptops, Blogs, podcasts, etc), to communicate with their vast audience; this makes it more accessible for clergy and the people to experience new ways to reach and engage with their beliefs and practices online.

Over the last few decades, researchers have shown increased interest in exploring how spiritual engagement is infused into the modern technological world. Although the digital trend was established decades ago, it became more noticeable in 2020 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown restrictions and rules.⁸⁹ Brien believes that the pandemic has fast-tracked the pre-existing development of online faith practices rather than introducing something new⁹⁰. The rise of engagement with worship practices during the early waves of the pandemic might be due to several factors. For example, in 2020, the Federal Government and some

⁸⁸ S. Kemp (20020). *Digital 2020: Global digital overview*. Global Digital Insights. 247.

⁸⁹ S.A.O. Osungbeju (2020). *The Global Coronavirus Pandemic: The Emergence of The Christian Church with a New Horizon*. Ibadan: AFI-PRINT and Publishing Ventures. 16-18.

⁹⁰ H.O. Brien (2020). *What does the rise of digital religion during COVID-19 tell us about religion's capacity to adapt?* Irish Journal of Sociology, 28(2), 242-246

State Governments began banning personal gatherings and enforcing a stay-at-home order. Hence, mosques, churches, and other places of worship were shut down, and adherents were prohibited from visiting or attending them; this, in no small way, had a significant impact on Anglican parishes in Nigeria as well. To face these challenges, most Anglican parishes began innovating and developing new ways for people to participate in weekly worship and other programmes.

As clergy and worshippers struggled to find new ways to connect in worship, many churches and parishes began coping with health and safety concerns by shifting all in-person services to digital platforms. Most parishes in cities and towns have increased their reliance on online platforms such as social media and live streaming and have begun producing worship services online for their members.⁹¹. Instead of attending in person. The increase in hybrid practices during the pandemic has also influenced how churches are more advanced in their use of digital technology.⁹².

Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) Worship and Digitalisation

What we all know and call the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) today has its roots in the evangelistic activities of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of the Church of England, which operated in what is now Nigeria in the 19th century, specifically in 1842. The missionary Henry Townsend arrived in Badagry and extended his missionary activities to Abeokuta at the request of the mission works of the returned enslaved people. Among other missionaries were Rev. and Mrs S. A. Crowther, Rev. and Mrs Golmer, Mr and Mrs Marsh, Mr Philips, a school, and others⁹³. From this humble beginning, “Anglicanism, which started in Badagry and Abeokuta, spread like wild harmattan fire to all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria”⁹⁴.

⁹¹ W. Akmaliah, and A.N. Burham (2021). *Digital Islam in Indonesia: The Shift of Ritual and Religiosity during Covid-19*. ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

⁹² Pew Research Centre (2020). *Most Americans say the Coronavirus Outbreak has impacted their lives*. Pew Research Centre Social and Demographic Trends.

⁹³ W.O. Wotogbe-Weneka, (1997). *Anglicanism: (Revised, with a Chapter on GAFCON)* Owerri: Springfield Publishers Ltd., 31-32.

⁹⁴ Titus B. Olayinka, (2010). *Concise Hints on Anglicanism and Episcopal Terms*. Ibadan: Ibadan Diocesan Printing Press, 1-2.

It should be noted that the Anglican Church in Nigeria, since its inception, has worshipped God with reverent devotion and allegiance; its worship is characterised by adoration, glorification, exaltation, and idolatry. The various forms of their worship are: Liturgical services, Non-Liturgical services, Statutory services, and Occasional services. They meet in these forms of worship: Mattins, Midday Prayer, Compline, and Eucharistic services.

However, in all these worship lives in the Anglican Church, digital technology has come to stay. It has become so integrated into the fabric of the church, so enmeshed in the various substructures of their daily living, that it is even now indispensable in the Anglican Church and other religious gatherings in Nigeria, especially since the wake of the pandemic, they make greater use of the digital technology resources at their disposal.

Clergy and every file and rank of the church who had been technologically resistant before Year 2020 had to rethink their critique of technology, many have had to embrace it for their survival, for example livestreaming of Sunday and weekly services, now after the pandemic, most of the Anglican churches in Nigeria have resumed their worship in livestreaming, recording of the services, posting on YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media devices.

The relationship that exists between technology and church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) especially on worship life has become a phenomenon that is very attractive and impressive, however the degree and scope of synergy are often complex and progressive in such a globalised society of today where technology has evolved in a grid of digital infrastructure negotiating both time and space which has metamorphosed into a multi-faceted institution, wherein it seeks to address, not only mans spiritual but also man's extensive communal, cultural economic and other needs. Hence, this enhances the Anglican priests' level of administrative proficiency, accountability, and transparency in their day-to-day pastoral duties. Therefore, the interest of these movements, though conflicting sometimes manage to address the everyday and societal needs always in continuum of its social responsibilities has dived new territories by adopting and deploying new technologies, it has negotiated for a space as the mediation of Nigerian's emerging social order in the digital pace, characterised by the new media, is expanding at a quick speed.⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ A Silverblart (2004), Media as Social Institution. *Sage Journals*, 35-41.

Influences of Digitalisation on the Worship Life of The Nigerian Anglicans

There is no gain saying that there are some empirical proofs that demonstrated the benefits of new telecommunication devices on the worship and administrative activities of most Anglican Churches in Nigeria, regardless of their geographical locations, hence this has re-structured the well-being of individual members of the church and their family life, because most of the gadgets used in the churches are to edify spiritual and to build ethical and moral characters for the largest society e.g. projection of videos, films, sermons and other Christians programmes for members to view in the various parishes and even at the Diocesan levels like Lagoon Television in the diocese of Lagos and Anglican Cable Network of Nigeria (ACNN) in Abuja for Anglican faithfuls to watch, to mode healthy lifestyles and establishment of strong family life; even a times during divine worship services, revivals at various homes.⁹⁶ These also help improve a balanced spiritual, physical, and mental life.

Easy and convenient access to the church's sacred books is another positive influence of digitalisation on the worship life of Anglicans, because opening worship hymn books such as Hymns Ancient and Modern, the Church of Nigeria Hymnal, and the Bible is easier on a projector or a smartphone. Worshippers and worship leaders could easily assess their materials in a few seconds by using their smartphones during hymn singing, Bible reading, or sermon delivery.

Advanced digital evangelism is another way that enhances Acts of Worship in the Anglican Church. Most pastors conduct prayer meetings, revivals, and messages via Zoom, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook to meet congregants' spiritual needs without meeting in person in the church auditorium. This has, in no small way, advanced positive Christian behaviour in the workplace.⁹⁷

Similarly, the use of digital media gargets in most Anglican Churches in Nigeria, has dramatically enhanced the worship life of the members through rapport and wellbeing strategies on social media between the clergypersons, Church members and other groups within the church setting which has extensively promoted individual and corporate spiritual growth and interpersonal strength, because the

⁹⁶ P. Fagan (2006). *Why Religion Matters Even More: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability*.

⁹⁷ D. Green (2012). *From Poverty to Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world*. UK: Practical Action Publishing and Oxford: Oxfam International

digital media has served as an insurance mechanism to people who are lonely and lack agency⁹⁸.

Furthermore, evangelism and digital media enhance the moral and spiritual lives of Anglican faithful through worship by allowing them to download prayer schedules to their mobile devices, which are automatically adjusted for location and season. Thanks to searchable online Bibles like BibleGateway, biblical sections are being created and distributed utilising artificial intelligence to address the moral requirements of the church members directly.

Distance has been eliminated, as Church Ministers in some Anglican Churches can reach members who may be unable to meet their clergy members face to face for worship and services. They can join their fellow congregants online. Hence, non-traditional worship styles and spaces with rhythmic set designs through big screens of song lyrics and no notices. Technology has enabled most Anglican parishioners to text questions or responses to their clergy's messages, and vice versa, allowing page views and comment feedback through Twitter followers and Facebook friends.

Most of the Anglican Church lay members are adequately involved in social media and the interest facilities through participatory media, allowing individual church outside of the church organisation to contribute and shape the society around them for good; since social media inspires the people to share their opinions on worship by writing on Church Facebook wall, sending to Twitter message or WhatsApp platforms which connotes participation with significant reforms.

On the other hand, it should be noted, however, that digitalisation usage in worship has some adverse effects on the free flow of worship service in the Anglican Church, among which are:

Firstly, digitalisation in worship does not create strong generations of committed Anglican faithfuls, since most worship liturgies are already streamlined or on a palm gadget, making it very difficult to open hard copies of the liturgical books and the Holy Bible, and familiarisation with worship becomes difficult too.

Secondly, technology has created a worship experience of isolation, distraction, and entertainment rather than one of awe, reverence, and participation, since some

⁹⁸ C. Graham and S. Crown (2014). *Religion and Wellbeing around the world: Social purpose, social time, or social insurance?* International Journal of Wellbeing, 1-27.

may be at home attending to other domestic activities rather than being together with fellow Anglican faithful in the Church auditorium.

Third, in some Anglican Parish Churches in Nigeria, technology has been allowed to redefine and reshape the culture of sitting together after church services to discuss family issues, politics, sports, and other national matters in relative comfort.

Finally, as technology provides distractions that draw some church members away from the main message and liturgical rules in Anglican worship, bodies and souls are divided, because Christianity requires conformity to God's standards, the Holy Spirit's leadership, and true Anglican formularies, not technological standards.

In conclusion, the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has seen significant shifts in how information is communicated during worship services and how technology, especially new technology, is changing its members. We have seen the proliferation of megachurches; we have also not taken cognisance of Cyber churches that have literally evaded the digital landscape within the church. Now they are confined to a single web page where their activities are broadcast, e.g., Lagoon Radio and Television in Lagos and the Anglican Cable Network of Nigeria (ACNN) in Abuja. All these strengthen their Communion in no small way, as a church in Nigeria, as they embrace new technology in droves, with online worship experiences offering countless choices.⁹⁹.

Therefore, digitalisation is not inherently bad or evil, but worshippers should use it carefully and show God the appropriate dignity, awe, reverence, and respect during worship services.

⁹⁹ W.C. Ihejirika (2012). *From Televisuality to Social Activism: Nigerian televangelist and their socio-political agenda*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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**EXAMINING THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH STUDENTS’
FELLOWSHIP OF NIGERIA’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL
SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AMONG
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS STUDENTS**

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the Apostolic Church Students’ Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON) at the University of Lagos on fostering social connections and enhancing student well-being amidst academic pressures and isolation. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combined qualitative interviews with TACSFON leaders and quantitative questionnaires distributed to 100 participants, utilising purposive and stratified random sampling to capture diverse perspectives, and employing thematic analysis and percentage-based data visualisation for data interpretation. Grounded in Robert Putnam’s Social Capital Theory, the study finds that 97% of TACSFON members report a strong sense of belonging, and 94% report receiving adequate emotional and spiritual support from leaders. Furthermore, 99% believe that TACSFON significantly contributes to their spiritual development, illustrating the practical application of social capital within a religious context. The study concludes that the Apostolic Church Students Fellowship of Nigeria significantly contributes to students’ academic, social, and spiritual experiences. Recommendations include implementing regular mental health programs, expanding leadership development initiatives, strengthening the alum network, and forming partnerships for youth development to amplify TACSFON’s positive impact. Future research should explore similar frameworks in various religious contexts to investigate broader implications for student well-being.

Keywords: Social Support, Community Building, Leadership Development, Moral Values and University of Lagos

Word counts: 204

Introduction

Religion significantly influences individuals by shaping their beliefs, values, behaviours, and social bonds. It serves as a source of moral direction, emotional comfort, and a sense of belonging, all of which are vital for both personal and social development. In higher education, students balance academic pursuits with extracurricular activities, including religious engagements. Religious fellowships, such as Christian student groups, offer opportunities for spiritual growth, community building, and fostering meaningful connections that enhance students' overall well-being.

A notable example is The Apostolic Church Students' Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON), founded in 1978 at the University of Lagos. Since then, TACSFON has grown into a vital organisation that enables students to maintain their religious practices, connect with fellow believers, and foster personal and spiritual growth. It serves as a transformative space where members are guided towards future leadership roles within the church and society. TACSFON's mission is to promote students' spiritual well-being while fostering unity, mutual support, and a strong sense of community among its members.

This study investigates how TACSFON contributes to social support and community development among students at the University of Lagos. By offering spiritual guidance and a robust support network, TACSFON plays a vital role in helping students navigate the challenges of university life. This support fosters personal growth, social connections, and spiritual development (Cohen, 2015; Donahoo, 2014). While the importance of support systems in higher education is widely recognised, limited research has focused on the unique contributions of religious fellowships, such as The Apostolic Church Students' Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON), in this regard.

University life often brings challenges such as academic pressure, loneliness, and emotional stress, which can significantly impact students' well-being. Traditional university resources, such as student unions and counselling services, may not fully address students' holistic needs, particularly their spiritual and social needs. Religious fellowships like TACSFON provide a valuable alternative, offering students opportunities to form meaningful relationships, receive moral guidance, and build a supportive community rooted in shared faith.

Established in 1978 at the University of Lagos, TACSFON aims to promote spiritual and social development among students. However, there is insufficient research on its specific impact in these areas. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how TACSFON provides social support and fosters a sense of community, with a focus on its role in enhancing students' academic, spiritual, and personal growth. The findings could provide valuable insights into the contributions of religious groups to university students' overall well-being.

This study aims to examine the multifaceted role of The Apostolic Church Students' Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON) in providing social support and fostering a sense of community among its members at the University of Lagos. It seeks to analyse the fellowship's activities, interactions, and programs to understand how TACSFON creates an environment where students can find emotional, spiritual, and social support through meaningful connections.

Additionally, the study explores TACSFON's impact on the development of leadership skills and moral values among its members. By participating in mentorship programs, spiritual teachings, and leadership opportunities, members develop essential qualities that prepare them for responsibilities within the church and society at large.

By focusing on these objectives, the research aims to highlight TACSFON's significant role in fostering its members' spiritual, social, and personal growth. It will also emphasise the broader contributions of religious fellowships in shaping students' lives beyond academics, particularly in areas of leadership and moral development. The paper seeks to address the following questions:

1. How does TACSFON provide social support and cultivate a sense of community among its members at the University of Lagos?
2. In what ways does TACSFON contribute to the development of leadership skills and moral values among its members at the University of Lagos?

“Investigating TACSFON's Role in Social Support and Community Building at the University of Lagos reveals significant benefits for various stakeholders.

Firstly, students who participate in TACSFON experience the most direct advantages. The fellowship fosters a sense of belonging and emotional support, helping members manage the academic and social challenges of university life. Through activities such as fellowship meetings, prayer sessions, and social events,

TACSFON creates a safe and welcoming space for students to share their struggles, receive encouragement, and build meaningful relationships. These connections often extend beyond emotional support to academic and even financial assistance, enriching members' university experience.

Secondly, this investigation benefits university authorities and counsellors. By understanding TACSFON's positive role in student welfare, the university can explore partnerships with similar organisations to enhance student support systems. TACSFON's contributions to fostering a strong sense of community can complement university counselling services, alleviating their workload while promoting student well-being.

Lastly, the broader University of Lagos student community benefits indirectly. TACSFON members often develop leadership skills, moral values, and a community-focused mindset, serving as role models for their peers. Their involvement in campus-wide community-building initiatives promotes inclusivity, cooperation, and mutual support, enriching the campus culture and fostering a more empathetic and supportive university environment for all."

The study on TACSFON's role in social support and community building at the University of Lagos focuses on how this fellowship group influences its members socially and emotionally. It investigates activities such as fellowship meetings, prayer sessions, and social events to understand how these initiatives foster relationships and provide mutual support. The study also explores how TACSFON cultivates a sense of belonging among students, helping them feel connected within the larger university setting. Additionally, it examines the group's role in shaping leadership qualities and moral values among its members, highlighting its broader influence on the university community.

This research aims to examine how religious groups, such as TACSFON, contribute to students' overall well-being and development. However, several limitations should be noted. The study is limited to TACSFON at the University of Lagos, so its findings may not be fully applicable to similar groups at other universities, where challenges and dynamics may differ. Furthermore, the reliance on data from TACSFON members could present a narrow perspective, potentially overlooking the group's impact on non-members or the broader student population. Lastly, the study predominantly focuses on positive contributions, leaving gaps in addressing potential challenges or negative aspects of

TACSFON's activities, which may limit the comprehensiveness of its conclusions.

The study provides practical and clear definitions for key terms as follows:

Social Support: This encompasses the emotional, academic, and financial assistance that TACSFON extends to its members. It aims to help students navigate the challenges of university life by building a supportive network that fosters care and encouragement.

Community Building: Refers to TACSFON's initiatives to cultivate a sense of belonging among members. This is achieved through regular interactions, group activities, and support systems that enhance relationships and promote unity.

Leadership Development: Highlights TACSFON's role in equipping students with leadership skills. Through opportunities to take on leadership roles, members gain practical experience in decision-making, teamwork, and responsibility.

Moral Values: The ethical standards TACSFON promotes among its members. Through Bible studies, mentorship programs, and discussions, the fellowship encourages students to uphold integrity and lead morally upright lives both on and off campus.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Apostolic Church Students' Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON) plays a crucial role in providing social support and fostering community among its members at the University of Lagos. One of the primary ways TACSFON achieves this is through regular fellowship meetings, where students come together for prayer, worship, and the sharing of personal experiences. These gatherings not only promote bonding among members but also foster a supportive environment that offers a sense of belonging, especially for students away from home (Adeoye, 2022). In this family-like setting, students can openly discuss their challenges, seek guidance, and receive emotional support from peers who can relate to their experiences.

Additionally, TACSFON organises small group discussions and Bible study sessions. These smaller settings encourage deeper interactions among members, allowing for more personal conversations and fostering stronger connections. Members often find it easier to share personal problems in such intimate settings, knowing trusted friends surround them. Through these small groups, students offer

each other academic, financial, and even spiritual guidance, creating a robust support network (Eke, 2021). This peer support structure not only helps students cope with the pressures of university life but also builds long-lasting friendships.

TACSFON also hosts social events and outreach programs that further strengthen the community. By participating in these activities, members work together towards common goals, whether it is organising charity events or visiting less privileged communities. These shared experiences help to build teamwork and unity among members, giving them a sense of purpose and a collective identity (Ogunyemi and Shola, 2020). The emphasis on community service also teaches members the importance of giving back, thereby strengthening their bond and sense of responsibility to one another and to society.

Moreover, the fellowship provides mentorship opportunities in which older members or alumni guide younger students through their academic and spiritual journeys. This mentorship helps new students adjust to university life by providing practical advice and support in areas such as time management, stress management, and academic excellence. The combination of mentorship, group activities, and spiritual guidance allows TACSFON to create a holistic support system for its members, promoting not only their spiritual growth but also their personal and academic development (Okoro, 2021).

The study by Glass and Gesing (2018) on international students highlights how student organisations help create a sense of belonging, which directly ties to TACSFON's fostering of community. As international students develop larger, more diverse networks, TACSFON helps its members build strong social connections, fostering a sense of emotional and social support. By participating in TACSFON activities, members can build a tight-knit community, ease feelings of isolation, and enhance their university experience.

This mirrors how student organisations generally offer a platform for students far from home to integrate into their new environment, thereby building social capital that can help them succeed academically and personally. In conclusion, TACSFON's initiatives at the University of Lagos play a key role in providing emotional, spiritual, and academic support to its members, fostering a strong sense of community and belonging.

The Apostolic Church Students' Fellowship of Nigeria significantly helps its members at the University of Lagos develop leadership skills and moral values through practical and intentional methods. One of the primary ways this is

achieved is by providing students with opportunities to take on leadership roles within the fellowship. Members can serve as group leaders, event coordinators, or part of the fellowship's executive committee. These positions allow students to practice leadership by managing teams, delegating tasks, organising events, and solving problems. According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), leadership is most effectively learned through practice, and TACSFON provides an environment where students can engage in real-world leadership experiences. This hands-on approach equips members with essential skills like decision-making, teamwork, and communication, preparing them for leadership roles both within the university and in their future careers (Kouzes and Posner, 2012). Moreover, TACSFON places strong emphasis on developing moral values rooted in Christian teachings. Through regular Bible studies, mentoring sessions, and ethical discussions, members are encouraged to apply these values in their daily lives. As Jones (2019) points out, moral development in a religious context often involves teaching ethical principles, such as honesty, integrity, and compassion, which are essential for building strong leaders. The mentorship within TACSFON, where older members guide younger ones, reinforces these values. This aligns with the research of Smith and Denton (2005), who emphasise that mentorship in religious groups plays a crucial role in shaping moral character. By fostering an environment where moral and ethical behaviour is consistently modelled and taught, TACSFON ensures that its members not only develop leadership skills but also lead with integrity and responsibility (Smith and Denton, 2005; Jones, 2019).

Harper and Quaye (2007) argue that student organisations foster leadership skills, particularly among marginalised groups advocating for justice and equality. Similarly, TACSFON provides a platform for members to develop leadership skills through activities that promote responsibility and accountability. Like African American student leaders who advocate for racial uplift, TACSFON members can develop cross-cultural communication skills and promote moral values grounded in Christian principles. Additionally, Rosch and Collins (2017) emphasise that student organisations create environments conducive to leadership learning, which aligns with TACSFON's focus on leadership development through hands-on roles within the fellowship. Student participation in these leadership roles fosters accountability, transparency, and moral integrity, preparing them for responsibilities beyond university life. This holistic approach to leadership and moral development reflects TACSFON's commitment to producing well-rounded individuals who are prepared to positively influence their communities (Bennett and Estep, 2015).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Capital Theory, introduced by Robert Putnam in 1993, provides a valuable framework for understanding how social networks, trust, and shared norms within a community promote mutual benefits and collective action. Putnam's later work, particularly in 2015, highlighted how social capital fosters cooperative relationships that benefit both individuals and society. The theory views social capital as a resource embedded in networks that creates opportunities for economic and social support. This aligns with Nan Lin's (2002) perspective, which emphasises that social networks are essential for accessing resources and creating opportunities.

In the context of TACSFON at the University of Lagos, Social Capital Theory explains how the relationships and trust cultivated among members foster socio-economic outcomes. TACSFON creates a supportive community where students can share their challenges and receive peer assistance, fostering a sense of belonging like family. This environment helps reduce the isolation many students feel when separated from their biological families and enhances their overall well-being.

Furthermore, TACSFON's alum association extends this sense of community beyond graduation, encouraging long-term engagement through leadership involvement and support for current students. By applying Social Capital Theory to this study, it becomes evident how TACSFON's activities, rooted in trust and cooperation, positively affect members' academic, financial, and psychological well-being. By strengthening the social fabric among its members, TACSFON enhances students' academic performance, career development, and financial stability.

Thus, Robert Putnam's Social Capital Theory offers a comprehensive understanding of how TACSFON contributes to the success and well-being of its members, illustrating the socio-economic impact of active participation in such networks (Putnam, 2015; Lin, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research designs to examine the socio-economic impact of TACSFON at the University of Lagos. The qualitative component involved conducting interviews with key leaders, including the president and nine executive members, to gain diverse insights. The quantitative component used questionnaires distributed to 100 participants, representing various fellowship units such as choir,

ushering, welfare, and general members. This dual approach facilitated a thorough exploration of both leadership and general member perspectives.

The research was carried out on the University of Lagos campus, where TACSFON is active. Purposive sampling was used to select the 10 executive members for interviews, while stratified random sampling was employed to choose the 100 questionnaire respondents. The data collection instruments included a self-designed questionnaire with five sections—demographic details and research questions—utilising a 4-point Likert scale, along with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary data was gathered from relevant academic sources.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed, with prior approval obtained from the TACSFON president and executives before conducting interviews or recording data. All participant information was kept anonymous, and consent was obtained for recording the interviews. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the qualitative data, identifying key themes, while quantitative data was analysed using simple percentages and visualised through graphics. This comprehensive methodology effectively addressed the research objectives and answered the research questions.

Demographic information of participants

Table 1: Respondents' age:

Age range	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Under 18 yrs	1	1%
18-20 yrs	34	34%
21-23 yrs	43	43%
24-26 yrs	16	16%
27-30 yrs	5	5%
Above 30 yrs	1	1%
Total	100	100%

The data reveals the age distribution of respondents, highlighting that the largest group, 43%, is aged 21-23 years, making it the most common age range. Following this, 34% of respondents are between 18 and 20 years old. Those aged 24-26 years account for 16%, while those aged 27-30 years account for 5%. The youngest (under 18) and oldest (over 30) groups each represent just 1% of the total respondents. Overall, the findings indicate that the respondents are mainly young adults, with a significant concentration in the 21-23 age range.

Table 2: Respondents' gender:

Sex	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Male	32	32%
Female	68	68%
Total	100	100%

The data shows a gender imbalance among the respondents, with 68% identifying as female and 32% as male. This indicates that more than two-thirds of the participants are women, with one-third men, among 100 respondents. The findings highlight a notable gender disparity in favour of females.

Table 3: Respondents' current year of study:

Levels (years)	Frequency	Percentages (%)
100 level	7	7%
200 level	34	34%
300 level	22	22%
400 level	28	29%
500 level	8	8%
Total	100	100%

The data reveal that second-year students in the 200 level constitute the largest group, accounting for 34% of respondents. This is followed by 29% of final-year students in the 400-level and 22% of third-year students in the 300-level. Fifth-year students in the 500-level account for 8%, while first-year students in the 100-level account for the smallest share at 7%. Overall, the distribution reflects a well-rounded representation of students across academic levels, with the highest concentration at the 200 level.

Table 4: Respondents' course of study:

Divisions	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Arts/Law/Agriculture	36	36%
Sciences/Computer studies	22	22%
Education/Social science	21	21%
Engineering/Technology	15	15%
Management Science	3	3%
Architecture	2	2%

Accounting	1	1%
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The data shows the distribution of respondents by academic division. The largest group, at 36%, consists of students from the Arts, Law, and Agriculture divisions, indicating strong representation in these areas. The Sciences and Computer Studies divisions account for 22% of respondents, followed closely by Education and Social Science at 21%. Engineering and Technology account for 15%, while Management Science accounts for 3%. The smallest groups are Architecture at 2% and Accounting at 1%. Overall, the distribution reflects a diverse range of academic disciplines, with the majority of respondents in the Arts, Law, Agriculture, Sciences, and Education fields.

Table 5: Respondents' duration of membership:

Time (years)	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Less than 1 year	22	22%
1-2 years	30	30%
2-3 years	21	21%
3-4 years	11	11%
More than 4 years	16	16%
Total	100	100%

The data reveal that most respondents have relatively short to moderate experience in their roles. Specifically, 30% have 1 to 2 years of experience, while 22% have less than 1 year. Additionally, 21% fall within the 2- to 3-year range, and 11% have 3- to 4-year experience. Only 16% of respondents report having more than 4 years of experience. Overall, there is a notable concentration of individuals with less than four years of experience.

In what ways is TACSFON providing social support and fostering a sense of community among its members at the University of Lagos?

TACSFON provides a strong sense of belonging and community among its members.

TACSFON provides a strong sense of belonging and community among its members.

100 responses

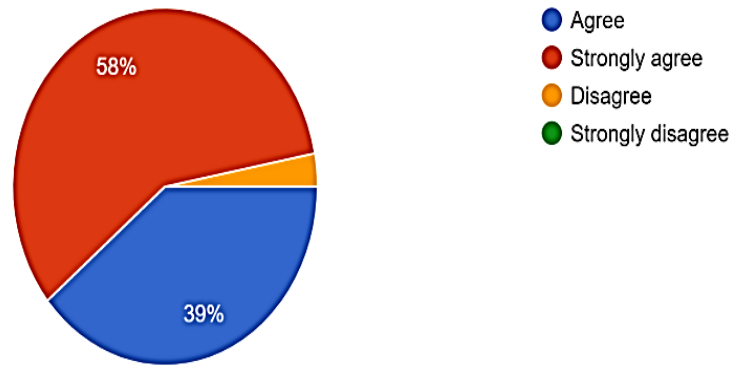


Figure 1: The provision of a sense of belonging and community among members

The data indicates that TACSFON fosters a strong sense of belonging and community among its members, with 97% of participants agreeing with this statement. However, a small minority (3%) disagreed, which may be attributed to recent involvement in the fellowship or a lack of sociability. The majority of respondents align with Tinto's (1993) perspective that organisations like TACSFON play a vital role in enhancing students' sense of connection, which is essential for retention and satisfaction. On the other hand, a minority agrees with Strayhorn's (2012) view that not all students experience a sense of inclusion due to factors such as social identity, comfort levels, or a lack of inclusivity, which may explain the 3% who disagreed.

I feel supported by fellow TACSFON members in both academic and personal matters.

I feel supported by fellow TACSFON members in both academic and personal matters

100 responses

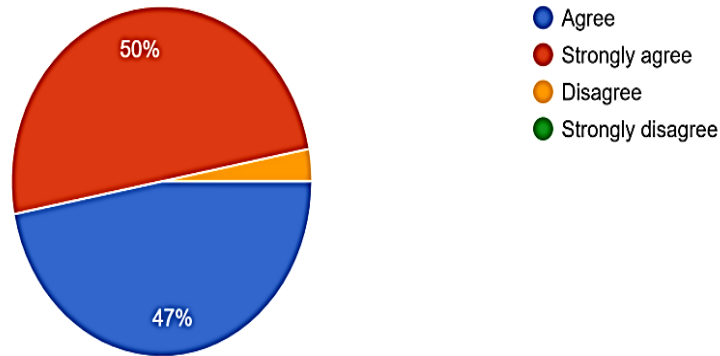


Figure 2: The feeling of academic and personal support among members

According to the data above, 97% of study participants agree that they feel supported by fellow TACSFON members in both academic and personal matters. This is because the remaining 3% disagree, implying that they do not feel supported by fellow members of the fellowship in their academic and personal lives. This could also be because they are new to the fellowship and have not yet mingled well with other members. Most respondents agree with Kuh's (1993) view that student organisations like TACSFON enhance academic performance and personal growth through peer support. However, a minority align with Bean and Metzner's (1985) perspective, suggesting that less-involved students may not feel supported, which explains the 3% who disagree.

TACSFON organises social events and activities that enhance camaraderie among members.

TACSFON organizes social events and activities that enhance camaraderie among members

100 responses

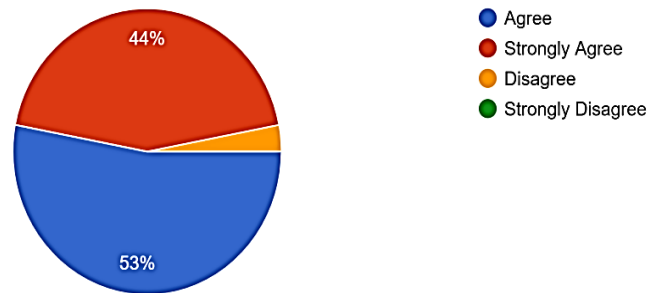


Figure 3: Organisation of social events and activities that enhance socialisation

The result from this assumption maintains the same pattern as the two previous assumptions, where only three (3%) participants continue to disagree on the assumption that TACSFON provides social support and fosters a sense of community among members. This is while 97% of participants, a convincing number, agree that TACSFON organises social events and activities that enhance members' sociability. Most respondents agree with Kuh's (2009) view that social events are crucial for enhancing sociability and community, while a minority align with Baxter Magolda's (2001) critique that these events may feel forced or ineffective for some students, explaining the small percentage who disagree.

The relationships I have built through TACSFON have positively impacted my university experience.

The relationships I have built through TACSFON have positively impacted my university experience

100 responses

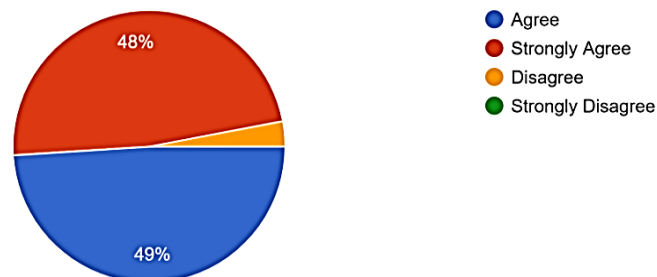


Figure 4: Building positive relationships that impact university experience

Maintaining the same pattern as the preceding assumptions, this assumption also shows that TACSFON helps members build relationships that positively impact their university experience. 97% of participants agree with this assumption, while only 3% disagree. Most respondents agree with Berger and Milem's (1999) research that participation in student organisations such as TACSFON fosters positive relationships, thereby enhancing university satisfaction and academic success. The 3% who disagree align with McMillan and Chavis's (1986) view that not all students experience these benefits, possibly feeling alienated or disconnected, underscoring the challenge of inclusivity.

TACSFON leaders and members are approachable and provide emotional and spiritual support when needed.

TACSFON leaders and members are approachable and provide emotional and spiritual support when needed.

100 responses

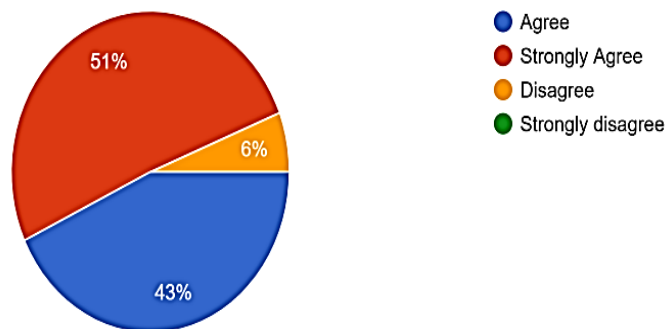


Fig 5: Approachability of Tacsfon leaders and members for emotional and spiritual support

As shown in the data above, 94% of participants agree that both members and leaders of TACSFON are approachable and provide emotional and spiritual support to members who need it. However, 6% of participants disagree with this assumption, which could imply that they gave this response due to limited experience. Most respondents agree with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) view that organisations like TACSFON provide crucial emotional and spiritual support, indicating effective leadership. However, a minority align with Baxter Magolda's (2001) view that the quality of support can vary, with the 6% who disagree possibly reflecting unmet needs or expectations, emphasising the importance of genuine engagement from leaders.

Research Question 2: What are the contributions of TACSFON to the spiritual and personal development of its members at the University of Lagos?

TACSFON has significantly contributed to my spiritual growth and development

TACSFON has significantly contributed to my spiritual growth and development.

100 responses

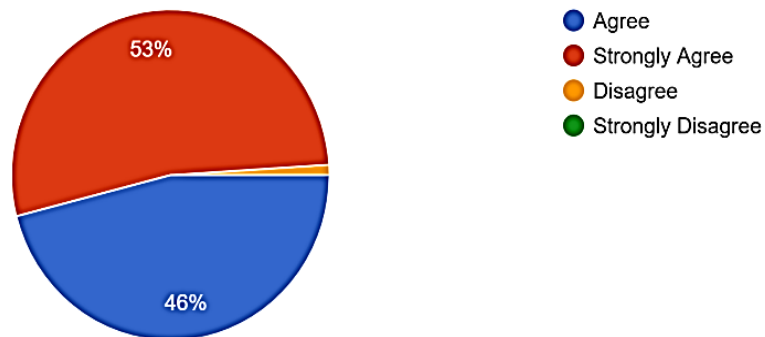


Figure 6: The contribution of TACSFON to the spiritual growth and development of members

The data presented above highlights TACSFON's significant contribution to the spiritual growth and development of its members. A strong 99% of participants agreed that the fellowship plays a crucial role in their spiritual growth, while only 1% disagreed. It is important to recognise that spiritual matters are deeply personal and can be viewed differently. Nevertheless, the overwhelming 99% agreement strongly indicates that TACSFON greatly supports its members' spiritual development. This finding aligns with Parks (2011), who asserts that organisations like TACSFON play a vital role in fostering spiritual growth through community support and shared beliefs.

The teachings and activities of TACSFON have strengthened my faith and beliefs.

The teachings and activities of TACSFON have helped me strengthen my personal faith and beliefs

100 responses

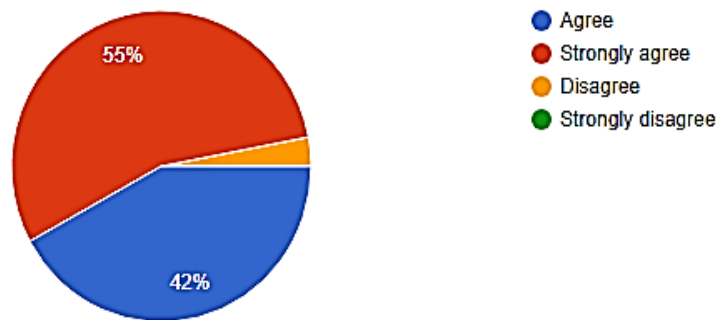


Figure 7: The impacts of teaching and activities of TACSFON on the personal faith and beliefs of members

The data shown above clearly indicate that TACSFON's teachings and activities have strengthened respondents' personal faith and beliefs. This is because 97 (97%) participants agree. However, 3 respondents (3%) disagree with this position, which may be due to a lack of commitment or attention on their part. It is left to participating members of the fellowship to make good use of whatever lessons the fellowship leadership teaches.

Most respondents agree with Smith and Snell (2009) that faith-based organisations like TACSFON significantly strengthen personal faith, as reflected by 97% of participants. However, the 3% who disagree may align with Fowler's (1981) view that differences in spiritual development stages can affect the impact of these teachings, suggesting that TACSFON's activities may not fully resonate with everyone.

Participation in TACSFON has enhanced my personal development, including my character and values.

Participation in TACSFON has enhanced my personal development, including my character and values.

100 responses

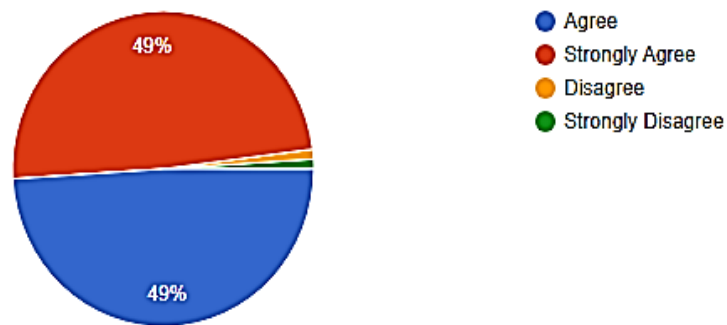


Fig 8: Enhancement of members' personal development through participation in TACSFON

The above data also shows a convincing positive response regarding whether participating in TACSFON activities has enhanced participants' personal development. Of 98 participants, 98 (98%) agreed that their participation in the fellowship enhances their personal development; 2 (2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Most respondents agree with Chickering and Reisser (1993) that student organisations like TACSFON significantly enhance personal development, as shown by the 98% who reported positive growth. However, a minority may align with Arnett's (2000) theory, suggesting that some students exploring different identities may not fully benefit from TACSFON's structured opportunities for personal development.

The mentorship and guidance provided by TACSFON leaders have positively impacted my spiritual journey.

The mentorship and guidance provided by TACSFON leaders have positively impacted my spiritual journey.

100 responses

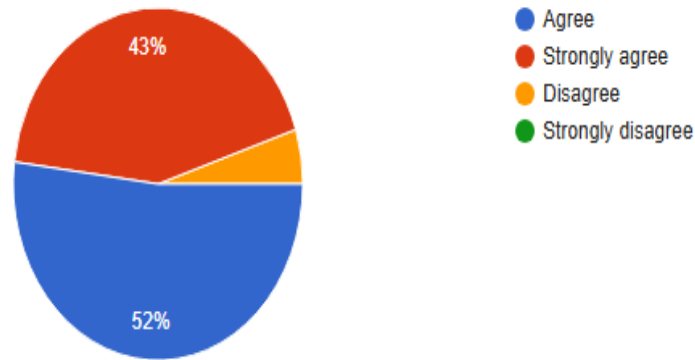


Fig. 9: The impacts of mentorship and guidance on the personal faith and beliefs of members

As shown above, 95 (95%) participants agree or strongly agree that the mentorship and guidance provided by leaders in TACSFON have positively impacted their spiritual journey. Moreover, 5 (5%) participants disagree, suggesting they may not have been actively participating in the mentorship and guidance programs, or that the fellowship still needs to do more in this area.

Most respondents agree with Parks (2011) that mentorship in organisations such as TACSFON significantly enhances spiritual growth, as reflected in the 95% who felt positively impacted. However, a minority may align with Arnett's (2000) view, suggesting that some participants, in a phase of independent belief exploration, might find structured mentorship less relevant or constraining to their spiritual journey.

TACSFON activities and programs have equipped me with the skills to lead a spiritually fulfilling life.

TACSFON activities and programs have equipped me with the skills to lead a spiritually fulfilling life.

100 responses

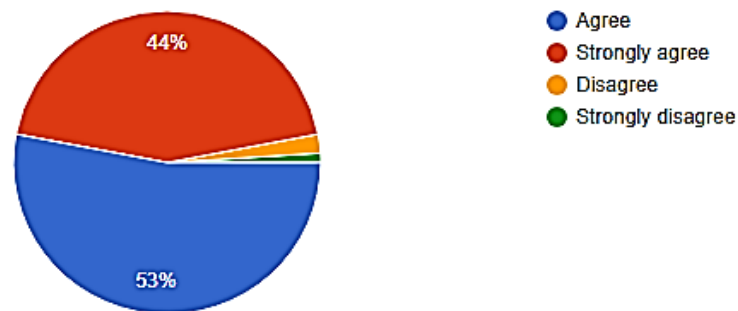


Fig 10: Equipping members with skills to lead a spiritually fulfilling life

A total of 97 (97%) participants, as shown in the data above, agree or strongly agree that the activities and programs in TACSFON have equipped them with the skills to lead a spiritually fulfilling life. Although 3 (3%) participants responded negatively, the overwhelming majority agreed with this position, providing convincing evidence that the activities and programs in TACSFON have equipped them with the skills to lead spiritually fulfilling lives.

Most respondents agree with Astin (2011) that organisations like TACSFON are crucial in equipping members with skills for spiritual fulfilment, as shown by 97% who felt positively impacted. However, a minority may align with Streib's (2005) research, suggesting that 3% of participants felt unequipped because they were in a phase of redefining their spirituality, in which TACSFON's teachings no longer aligned with their evolving beliefs.

Summary of findings

This study explores the role of The Apostolic Church Student Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON) in providing social support and fostering community among students at the University of Lagos. The research highlights how TACSFON positively influences its members' academic success through programs that support their studies. Beyond academics, TACSFON cultivates a strong sense of belonging, offering a supportive environment where students can seek help with personal, academic, and financial challenges. The fellowship also promotes

spiritual and personal growth by engaging members in leadership roles and providing mentorship opportunities. In addition to these supports, TACSFON offers financial assistance to its members and organises workshops to develop practical skills for future success. The findings demonstrate that TACSFON plays a significant role in supporting academic achievement and nurturing personal and professional growth among University of Lagos students.

Conclusion

TACSFON has become a significant influence in the lives of many students at the University of Lagos, offering much more than just spiritual guidance. The fellowship supports students' academic, social, and financial growth by fostering a tight-knit community where members actively support one another. TACSFON's focus on leadership development, mentorship, and skill-building equips students for future success, while also providing financial aid to those in need. On a global scale, TACSFON enriches its members' lives, making their university experience more rewarding and seamless. In summary, TACSFON plays a crucial role in enhancing its members' academic, social, spiritual, and financial well-being, creating a supportive community that positively impacts the overall student experience at the University of Lagos.

Recommendations based on the study findings

1. We recommend that TACSFON offer regular mental health programs such as counselling sessions, stress management workshops, and peer support groups. This will help students manage their academic pressures and personal challenges, improving their overall well-being and focus on their studies.
2. We recommend that TACSFON ensure that leadership development programs are available to all members, not just the executives. This way, everyone can gain important leadership and life skills that will be useful both during and after university.
3. We recommend that the fellowship offer workshops on personal finance, budgeting, and small business management. This will equip members with practical skills to manage their finances better and explore opportunities to earn income during their studies.

4. We recommend that strengthening the alum network will provide current members with mentorship, career advice, and professional connections. Alums could also support the fellowship through donations or volunteering to keep programs running and growing.
5. We recommend that TACSFON set up a system to gather feedback from members about its activities regularly. This will allow the fellowship to assess and improve its programs to better meet members' needs.
6. We recommend that TACSFON consider partnerships with organisations that focus on youth development, education, and economic growth. These collaborations can bring in resources, training, and new opportunities for members, enhancing their prospects.
7. We recommend that TACSFON expand its academic support by organising tutorials across different departments, open to both members and non-members. This will not only help students academically but also increase the fellowship's on-campus outreach. These recommendations are designed to enhance TACSFON's impact in providing comprehensive social, emotional, academic, and financial support to its members.

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