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Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

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Table of Contents

Foreword	
Dr Robert Falconer	i
A Study of the Lived Experiences of Eight Clergywomen Ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, between 2011 and 2019	
Dr Akua Ofori-Boateng	
<i>Supervisor: Dr Modisa Mzondi</i>	1
An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Paul's Interactions with the Greco-Roman Political Systems According to Acts of the Apostles	
Dr Albert Douglas Ofori	
<i>Supervisor: Dr Annang Asumang</i>	40
An Evangelical Evaluation of Major Readings of Christ's Sufficiency in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards an Appropriation of Colossians 2:1–10	
Dr Anthony Oladayo Fawole	
<i>Supervisor: Dr Isaac Boaheng</i>	61

Toward a 21st Century Interdisciplinary Pentecostal
Catechesis in Four Pentecostal Denominations in the
United States

Dr Cathy Lynn Mason Vaughan

Supervisor: Dr Nicholas Darko

91

Polysystem Analysis and Bible Translation: A Wedding of
Theory and Practice to Create a Holistic Model to Guide
Bible Translation and Biblical Exegesis

Dr Glenn John Kerr

Supervisor: Prof Ernst Wendland

124

Perfect Being Theology and the Molinist View of Divine
Providence: An Anselmian Critique of Middle Knowledge

Dr John Steven Lee

Supervisor: Dr George Coon

151

Strategies for Succession Planning Through Intentional
Leadership Development for SIL Papua New Guinea

Dr Peter John Frost

Supervisor: Dr Antonio Carlos Barro

174

An Examination of an Ethical Decision-Making Framework:
Applying Divine Command Theory to the Analysis of
Ethical Issues Related to Specific Procedures in Assisted
Reproductive Technology in Saipan

Dr Sean Sartler

Supervisors: Dr Robert Falconer and Dr Gabriel Ndhlovu

218

Foreword

One of my heroes, Thomas à Kempis, wrote in his classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, “Naturally everyone desires knowledge, but what use is that without a sense of the mystery of God? A humble peasant who serves God is more pleasing to God than a conceited intellectual who knows the course of the stars but ignores the things of the spirit.”¹

Every student who has contributed to this volume has desired knowledge, which I assume is one of the primary reasons for embarking on such a difficult doctoral journey. And yet, like Thomas’s comment, when I had the privilege of listening to them defend their PhD, one got the sense that it was not so much about the PhD itself—as wonderful and important as that is—but about serving Jesus and his church. My prayer is that now that you have your PhD, you will be captivated by the wonder of the mystery of God and that this wonder will be contagious, drawing others into a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Jesus as you continue to be led by the Holy Spirit.

This issue of the SATS PhD Compendium focuses on biblical exegetical studies, Bible translation, leadership, ecclesiology, and philosophical theology. I want to thank all the doctoral graduates for writing such excellent executive summaries of their theses and for submitting them timeously.

¹ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Robert Jeffery (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), 7.

As always, a huge thank you goes out to all those, including supervisors, friends, family, and churches, who have supported each student on their research journey. In addition, the Compendium is the fruit of many people's dedication. I am grateful to my assistant, Kayle Pelletier, and Trudi Joynt, who proofread all the articles, and Dr Marno Kirstein, who copy-edited and typeset the Compendium. Thank you! Above all, I thank the Blessed Trinity, who has walked with these students every step of the way—guiding, sustaining, and equipping them for this great work. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Robert Falconer, PhD

Head of Research and Publishing

A Study of the Lived Experiences of Eight Clergywomen Ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, between 2011 and 2019.

Dr Akua Ofori-Boateng

Supervisor: Dr Modisa Mzondi

Abstract

In 2009, the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, made history by approving the ordination of women as priests at an emergency meeting convened at the Bishop's Court in Accra. This pivotal decision was presided over by the then Bishop of the diocese and the Archbishop of the province of West Africa, the Rt. Rev'd. Hon. Dr. Justice Yaw Ofei Akrofi. Yet, the experiences

I declare that this article employed the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and adheres to SATS's Policy on Generative Artificial Intelligence. The AI platform that was used was Meta AI. The purpose of using the AI tool was specifically limited to improving grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and tone, giving it a more scholarly style, while maintaining my original ideas, contribution, and input. The extent of the AI editing was extensive throughout most of the article.

of the pioneering clergywomen have received little scholarly attention. This paper seeks to address this situation by exploring the question: “How can a study of the lived experiences of eight clergywomen ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, between 2011 and 2019, inform and improve the policies and practices of the diocese to better support and promote the ordination of women within the diocese?”

The study employed an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, utilizing the 4-D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics surrounding the ordination of women in the context of Anglican tradition and Ghanaian culture. Forty-two participants from the Accra Diocese were interviewed for the study, including bishops, male clergy, lay members and female clergy. These interviews were audio recorded and consisted of a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions. Additionally, field notes were taken during the interviews to capture nonverbal cues and the environmental context.

The findings of the study revealed a range of challenges faced by the first female priests, including bias, a lack of support and mentorship, sexualization, as well as a lack of clarity about clergy attire and ecclesial titles. Additionally, the study identified factors that affected the process of female ordination in the diocese, such as male dominance, biblical interpretation, gender discrimination, acceptance levels by the laity, and the resilience of advocates for female ordination.

Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of addressing gender bias and discrimination in the diocese, providing equal opportunities and support for clergywomen, and promoting inclusivity and empowerment of women. Recommendations include encouraging mentorship programs, implementing policies to address sexual harassment, establishing clear guidelines on attire, and adopting gender-free titles for all priests.

1. Introduction

1.1. Historical Development and Contemporary Challenges in the Anglican Communion

The Anglican Communion is made up of autonomous churches or provinces united through a shared faith, worship traditions, and mission (Doe 2013, 47). The origins of the church can be traced back to the breaking away of King Henry VIII from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. This departure was further defined by theological reformers like Cranmer and Hooker, who established Scripture and tradition as foundational principles for what would become the Church of England (McMichael 2014, 159–160, Milton 2017, 1). Key formational elements for the church included the Book of Common Prayer and Thirty-Nine Articles of faith (Podmore 2005, 3). The Communion is unified around four Instruments, namely, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council, and Primates' Meeting (Doe 2013, 47). Today, these Instruments of Unity face significant challenges in authority and decision-making capacity, particularly amid deep divisions over female ordination and human sexuality, issues that have polarized the Communion especially since the 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10 which declared homosexual practices as being “incompatible with Scripture” (Pui Lan 2023, 142–143, 171–177, AF 2024, 1–2).

1.1.1. Female Ordination in the Anglican Communion

The approval of the ordination of women as deacons at the 1968 Lambeth Conference was a pivotal moment in the pursuit of gender

equality within the Communion (Village 2018, 101). However, it was another ten years, at the 1978 Lambeth Conference, that Resolution 21 was established, reaffirming the doctrine of the priesthood of all baptized persons. It acknowledged the diverse viewpoints on the ordination of women among various provinces within the communion and requested the ongoing study of female ordinations (1978 Lambeth Conference Resolution No. 20, 21, 22, 11–13, Layton 2022, 2). Research shows that while some churches like Hong Kong, Canada, USA, and New Zealand were early adopters of female ordination, others like the Church of England and African members of the communion lagged (1978 Lambeth Conference Resolution No. 20, 21, 22, 12). In Ghana, it was not until 2011, that the Anglican Diocese of Accra ordained its first three female priests (Anglican Communion News Service 2011, 1, Pobee 2012, 321).

1.1.2. Systemic Barriers to Female Ordination

Globally ordained women like their secular counterparts, face barriers to upward progress, often called the “stained-glass ceiling” or “lead roof” (Bagilhole 2006, 109, Lampman 2006, 14, Rois, Rixon, and Faseruk 2013, 25–26, Adasi 2014, 53). Banerjee (2006, 2) emphasizes this phenomenon by pointing out the disparity between the number of women in the church pews, and the increasing number of women in divinity school as compared with the limited number of women leading large congregations in mainline Protestant churches. This striking discrepancy between female ecclesiastical participation and church leadership reveals systemic barriers that continue to hinder gender equity in many Christian denominations (Banerjee 2006, 2).

Addressing these disparities will require intentional efforts to promote inclusivity (Banerjee 2006, 2).

1.1.3. Socio-cultural and Religious Challenges in Africa

In the African context, socio-cultural factors, religious attitudes and perceptions emerged as additional factors to the already existing barriers (Green 2011, 121). In Ghana, some traditional and cultural practices tend to marginalize women, hindering their advancement to prominent positions within the church hierarchy (Oduyoye 2007, 12, Adasi 2014, 53). In certain contexts, menstruation presents a challenge to clergywomen in Africa, as some Christians believe that menstruating women should be subject to restrictions regarding their handling of the Eucharist (Frymer-Kensky 1983, 403, Adasi 2014, 51–52). This belief stems from the perception that a woman is unclean during her menstrual cycle. Adasi and Frimpong (2014, 64) highlight another challenge that arises from the intersection of traditional Ghanaian marital expectations and the priesthood. The societal norm of wives relocating to their husband's homes creates uncertainty regarding the availability of married clergywomen for posting assignments. This uncertainty perpetuates a perception of women as unreliable as clergy (Adasi and Frimpong 2014, 64). Furthermore, the convergence of clerical responsibilities and domestic duties exacerbates the burden on married clergywomen, who must navigate sermon preparation, preaching, pastoral care, and counselling alongside cooking, cleaning, and nurturing (Adasi & Frimpong 2014, 64, Bonsu 2016, 64). These challenges highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics and strategies to mitigate pressures and support clergywomen.

1.1.4. Transformative Impact of Clergywomen

Clergywomen have, despite the challenges they face, made significant strides, creating a paradigm shift in the church and challenging traditional congregational perceptions of priesthood (Bagilhole 2006, 118; Marumo 2016, 62). As Davidge (2009, 2) points out, quoting Reverend Jane Gould, a parish priest in Massachusetts, “thirty-five years later, my sons think women can be deacons, priests, and bishops.” This changed and illustrates the significant impact that clergywomen have had on the church. Furthermore, clergywomen have successfully created opportunities to influence liturgical conversations, incorporating inclusive language and thereby introducing a distinctive ministerial style (Roberts et al. 2006, 202–217; Cooper 2018, 8). In Ghana, numerous clergywomen are leveraging their professional expertise to augment their priestly ministry. A notable example is Rose Akua Ampofo, a professional administrator who served as an assistant chaplain at Tema Joint Church in the urban and industrial mission in Tema, Ghana, between 1985 and 1990. Ampofo drafted a liturgy of widowhood rites, which the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) currently employs to emancipate widows from damaging socio-cultural practices (Adasi 2015, 114, 117). This initiative exemplifies the agency of clergywomen in shaping liturgical practices.

1.2. Problem Statement

The main research question for the study is “How can a study of the lived experiences of eight clergywomen ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, between 2011 and 2019, inform and improve

the policies and practices of the diocese to better support and promote the ordination of women within the diocese?”

1.3. Subsidiary Questions

The subsidiary questions for the study are as follows:

- i. What are the perspectives of the Anglican Church on the ordination of women?
- ii. What are the lived experiences of eight clergywomen ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra between 2011 and 2019?
- iii. What lessons, accruing from the lived experiences of these eight clergywomen, might the Anglican Diocese of Accra church adopt in its service?
- iv. What will it look like when the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana employs the lessons learned from the lived experiences of eight clergywomen in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana who were ordained between 2011 and 2019?

1.4. Research Aims and Objectives

The research explores the complexities of female ordination in Anglican tradition and theology, specifically in Ghanaian cultures. It examines the interplay of theology, culture, and tradition to enrich Ghanaian theological scholarship on gender and leadership. The research also serves as an African case study for global ecclesiastical gender debates and identifies pathways for reconciling tradition with contemporary leadership paradigms. It offers theoretical and

practical insights into institutional barriers and opportunities for the advancement of women in African church hierarchies.

1.5. Theological and Practical Significance

Kupari and Vuola (2020, 2) argue that gender is a basic building block of society, and it naturally influences how people express their religion. Ecclesiastical traditions, therefore, either support or challenge the existing gender power dynamics. This aligns with Smit's (2019, 85) argument that any study of female ordination goes beyond just religious roles but examines issues of tradition, authority, and apostolic continuity. The study explores what Kalkun (2020, 97) describes as the disconnect between theological stances on gender equality and practical limitations on women within the Anglican Communion, and in so doing, contributes to ongoing discussions in practical theology, church, and society. The researcher hopes to provide a valuable resource for researchers and students in theological education, with implications for a broader international audience. The study chronicles the experiences of the first eight women ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, serving as a foundation for critical evaluation and refinement of practices and policies regarding female ordination in the diocese and other African churches. It also inspires and informs young women contemplating the priesthood, offering insights from these pioneering women.

1.6. Research Design

The study is qualitative and utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the lived experiences of the clergy women

(Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009, 1). Qualitative research explores the perspectives of individuals, capturing their values, beliefs, emotions, and lived experiences (Jackson 2012, 1). It is effective for studying cultural, social, and intangible factors such as gender, ethnicity, and religion, and it excels in examining sensitive topics and complex human behaviors (Jackson 2012, 1–2, Rahman 2016, 7). IPA, a qualitative data analysis method, focuses on how individuals interpret significant life experiences (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009, 1). It prioritizes in-depth exploration of lived experiences while capturing shared understandings and individual uniqueness. IPA was the most rigorous approach for the study as it aligns with the study's objectives (Creswell 2013, 76).

1.6.1. Research Population

The study sampled forty-two participants from the three governing bodies of the Anglican Diocese of Accra. From the House of Bishops, participants included the sitting Bishop of the diocese and the immediate past Bishop, who also served as Archbishop of the Province of West Africa. The House of Clergy was represented by the eight ordained women clergy and fifteen male clergy who were working or had previously worked with any of the eight. From the House of Laity, the study engaged seventeen lay participants made up of the Priest Warden or Peoples Warden and one elected member of the Parish Church Council from each of the parishes where the eight clergywomen had served. This triangulated design ensured representation across all the church leadership tiers, central to the focus of this research.

1.6.2. Data Gathering Instruments

The study employed audio-recorded interviews combining open-ended and closed-ended questions to comprehensively explore the experiences of ordained women (Richards 2016, 252; Bengtsson 2016, 10). The researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim and supplemented them with field notes capturing contextual details, nonverbal cues, and observational data to ensure a rich, nuanced dataset (Sutton and Zubin 2015, 228).

1.6.3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analytical process involved identifying and coding emergent themes from participant narratives (Sutton and Zubin 2015, 228) and capturing both shared experiences and individual perspectives (Creswell 2013, 76). This enabled the identification of meaningful patterns while preserving the uniqueness of each woman's journey. The methodology emphasized the phenomenological description, ensuring that the findings remained grounded in each participant's authentic experiences, rather than the researcher's presuppositions (Holmes 2020, 2–3). By employing the IPA framework, the study generated a nuanced understanding of the ordination experiences of the women, it maintained a methodological rigor through systematic data interpretation, and it produced actionable insights for diocesan policy reform.

1.7. Research Methodology

1.7.1. Practical Theology

Practical theology bridges theological reflection and real-world application by assessing how faith communities express their beliefs while proposing relevant transformations (Smith K. 2013, 34, 151). Practical theology emphasizes contextual factors such as culture, society, and establishment, making it particularly suitable to investigate barriers and opportunities for women in ordained ministry (Smith K. 2013, 89, 104). Ultimately, the study leveraged the focus practical theology brings to both interpretation and action to translate the experiences of the clergywomen into concrete recommendations for diocesan reform. The study engaged with multiple practical theological methodologies including the Zerfass, Browning, Heitink, LIM, and Osmer models with each one offering distinct insights into the interplay between theological reflection and actionable change. While these frameworks collectively enriched the research, the study ultimately adopted the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Method for engagement with the lived experiences of these Clergywomen.

1.7.2. The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Method

AI is a practical theology methodology that embraces organizational change by focusing on what works well within an organization (Stavros and Saint 2010, 378). Thomas (2017, 2) states that every organization has aspects that give it life and make it effective, successful, and connected to its stakeholders, and AI identifies and builds upon these positive elements. AI operates on the foundational premise that sustainable

change emerges from systematic exploration and enhancement of what already works effectively in an organization, rather than problem-centric analysis (Moore, 2019, 4). The research implements AI's four-phase cyclical process:

- *Discovery*: Examining historical and contemporary alignment between Anglican theological tradition and current practices to identify existing strengths.
- *Dream*: The Dream phase allows participants to explore their hopes and dreams for both their priestly vocations and collective diocesan development.
- *Design*: The Design phase develops strategic pathways for the diocese based on the dreams and aspirations identified in an effort to institutionalize these visions.
- *Destiny*: The Destiny phase makes concrete proposals for change based on the lessons learned to transform diocesan systems, structure, processes, and procedures (Moore, 2019, 12).

1.7.3. Research Ethics and Confidentiality

The study was rooted in respecting all individuals and implemented the following safeguards: informed consent, strict confidentiality, and transparency. Participants received comprehensive information about the study, potential risks and benefits, and their rights. Data was anonymized to protect participants and their references. Participants had the unconditional right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Together, these measures created an ethical framework that

prioritized participant autonomy, dignity, and welfare throughout the investigation.

1.8. Positionality

As a female Anglican priest within the Accra Diocese, my positionality as both researcher and insider presented opportunities and challenges. While my shared identity with the clergy women fostered trust and openness, it also required rigorous reflexivity to avoid biases (Holmes 2020, 2). To uphold methodological integrity, I implemented reflexive journaling by systematic documentation of my assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretive decisions throughout the research process, ensuring participant voices remained central (Holmes 2020, 2). I also adopted bracketing, deliberately suspending my preconceptions during data analysis to authentically share in the experiences of my colleagues (Berkovic et al. 2020, 2). Finally, I adhered to qualitative principles like transparency, triangulation, and ethical sensitivity to enhance credibility (D'Silva et al., 2016, 103). This transformed my positionality from a potential limitation into a tool for grounded data analysis.

2. Literature Review: The History of Female Ordination

The ordination of women as priests has sparked a longstanding debate among theologians and biblical scholars globally, with two distinct perspectives emerging: complementarianism and egalitarianism (Paulson 2019, 3-9, Rodgers 2011, 1-2). Complementarians argue that the Bible prohibits women from holding priestly positions, citing the lack of female priests in the Old and New Testaments, as well as Jesus' choice of male

disciples, the perceived headship of men over women, and the prohibition of women from teaching or preaching (Witherington 2009, 4, Paulson 2019, 3–9). In contrast, egalitarians advocate for gender equality and the freedom for women to serve in any ministerial capacity, pointing to the misinterpretation of scripture by complementarians and to the biblical evidence of the leadership of women like Deborah and Huldah in the Bible (Ortlund Jr. 2003, 19, Witherington 2009, 3–9, Paulson 2019, 7).

Historically, these theological and cultural arguments have influenced the decisions of various Christian denominations regarding female ordination. The Methodist Church, for instance, began ordaining women in the late nineteenth century, with Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Helenor M. Davisson, Anna Howard Shaw, and Alma White being accepted into church orders as deacons and preachers (Resource UMC 2018, 2, Robeck Jr. 2024, 1). However, it was not until 1956 that the church officially granted women the right to be ordained as full priests (Kenaston 2015, 162). Similarly, the Presbyterian Church ordained Margaret E. Towner as the first woman priest in 1956 (Smylie 2006, 1); while the Southern Baptist Convention ordained Addie Davis as the first woman priest in 1964 (Shaw 2021, 2). Despite initial opposition, these churches have since ordained thousands of women, with some serving as bishops or church presidents (Turner 2020, 2; Bloomquist 2016, 1). In contrast, the Roman Catholic Church has consistently rejected the ordination of women, citing 1 Corinthians 14:34–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 (Aquino 2014, 6). This stance is rooted in tradition and has been reaffirmed by various popes, including Pope John Paul II (Aquino 2014, 5).

The Lutheran Church in America voted to ordain women in 1970, paving the way for female priests and ultimately leading to the ordination of thousands of women, including Elizabeth Platz, Barbara L. Andrews,

Lydia Rivera Kalb, and Earleen Miller, among others (Koch 2001, 2, Turner 2020, 2). However, this shift was not unanimously accepted, as the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod maintained its stance against female ordination, citing scriptural prohibitions (Koch 2001, 2). The resultant divisions led to the expulsion of faculty from Concordia Seminary and the eventual formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Koch 2001, 3; Turner 2020, 2). In contrast, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church has historically allowed women to participate in various roles, including preaching, without requiring ordination (Timm 2014, 3). Notably, Ellen White, a prominent figure in Adventist history, exercised a prophetic ministry and preached alongside ordained pastors without facing challenges to her authority (Timm 2014, 4).

The Pentecostal movement has historically been marked by a tension between the utilization and restriction of women in church leadership, with women like Agnes Ozman and Lucy Farrow playing significant roles in the early days of the movement (Novieto 2013, 12–13). Despite this, women have often been excluded from ordination and leadership positions, with some denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, only permitting women to serve as missionaries and evangelists, but not as senior pastors or bishops (Robeck Jr. 2024, 2–3). However, some Pentecostal churches, such as the Elim Pentecostal Church, began to ordain women in 1999, with eight women being ordained as priests (Carter 2018, 19). In Ghana, the Church of Pentecost has also seen a shift towards greater inclusion of women in leadership, with women like Christie Doe Tetteh and Gifty Afenyi-Dadzie serving as leaders and mentors (Novieto 2013, 4).

Within the Anglican Communion, the ordination of women remains a complex and controversial issue. The historical stance on

female ordination has evolved, with initial resistance rooted in biblical interpretations giving way to gradual acceptance, as evidenced by the 1978 Lambeth Conference recommendation to consider ordaining women (Gathogo 2008, 265, Pillay 2017, 2). While some provinces, such as Hong Kong and New Zealand, have ordained women as priests since the mid-twentieth century, others like the Church of the Province of Central Africa, and the Church of the Province of Nigeria, still refuse to ordain women due to perceived biblical and cultural objections (Mombo 2008, 16, Royal Gazette Staff 2012, 3, Afrotol News 2014, 2, Knott 2021, 2). Case in point, the ordination of three women as priests in the Anglican Diocese of Ilorin, Nigeria on December 12, 1993, under Bishop Herbert Haruna, sparked so much controversy, that within a month, their ordination was annulled by the House of Bishops at the Episcopal Synod in Aba (Omotoye 2010, 8, Ojone 2023, 24).

Other provinces, such as the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, were late adopters of female ordination but have nonetheless embraced it. In 1992, the Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa voted in favour of ordaining women. The very first woman to be ordained was Ellinah Ntfofombi Wamukoya of South Africa, who was ordained as Bishop of the Swaziland (renamed eSwatini) diocese in 2012 (ACNS 2021a, 1, La Croix International 2018, 2). Today, the number of female clergies within the Anglican Communion is steadily increasing, with notable milestones including the consecration of Emily Awino Onyango as the first female Anglican Bishop in East and Central Africa in 2021 (ACNS 2021b, 1). Overall, significant progress has been made by women in various Christian denominations, but women continue to face restrictions, barriers, challenges and discriminations in their pursuit of leadership roles in the church (Mombo 2008, 16).

3. The Lived Experiences of Clergy Women in the Anglican Diocese of Accra

The Anglican Diocese of Accra, like many others, historically denied women ordination. The findings of the study demonstrate that the initial resistance to female ordination within the diocese was deeply rooted in Ghanaian sociocultural norms, which traditionally emphasize patriarchal structures (Hofstede 1997, 1, Ikegbu 2018, 1, Pobee 2009, 386). However, through activism and commitment, this discrimination changed, influenced by Ghanaian culture, pioneers, and the pioneering female clergy themselves.

3.1. Factors that Affected the Ordination of Women in the Anglican Diocese of Accra

The ordination of women in the Anglican Diocese of Accra emerged through a contested negotiation of biblical hermeneutics, cultural patriarchy, and institutional reform, with opponents leveraging restrictive Pauline texts while advocates invoked egalitarian theology and historical female leadership. The study examines how gendered resistance was gradually overcome through liturgical innovation, strategic advocacy by Akrofi, and the demonstrated efficacy of female clergy, ultimately redefining church leadership.

3.1.1. Male Dominance through Culture, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation

The culture, reinforced by certain biblical hermeneutics, provided theological justification for male dominance with opponents of female

ordination frequently citing 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–36 as prescriptive texts restricting women from holding clerical roles (Participant 23, Participant 32). However, advocates for female ordination counter them with alternative biblical interpretations, highlighting Galatians 3:28 and the presence of female leaders in the Old and New Testaments (Torto, Participant 29). The eventual shift toward ordaining women within the diocese was influenced by a nuanced understanding of scripture and culture, recognizing the equal capabilities of men and women in leadership roles (Participant 5, Neequaye). The empirical data from the study indicated that over 95% of the respondents perceived Ghanaian culture and traditions as a decisive factor in shaping diocesan attitudes toward female clergy (Hofstede 1997, 1). This aligns with broader theological conversations on the intersection of culture and church structure (Pobee 2009, 386).

3.1.2. Gender Discrimination and Laity Acceptance

Gender-based objections to female ordination were pervasive, with 79% of the participants citing physiological and sociocultural differences as impediments. Concerns centred around menstruation and pregnancy as potential hindrances for women to effectively perform their clerical duties (Torto, Participant 7). Additionally, the data found that female clergy within the diocese contend with stereotypes regarding emotional stability, familial obligations, and perceived ministerial inferiority (Participant 32, Participant 13). Nevertheless, after the diocese introduced incremental liturgical reforms, such as the introduction of female altar servers, it facilitated a gradual shift in laity perception and acceptance (Participant 1, Akrofi). This strategic normalization of women in sacred roles was crucial in shifting congregational attitudes, especially with many women in the

congregation now finding an ally in female priests who they realised could relate to their concerns and experiences better than male clergy (Participant 5, Participant 24). The acceptance of female clergy by the laity was critical to the ordination of women as priests, because of the crucial role of lay approval at Synod (Akrofi, Participant 15).

3.1.3. The Resilience of Akrofi et al.

The advocacy of key figures, including Archbishop Akrofi and Bishop Torto, was instrumental in overcoming opposition (Torto, Pobee 2009, 386). A phased approach, progressing from female servers to chalice assistants and, ultimately, to priestly ordination in 2011, ensured structural and ideological adaptation (Mariam Addo, Pobee 2009, 387). The perseverance of these leaders mitigated resistance rooted in tradition and restrictive biblical exegesis (Akrofi, Participant 27).

3.1.4. The Precedence Set by Female Forerunners and Financial Burden

The ordination of women has had a positive impact on the diocese, with female clergy providing a unique perspective and approach to ministry, particularly in areas such as pastoral care and worship (Participant 24, Participant 5). While one respondent raised fiscal concerns regarding theological education for female candidates (Participant 19), such apprehensions were overshadowed by the demonstrable efficacy of women in clerical roles. The pioneering cohort of female priests ordained in 2011 have established a compelling precedent, with respondents lauding their competence, humility, and professional rigor (Participant 1, Participant 22).

Their success has effectively dispelled the initial reservations, reinforcing the viability of women in church leadership (Torto).

3.2. Personal Experiences of Female Leaders in the Anglican Diocese of Accra

The lived experiences of female clergy in the Anglican Diocese of Accra reveal a complex interplay of institutional bias, gender discrimination, and sexualization, reflecting broader sociocultural and ecclesial tensions (Participant 2, Participant 24, Participant 17). These challenges underscore the persistent male-centred views within religious structures, necessitating critical examination of both hidden and open barriers to gender equity in ministry.

3.2.1 Personal Bias, Support and Mentorship

Female clergy within the diocese reported facing undue pressure to prove themselves due to pre-existing negative expectations from both the laity and fellow clergy, highlighting the need for mentorship and support (Participant 17, Participant 23). This dynamic reinforces an expectation wherein women need to continually substantiate their vocational legitimacy, and that is a burden that is seldom placed on male clergy. The absence of formalized mentorship structures exacerbates this disparity, highlighting an institutional gap in pastoral formation (Participant 17).

3.2.2. Sexualization

The sexualization of female clergy is a significant challenge, with some experiencing objectification and romantic advances from colleagues and

parishioners (Participant 17, Participant 29). This phenomenon reflects the persistent inability of the patriarchal religious structures to separate the spiritual identity of a woman from her physical identity.

3.2.3. The Issue of Attire

The absence of formal guidelines for female clergy vestments has resulted in self-prescribed practices aimed at minimizing femininity to secure acceptance within the church (Participant 17, Participant 29). Head coverings, which hold both religious and cultural importance, show how complex it can be to balance gender visibility in religious spaces (Participant 32). Female clergy must often find a balance between being traditional and being respected as professionals, which can sometimes mean suppressing who they really are.

3.2.4. The Issue of Titles

The use of ecclesial titles is a point of contention, with female priests remaining “Reverend” while male priests become “Reverend Father,” creating a sense of inferiority (Participant 38, Participant 32). The distinction in titles has led to awkwardness, discomfort, and the trivialization of female ordination, with some using unofficial titles like “Reverend Mother” (Participant 38, Participant 32). The matter is further exasperated by the fact that the wives of the male clergy by tradition, are given the title “Mother” when their husbands are made priests (Participant 32).

3.2.5. Process of Admission into the Priesthood

Despite systemic barriers, female clergy reported relatively unencumbered pathways to ordination, with several noting congregational encouragement (Participant 23, Participant 24). Their ministerial value of ordained women has been widely acknowledged, with descriptions such as “well respected,” “humble,” and “efficient” underscoring their vocational competence (Participant 1, Participant 22). The pioneering female clergy have paved the way for future generations, demonstrating their capabilities and debunking concerns about female ordination (Torto, Participant 4).

4. Proposing an Enabling Environment for Women to be ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Accra

Envisioning the future of the Anglican Diocese of Accra, based on the lived experiences of the eight clergywomen ordained between 2011 and 2019, requires that the diocese embrace this statement by one archdeacon who said, “The Holy Spirit uses you, regardless of gender, so it’s the same thing” (Participant 5). This underscores the need for the diocese to fully utilize the talents and gifts of all individuals called to the priesthood, irrespective of gender. The diocese must implement a system that eradicates gender bias in the assessment of candidates for the priesthood (Oredein 2023, 2). This entails acknowledging the significance of the narratives and experiences of women, as recounted by themselves, rather than through the lens of men (Oredein 2023, 2). The challenge of male dominance and discrimination against female clergy can be addressed by the diocese engaging in conversations and implementing improvements to mitigate the cultural biases that perpetuate discrimination (Oredein 2023, 2).

Forums should be held to discuss issues such as ecclesial titles and attire for female clergy, leveraging the expertise of activists like Professor Mercy Oduyoye. Intentional mentorship programs for female clergy, paired with tolerant male clergy, can facilitate their success and professional development (Green 2009, 169). Furthermore, the diocese must establish clear policies on professional relationships and mutual consent, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all clergy.

Ultimately, the vision of the diocese, as interpreted through this research, can be realized through a comprehensive strategy encompassing policy implementation, educational initiatives, and the establishment of a nurturing environment that supports both genders. This approach must be crafted in such a way as to advance the gospel and promote gender equality within the ministry, fostering a vibrant and effective ministry that embodies the Spirit of God (Thomas 2017, 4).

Building on the work of Torto (1998, 73), who argued that the exclusion of women from priesthood reflects institutionalized bias rather than scriptural mandate, urging the church to “as a matter of urgency should consider opening her doors to the ministerial priesthood to women”, the study asserts that the logical culmination of such reform necessitates the consecration of female bishops. This advancement would not only align with the professed commitments of the diocese to gender equity, but it would also rectify the discord between theological rhetoric and praxis. The precedent set by Anglican provinces in South Africa and East Africa (ACNS 2021a, 1, La Croix International 2018, 2) demonstrates the viability and transformative impact of female episcopal leadership. By embracing this progression, the Diocese of Accra would affirm the integral role of women in ecclesial tradition while challenging systemic barriers that have perpetuated hierarchical inequities. Such a milestone would

epitomize the institutional embodiment of Galatians 3:28, ensuring that the leadership of the church reflects the full dignity and vocation of all its members.

5. Implementing the Proposal

The study proposes a strategic implementation plan that outlines actionable steps to advance gender equity in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, addressing systemic barriers to female ordination and leadership (Siegal 2015, 1).

- *Mandatory female clergy representation:* Amend the constitution to mandate female clergy representation on decision-making bodies (The Church of the Province of West Africa 2017, 19).
- *Biased ordination candidate selection mitigation:* Implement diverse recruitment and screening tactics for ordination candidates, including training recruitment teams to avoid unconscious biases and ensure fair evaluation (Bakhtiari 2023, 4; Ghoshal 2023, 2).
- *Bias recognition and mitigation training:* Provide comprehensive training to all clergy on recognizing and mitigating their own biases (Leyshon 2023, 4).
- *Liturgical language review:* Conduct a review of liturgical language within an African context, emphasizing the preservation of African identity (Meyers and Sonderegger 2021, 17; Njoh 2006, 107)
- *Mentorship program:* Implement a lifelong mentorship program starting in seminary, focusing on emotional and relational well-being, physical health, ministry development, and spiritual growth (Rose 2021, 60).

- *Work-life balance policies*: Create work-life balance policies that reflect diocesan values and goals, like maternity leave, paternity leave and flexible work options (Siegal 2015, 5).
- *Sexualization and sexual harassment prevention*: Provide frequent awareness training on sexualization and sexual harassment and establish clear policies and procedures to address these issues (Collins 2009, 12, McDuff 2008, 298).
- *Standardized clergy appearance*: Establish a standardized visual appearance for clergy women, encompassing headwear, to minimize distractions and augment their concentration on their spiritual responsibilities (Reedy-Strother 2011, 160).
- *Ecclesial titles for female clergy*: Consider alternative ecclesial titles for all clergy regardless of gender, such as “Reverend,” to promote inclusivity and respect (Holmes 1985, 8, Oduyoye, 2023).
- *Monitoring and Evaluation*: Establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of the implemented interventions (Caleo and Heilman 2019, 71)

The researcher believes that through intentional policy reforms, education, mentorship, and ongoing evaluation, the diocese can cultivate a more inclusive and equitable church leadership.

6. Reflection of Findings

The journey toward female ordination in the Anglican Diocese of Accra represents a critical case study in the broader struggle for gender equity within global Christianity particularly in African contexts where theological conviction, cultural tradition, and institutional inertia meet. As

the study demonstrates, the eventual acceptance of female ordination in 2011 was not merely an administrative shift but a profound renegotiation of ecclesial identity, one that required the leadership to confront deeply embedded patriarchal norms (Hofstede 1997, 1, Pobe 2009, 386). The resistance to female clergy, rooted in selective biblical hermeneutics and Ghanaian sociocultural structures, reflects an inconsistency where African Anglicanism simultaneously resists Western supremacy while perpetuating its own forms of gendered exclusion (Oduyoye 2007, 12; Adasi 2014, 53).

Despite facing challenges, these pioneering female clergy demonstrated remarkable work that went beyond the limitations imposed by the church. Their stories shed light on the contradictions of a church that honors biblical women but at the same time marginalizes women in religious positions (Participant 32, Oduyoye 2023). The gradual shift in female leadership roles, from altar servers to priests, emphasizes incremental change within the diocese that both respects tradition and expands its boundaries (Akrofi, Pobe 2009, 386).

However, the study also uncovers persistent structural inequities, from the sexualization of female clergy to the titles of “Reverend” versus “Reverend Father” (Participant 17, Participant 38). These challenges underscore the fact that female inclusion will not come without the same struggles that are seen in global Anglicanism, albeit in African contexts where culture and faith are complicated (Pillay 2017, 2). The study puts forward a proposal for women to become bishops as the logical next step in diocesan reform, not as a radical break, but to follow the biblical vision of Galatians 3:28 (Doe 2013, 47).

7. Conclusion of Study

The study has critically examined the historical, theological, and sociocultural factors shaping the ordination of women in the Anglican Diocese of Accra, Ghana, through the lived experiences of its first eight clergywomen. The study contributes to theological scholarship by demonstrating how cultural patriarchy and selective biblical hermeneutics have historically constrained female leadership; however, these pioneering clergywomen have redefined ecclesiastical norms through their ministerial effectiveness. Ultimately, the study underscores that the full integration of women into the Anglican priesthood in Accra is not merely an administrative adjustment but is critical to the theology of the church. One that demands the dismantling of systemic biases to reflect the egalitarian vision of Galatians 3:28. As the diocese moves forward, its willingness to implement these reforms will determine whether it merely accommodates women in ministry or truly embodies the inclusivity of the gospel it proclaims.

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An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Paul's Interactions with the Greco-Roman Political Systems According to Acts of the Apostles

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Abstract

This thesis analyses Paul's political behavior as recorded in Acts of the Apostles and correlates it with his political stance in his letters. The objective is to determine whether Paul's political behavior is compatible with his political stance. It also situates itself within the scholarly debate regarding whether Paul was against, for, or neutral towards the Roman Empire. By examining relevant passages, the study demonstrates that Paul's political behaviour and stance align with and reflect the interplay between politics and religion in the first century A.D. Greco-Roman

world. The study observed that Paul's political behavior and stance were motivated by focusing on the success of his missionary agenda. The study argues that with appropriate safeguards regarding authorial agenda and generic framing, Acts can serve as a key referee to settle scholarly debates about Paul's attitude towards the Roman Empire, particularly whether he was apolitical, anti-empire, or pro-empire.

1. Introduction

In recent times, there has been intense debate concerning how Paul related to the Roman Empire (Burk 2008, 311–312; Lull 2010, 251–262; Harrill 2011, 281–282; Wall 2012, 9–11; Campbell 2013, 129–142). The debate is mainly reflected in the disagreements among biblical scholars concerning Paul's interaction with the Greco-Roman political systems and the meaning of his statements concerning the first century Christians' political engagements in some of his letters. It is significant to note that some biblical scholars have used only Paul's political stance in his letters to develop his political theology without considering his political behavior in Acts. This study argues that in formulating Paul's political theology, his political stance in his letters and his political practice in Acts are necessary. This provided the basis for examining Paul's political behavior in Acts of the Apostles in this study. A fundamental premise of the approach adopted by this study is that the Acts of the Apostles is a historical monograph, written by Luke, who was a missionary companion of Paul for at least certain periods of the Apostle's ministry and travels. Even though Luke's own theological and pastoral interest inevitably overlays his account, Acts of the Apostles nevertheless serves as a reliable resource for excavating Paul's behavior when faced with the political systems of his day.

Thus, this study engaged arguments by some biblical scholars that there are barriers to using Acts to formulate Paul's political theology (van Ommeren 1991, 60–71; Keener 2012, 269; Diehl 2013, 51–53; Strait 2013, 139–140). These scholars assert that Acts is not historically reliable. The following are their reasons: First, the miracles of Acts undermine its historical credibility. Second, the speeches in Acts may not reflect what the characters said. Third, Luke's picture of Paul in Acts and the portraits of Paul that emerge from his letters are different. Fourth, Luke was presenting his own political agenda and not Paul's. Fifth, Paul did not have political theology because of his eschatological beliefs and statements.

After assessing these arguments, the study nevertheless argued that Acts is historically reliable, because of the following reasons: Firstly, concerning the issue of miracles in Acts, they do not undermine Acts' historical reliability because, by their nature, the miracles in Acts are not different in their profundity and complexity from other miracles in the rest of the Bible, and indeed in the Gospels. Since accepting miracles in the Bible depends on one's faith commitment, one cannot use the presence of miracles in Acts to prove that Acts is not historically reliable.

Secondly, concerning speeches in Acts, although in most respects, they parallel those of other Greco-Roman historians of the first century, they exhibit some distinctive features (Keener 2012:269). It is most likely that Luke was well-placed to have access to reliable sources for the speeches. The reason is that for some of the speeches, he states that he was present (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

Thirdly, concerning the argument that Luke's picture of Paul was different from what emerged from Paul's letters, the study argued that in Acts, Luke was reporting about Paul's evangelistic ministry among non-Christians, whereas, Paul's letters were pastoral, directed to

only Christians. Moreover, in Acts, Luke portrays Paul as a missionary present in communities seeking to plant and grow churches often in hostile environments, whereas, in his letters Paul was absent from those communities, seeking to solve problems within the churches. The two are thus bound to portray Paul differently. Furthermore, the study argued that in Acts, Luke was not presenting only his own political agenda but also Paul's agenda, as the two colleagues had a common mission.

Fourthly, regarding the argument that Paul did not have political theology because of his eschatological commitments, the study argued that Paul had political theology because he practised politics, as precisely defined, in Acts and gave thought to political issues in his letters. Politics was defined in this study as gaining and using power to govern a community and the responsibilities of both the governors and the governed for the common good of the community. Consequently, the study argued that Acts is historically reliable and contains important details of Paul's interactions with the Greco-Roman political systems. Thus, it is necessary to examine Paul's political behavior in Acts.

This study hypothesized that, when Paul's interaction with the Greco-Roman political systems in Acts is taken into consideration, the indication is that his political thought was not a binary "for" or "against" the Empire, but nuanced by his over-riding commitment to the advancement of the kingdom of God, to co-exist with it, recognizing its legitimacy but critiquing and denouncing its ungodly pretensions.

The study employed biblical and exegetical theology with additional insights from Social-Scientific Criticism to examine Paul's interaction with Greco-Roman political systems. The objective of adopting biblical and exegetical theology as the methodology of this research is to coherently bring into light the theological thinking and pastoral practice of Paul as far as the social world of Greco-Roman politics is concerned.

Consequently, the study gathered, examined, analyzed, and evaluated information on Paul's interaction with the Greco-Roman political systems in Acts of the Apostles. In addition, passages in Paul's letters that discuss the first century Christians' political responsibility were examined. The assembled texts in Acts where Paul interacted with political agents and texts in his letters where he discussed political issues were subjected to exegetical analysis to find out the meaning of the passages. Finally, Paul's political stance in his letters was correlated with his political practice in Acts to find out whether his political stance was compatible with his political practice.

2. A Survey of Secondary Literature on Paul's Interactions with His Political World as Depicted in Acts and His Letters

The study surveyed secondary literature on Paul's interaction with the Greco-Roman political systems as depicted in Acts and his political stance in some of his letters. The literature review aimed to examine scholarly works in English on Luke's political perspective and his presentation of Paul's interactions with the Greco-Roman political systems in Acts. The survey of literature was in three parts. The first part examined contributions biblical scholars have made regarding Luke's political perspective. The second part examined scholarly works on Paul's political behavior in Acts as presented by Luke. The final part examined relevant literature on Paul's political views in some of his letters, particularly Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and Titus 3:1.

Concerning contributions biblical scholars have made about Luke's political perspective, the study observed that biblical scholars have varied opinions on the issue. Some scholars see Luke as pro-empire

because he depicted the Roman political authorities positively (Wengst 1987, 89–105; Esler 1987, 201–219; Neagoe 2002, 4–21; Walton 2002, 1–41; Yoder 2012, 431). On the other hand, other scholars see Luke as anti-empire because he portrayed Jesus Christ as the savior and rightful ruler of the world. According to them, this was a challenge to Rome's position as the dominant power of the world (Gilbert 2002, 522–525; Punt 2010, 56; Alexander 2012, 283–293; Billings 2015, 13–19; Strait 2015, 9–18). Some biblical scholars, on the other hand, consider Luke as politically neutral because he portrayed the Roman Empire in both negative and positive ways. Furthermore, they argue that Luke's main concern was not political but rather he focused on the progression of the gospel of Christ (Walton 2002, 35; Kim 2008, 75–76; Rowe 2009, 3–4). The study argued that Luke's political stance in his narration of Acts was more likely neutral. This is because Luke's overwhelming agenda in writing Acts was the missionary advancement of the Jesus movement (Acts 1:1–4, 8). Even if he had more positive sentiments for the empire, these were subordinate to his overwhelming agenda of chronicling the missionary spread of the Christian faith. Luke's neutrality implies we can assume that how he portrays Paul as behaving towards the Greco-Roman political systems is not significantly tainted by authorial bias. It is this attitude that dovetails with that of his missionary companion, Paul.

Similarly, the literature survey concerning Paul's political behavior in Acts showed that biblical scholars have divergent opinions about Paul's political practice. Some scholars assert that Paul behaved positively towards the Roman authorities because he respected the Roman Empire, submitted to the authorities, and used the Roman legal system to defend himself and advance his mission (White 2009, 305–316; Alexander 2012, 283–293). Others also argue that Paul's behavior was negative or even subversive because he was seen as a lawbreaker who was often connected

with instances of unrest, arrest, and imprisonment. In addition, they contend that Paul challenged the Roman authorities during his arrests and trials (Cassidy 1987, 145–170; Punt 2010, 153; Strait 2013, 13–145). The study argued that Paul's political behavior was influenced by his preaching of the gospel of Christ.

The survey of literature on Paul's political stance in some of his letters also showed that biblical scholars have divergent opinions regarding Paul's exhortations to the early Christians concerning their political obligations. Some scholars argue that Paul used coded speech or irony in Romans 13:1–7 to subvert and undermine the Roman Empire (Herzog 1994, 339–360; Carter 2004, 209–228). Other scholars on the other hand argue that at the time Paul wrote Romans 13:1–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and Titus 3:1 Nero was a wise and humane ruler. That was why Paul spoke favorably of the empire (Mounce 2000, 75–84; White 2009, 305–333). Others also argue that Paul's statement in Romans 13:1–7 is not a universal commandment (Jewett 2007, 780–803; Constantineanu 2010, 143–157). The study argued that Paul was not apolitical. He was also not for or against the Roman Empire. His exhortation to the first century Christians was for them to know their political obligations.

It was also noted in the literature survey, that despite some well-published studies on Paul's political practice in Acts, most are either too old, limited, or skewed by other concerns. Therefore, there was a need for further study on Paul's political practice as portrayed in Acts of the Apostles.

3. Interactions between Politics and Religion in the First Century AD Greco-Roman World

To set the socio-cultural context, this study examined the interactions between politics and religion in the first century A.D. Greco-Roman world. The objective was to find out the connection between politics and religion in the first century A.D. and its impact on the Christian movement. The study began with setting forth the concept of religion in the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D. (Gradel 2002, 4–5; Scheid 2013, 1). The study noted that the Greco-Romans were deeply religious, and they worshipped many gods. Religion was the fabric of ancient life and everything people did was somehow “religious” in some respect. In addition, the study noted that organized religion, that is, the various public activities and cultural rituals associated with community beliefs and practices played a very important role in the politics of the Roman Empire (Cicero, *On His House* 1.1). Consequently, the Roman authorities did not separate organized religion, from politics, but used organized religion as one of the tools for the proper administration of the state, as well as to gain political control (Gradel 2002, 5–6; Billings 2015, 9). The study also observed that the imperial cult, which was a combination of religion and politics, represented the highest level of exploiting religion for politics in the Roman Empire. Accordingly, the imperial cult was used to promote the political achievements of the Roman emperor (Price 1984, 23–52; Jeffers 1999, 101–102; Klauck 2000, 283–284; Ferguson 2003, 199).

The study also observed that the Roman authorities generally tolerated various religious groups within the empire, including foreign cults. This is because the Romans practised polytheism. However, all religious groups operated with official permission. Furthermore, the

Roman authorities suppressed religious groups whose activities they considered dangerous to the stability of the empire (Beard, North, and Price 1996, 314). Thus, the reason for the suppression of religious groups within the Roman Empire was more political than religious. The study showed that when the Romans conquered the Jews, they gave special concessions to Judaism. Thus, Judaism became a legal religion within the Roman Empire. When Christianity began, the Roman authorities considered it a sect of Judaism. Consequently, Christians were able to operate freely within the Roman Empire. Furthermore, the study observed that because of the interaction between politics and religion in the first century A. D, Paul could not avoid behaving politically during his missionary activities. This has implications for assessing the extent to which his political conduct was *a priori* aimed at the empire system *per se* or rather was a vehicle for his other more pressing aims.

4. Paul's Political Stance in His Letters

This study examined Paul's political thought in his letters, particularly whether he was (a) anti-empire, (b) pro-empire, or (c) apolitical. It was noted that scholars have divergent views concerning Paul's political thought in his letters. Scholars who believe that Paul was anti-imperial argue that Paul's use of politically loaded terminology such as "gospel", "lord", "savior", "son of God", "peace", "*Parousia*", "Church", "justice" and "righteousness", as well as his apocalyptic theology in his letters, undermined the Roman Empire (Harrison 2002, 71; White 2009, 309; Bird 2016, 125). However, the study argued that the terminologies used by Paul were not the exclusive domain of political discourse in the Roman Empire. This is because many of the expressions used by Paul were also commonly

found in Jewish apocalyptic and eschatological literature with primary religious concerns (Joel 3:5; Jer. 9:22–23; Isa. 45:23). Furthermore, the study argued that defining Pauline terms solely following Roman Empire's imperial ideology and so suggesting a degree of political subversion is debatable.

Some scholars also contend that Paul was pro-empire because of his positive comments about the Roman Empire, especially his statements in Romans 13:1–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and Titus 3:1 (Crossan and Reed 2004, 11; Carter 2010, 7–26; Bird 2016, 125–132). However, the study argued that Paul's call for political submission was more likely due to instructions in the OT Scriptures regarding submission to governing authorities and the teachings of Jesus concerning Christians' relationship to the state (Eccl. 8:2–5; Jer. 27:5–11; Matt. 22:15–21; Mk 12:13–17; Lk 20:19–25). In addition, Paul did not want political irresponsibility on the part of the Christian communities, since it could lead to violent suppression of the Jesus movement by the Roman authorities, hence his call for political submission. Some scholars on the other hand argue that Paul was apolitical because his main objective was the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he was not interested in the politics of the Roman Empire (Cassidy 2001, 27; Jewett 2007, 793; Morgan 2010, 17; Heilig 2017, 1). The study argued that because Paul commented on political issues, he was not apolitical, if that term means complete disinterest in the politics of his world.

Having rejected these three conclusions, the study suggested that there is a fourth way of characterizing Paul's political stance in his letters. Thus, the study conducted exegetical studies of Romans 13:1–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and Titus 3:1. The objective of the exegetical study of the selected passages was to sum up what could be regarded as Paul's political stance in his letters. The exegesis began with information about each of the selected

passages. These are the author, recipient(s), date, occasion, purpose, genre, literary context, socio-political conditions, and integrity. The exegesis of these passages, therefore, showed that Paul recognized and accepted the legitimacy and authority of the Roman government. He also exhorted the Christians to submit to the political authorities, honor, and pray for the political authorities so that God would guide them to rule efficiently. Furthermore, he urged the Christians to be good and responsible citizens.

The exegesis of the selected passages showed that Paul did not wish for the destruction of the Roman Empire. He also did not ask the Christians to rebel against Roman political authorities. It was noted that Paul was neither for nor against the Roman Empire. Yet, he was not disinterested in the political world either. Paul's main preoccupation was to co-exist with and if need be, harness the resources of the political authorities for him to preach the gospel of Christ. Notwithstanding, it was observed that Paul criticized the ungodly pretensions of the Roman Empire, particularly idolatry (Acts 14:8–18). Paul's political stance in his letters can thus be characterized as mission oriented. It is this conclusion, which was tested by examining Paul's political behavior in Acts.

5. Exegesis of Passages in Acts, which Describe Paul's Interactions with the Greco-Roman Political Systems

The study conducted an exegetical study of passages in Acts that portray Paul's Political behavior when he interacted with the Greco-Roman political systems. Political behavior was defined in this study as one's attitude towards political authorities or political systems. The passages are Acts 16:16–40, 17:5–9, 19:31, 22:30–23:15, 24:10–11, 25:10–11, 26:1–2 and 28:7–10. These passages were selected because they seem to furnish very

rich material for fashioning a theology of Paul's practice when it came to engagement with civil authorities. The objective of the exegetical study is to help us understand how Paul practised politics in a difficult context. The study began with information about the author, date, audience, genre, literary context, the historical reliability of Acts, and purpose. The exegesis of the selected passages showed that Paul's encounter with political authorities was frequently necessitated by opposition from Jewish and Gentile agitators, who were not comfortable with his preaching. The opposition from these agitators often resulted in his arrests and trials. Thus, frequently, the contexts of Paul's political behavior were often those in which he stood accused by others seeking to use the administrative and political systems against his mission. It was also noted that in all his arrests and trials Paul submitted to the Roman political authorities. In addition, it was observed that Paul respected the Roman legal system and answered all charges against him respectfully.

Notwithstanding, it was observed that Paul's political behavior depended on the circumstances in which he found himself. The following examples were noted. At Philippi (Acts 16:16–40), he accepted flogging and imprisonment before declaring that he was a Roman citizen. On the other hand, in Jerusalem, he declared his Roman citizenship to avoid flogging (Acts 22:25–29). Again, at Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin, he declared that he was a Pharisee, and this led to the suspension of his trial before the Sanhedrin (22:30–23:15). At Caesarea when he realized that he was not going to receive a fair trial if his case was transferred to Jerusalem, he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10–11). Furthermore, Paul was bold to point out to the political authorities when they violated the laws of the state (Acts 16:16–40, 22:30–23:15). Paul also had friendly interactions with government officials and had politician friends (Acts 19:31, 28:7–10). It was observed that in Paul's interaction with the Roman political systems,

he was not for or against the Roman political authorities; his focus was on his missionary activities. The exegetical study showed that Paul was politically responsible, and he gave utmost respect to political appointees as instituted by God. Furthermore, his behavior was overwhelmingly shaped by his missionary agenda. This conclusion would seem to cohere or at least correlate with the analysis of Paul's stance in his letters.

6. Paul's Politics: Correlating Paul's Letters and Acts of the Apostles

The study correlated Paul's political stance in his letters with his political behavior in Acts. The objective was to demonstrate that Paul's political behavior in Acts is compatible with his political teachings in his letters. The study argued that it is reasonable to compare Acts and Pauline letters because the authors were close associates, and Luke was appropriately well-placed to record Paul's political behavior even if from different authorial and pastoral purposes. The study showed that in his letters, Paul discussed God's purpose of establishing human government and admonished the first century Christians to submit to the governing authorities. In addition, Paul outlined the political responsibilities of both the citizens and the governing authorities. According to Paul, the government's responsibility is to ensure law and order in society, punish wrongdoers, and reward those who do what is right. Furthermore, the government collects taxes for the administration of the state and social development. Paul also states that the citizens' responsibility is to do what is right, honor, respect, and submit to the government. In addition, the citizens must pay their taxes and pray for the well-being of the government (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; Titus 3:1).

The study also re-evaluated the views of biblical scholars concerning Paul's call for political submission. It was noted that biblical scholars have varied opinions regarding Paul's exhortations concerning Christians submitting to political authorities. The major concerns of biblical scholars are centered on the following hermeneutical issues: (a) Paul's purpose of exhorting Christians to submit to the Roman political authorities; (b) Whether the real meaning of Romans 13:1–7 is cryptic and thus, more opposed to the Roman Empire than first appears; (c) Whether Paul urged the first century Christians to submit to the Roman political authorities unquestionably; (d) Whether Paul urged the first century Christians to submit to evil and autocratic Roman authorities and (e) Whether Paul's call for political submission applied to all Christians in the first century.

The study argued that based on the findings on Paul's behavior in Acts, it may be concluded that Paul's purpose for asking the Christians to submit to the political authorities was to inform the Christians about the importance and the responsibilities of government as well as their own political responsibilities. In addition, Paul did not want the Christians to rebel against the government or do anything that would affect the overriding concern of the Christian mission. Regarding the meaning of Romans 13:1–7 and Titus 3:1, the study argued that Paul wanted the Christians to submit to the political authorities. Since he himself submitted to the Greco-Roman political authorities. This means he was sincere in his call for political submission. Regarding the extent to which Christians are to submit to political authorities, the study argued that Christians must not submit to political authorities unquestionably. For instance, although Paul submitted to the political authorities, he rebuked them when they did not act according to the laws of the empire (Acts

16:16–40, 22:30–23:15). Concerning the first century Christians submitting to autocratic and evil Roman government, the study argued that Paul did not make any distinction between good and bad governments in his call for political submission. Paul himself submitted to the autocratic Roman government and relied on the Roman legal system for justice (Acts 25:10–11). However, Paul's political behavior shows that if the actions of the government violate the laws of God, Christians must obey God and accept the consequences of the government. Regarding the issue of whether Paul's call for political submission applied to all first century Christians, the study argued that since Paul asserted that government is an establishment of God for the wellbeing of humanity, it implies that his exhortation on political submission applied to all first century Christians and by extension all humans in all generations.

The correlation of Paul's political behavior and his political stance shows that when important generic, contextual, and authorial factors are taken into consideration, Paul's political behavior as portrayed in Acts of the Apostles, is not only compatible with his political theology and instructions in his letters but also serves as an illustration of how the first century readers of his letters would have understood and practised those instructions.

7. Conclusion

This study sought to analyze Paul's interaction with the Greco-Roman political systems in Acts of the Apostles, within the milieu of first century A. D. political context. The study has argued that the formulation of Paul's political theology should be based on his political stance in his letters as well as his political practice in Acts. The study argues that Acts of Apostles

is a historical monograph written by Luke, a missionary companion of Paul, that provides reliable information about Paul's political behavior when he interacted with the political authorities of his day.

Furthermore, the study argues that Paul was not apolitical because he gave thought to political issues in his letters, particularly Romans 13:1–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and Titus 3:1. He also had friendly interactions with political authorities during his missionary activities and even had politician friends (Acts 19:31). Paul's interactions with political authorities could be attributed to the connection between politics and religion in the first century A.D. Greco-Roman world. In addition, the study argues that Paul was sincere when he instructed the first century Christians regarding their political obligations. This is because he also submitted to the governing authorities as he urged the early Christians to do. Furthermore, the correlation of Paul's political stance in his letters with his political behavior in Acts shows that Paul's political stance in his letters was compatible with his political practice in Acts.

It was noted in this study that Paul's political behavior was influenced by his preaching of the gospel of Christ. Thus, Paul co-existed with the Roman political authorities, recognized their legitimacy to rule, submitted to them, and sought their assistance when he was unfairly treated. Notwithstanding, Paul also criticized and denounced the Roman authorities' ungodly pretensions. We can therefore conclude that Paul was not for or against the Roman Empire but rather he negotiated the Greco-Roman political systems because of his missionary agenda. This study argues that Acts of the Apostles with appropriate safeguards regarding authorial agenda and generic framing can serve as a key referee to settle scholarly debates about Paul's attitude towards the Roman Empire, particularly whether he was pro-empire, anti-empire, or apolitical.

Furthermore, this study argues that Paul's political behavior in Acts of the Apostles and his political stance in his letters indicate that government is important for the proper functioning of society. Additionally, the study notes that Paul's political stance and his political behavior indicate that politics is unavoidable. Also, Paul's call for political submission and his political behavior show that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has theological, social, and political dimensions. However, Paul's political behavior indicates that when state laws conflict with God's laws, Christians must obey God and suffer the consequences. Finally, Paul's political behavior and his political stance are instructive for contemporary Christians, particularly in Ghana where some Christians believe that politics and religion do not mix.

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An Evangelical Evaluation of Major Readings of Christ's Sufficiency in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards an Appropriation of Colossians 2:1–10

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Abstract

Many Africans, including Christians and even church leaders, betray the thought that Jesus Christ is sufficient for them by their actions, inactions, and/or speech. In response to this thought, many theologians have demonstrated Christ's sufficiency using different imageries that they consider relevant for this task; however, these imageries do not meet all the four core tenets of evangelicalism in one way or the other and they fail to capture Christ's sufficiency comprehensively from both ontological and functional perspectives without undermining either perspective. By

modifying Lewis and Demarest's (1996) methodology, reinforced with a partially modified Vyhmeister and Robertson's (2020) exegetical method used to engage Colossians 2:1–10, the study developed a “comprehensive Christology” that imitates the biblical model of depicting Christ's sufficiency. The study demonstrated how comprehensive Christology engenders a Christocentric worldview, which in turn entrenches the thought of Christ's sufficiency in every aspect of life.

1. Introduction

The prevalent influence of traditional spirituality on many sub-Saharan Africans is an evident reality (see Hartman 2020, Chap. 4; Smith 2018, 71; Quayesi-Amakye 2017; Falconer 2016, 175–181; cf. Udeani 2007, 61) which necessitates the depiction of Christ as sufficient for them in light of their traditional spirituality. The vigorous attempts to depict Christ as sufficient, however, often come from a functional and utilitarian perspective whereby Christ's sufficiency is defined more in terms of what he can do for the people than in terms of who he is as truly God (Jabini 2010, 65; Bediako 2004b, 22). The popular functional approach to depicting Christ imitates the traditional African utilitarian view of religion but it fails to consider in-depth the basis of what makes Christ sufficient, which is his deity, and what this means for thinking of Christ as sufficient. This study thus evaluated the more common depictions of Christ as sufficient for Africans from an evangelical perspective, and the evaluation proved these depictions deficient of one or more core evangelical tenets, so they cannot be considered as evangelical. This necessitates the development of an adequately evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency for Christians, which will meet the core requirements of an evangelical

theology and demonstrate hands-on the implications of understanding Christ as sufficient for Africans.

To develop a theology of Christ's sufficiency for Africans, this study used a modified form of Lewis and Demarest's (1996) research methodology to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the causes, manifestations and effects of understanding Christ as insufficient for Africans?
- ii. What are the various understandings of Christ's sufficiency among Christians, especially African Christians?
- iii. What does Colossians 2:1-10 teach about Christ's sufficiency?
- iv. How might we develop an adequate evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency among Christians in Africa?
- v. What is the relevance of the proposed evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency?

It is anticipated that painstakingly answering the foregoing questions will yield an adequate evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency for Africans and embed this understanding in their minds.

2. The African Challenge of Christ's Insufficiency

Some of the reasons some Africans think that Christ is not sufficient for them is their worldview, their traditional notion of religion and salvation, their perception of God as aloof, and the partial sufficiency of the divinities they are acquainted with in their traditional religion. For some, it is their feelings of susceptibility to malevolent spirits and powers, often fueled by what they see and hear in the media and from preachers.

These reasons also include inadequate theological training of church leaders and preachers, lack of effective discipleship, unhealthy quest for miracles, distorted attempts to indigenize and contextualize the Christian faith, and the need for self-protection and defense in the face of ethno-religious conflicts. All these reasons often interplay as factors that instigate the thought in the minds of many Africans that Christ is not sufficient for them, and this thought mainly manifests in the act of syncretism. Syncretism, in the context of this discussion, takes place when people augment Christ with another being or power to meet one's needs because they think Christ alone is not sufficient to meet their needs.

This study argues that the thought of Christ's insufficiency must be addressed and eradicated because of its negative effects on African Christians and Christianity. These effects include the reliance on mystical powers to meet existential needs and the fusion of traditional African religious practices with Christianity, both of which give Christianity a bad reputation before the watching world. Furthermore, such thought results in a sacred-secular divide mentality that impinges on the integrity of Christianity as a holistic faith and an unbiblical view of Christian preachers and leaders, in the similitude of witchdoctors and magicians, which sometimes results in the abuse of authority wielded by these preachers and leaders. All these effects reiterate the need to engage the thought of some Africans that Christ is not sufficient for them and eradicate such thought.

3. An Evangelical Evaluation of Major African Readings of Christ's Sufficiency

As noted earlier, many African theologians have attempted to eradicate the thought that Christ is insufficient among Africans, and they often do this

through different portrayals of how Africans should think of who Christ is to them, so they can consider him sufficient for them. This study assesses the more common portrayals of Christ's sufficiency for Africans from an evangelical perspective by weighing each portrayal in light of the four core tenets of evangelicalism (cf. Suomala 2017, 590; Noll 2003, 16; Boaheng 2022, 208–210) to know if they retain all four tenets simultaneously. The four core tenets of evangelicalism include an emphasis on: personal conversion through believing the gospel, preaching the gospel to every human, the Bible as the supreme authority for Christians and the only source of the gospel message, and Jesus's atoning death on the cross as the main theme of the gospel message (Bebbington 1989, 3; 2021, 36–39).

One of the most common suggestions is that Africans should think of Christ as their ancestor (see Pobee 1979, 94; Dickson 1984, 197–198; Milingo 1984, 85; Kabasélé 1991a, 123–124; Bujo 1992; Bediako 1994; Nyamiti 2006, 24; Oborji 2008, 16; Wachege 2012, 27; cf. Magezi and Magezi 2016a). This is in light of the prominent position held by ancestors in the traditional African worldview (Bujo 1992, 120; Triebel 2002, 193; Dyrness 1990, 48; Reed and Mtukwa 2010, 148; Abogunrin 2003b, 10). To distinguish Christ from their natural ancestors, however, some suggest several adjectives that emphasize Christ's superiority and supremacy, such as “the Great and Greatest Ancestor” (Pobee 1979, 18, 94; Dickson 1984, 197–198) or “a kind of special ancestor” (Sarpong 1998, 143, 152). However, portraying Christ as an ancestor does not achieve its intended aim of portraying Christ as sufficient (see Magezi and Magezi 2017b, 9; Potgieter and Magezi 2016, 6). Instead, it ends up undermining the deity of Christ, encouraging syncretism, and sometimes ignoring African contextual needs (Potgieter and Magezi 2016, 7).

Similar to the ancestral description of Christ's sufficiency for Africans is the “elder brother” portrayal of Christ's sufficiency, which

derives from the highly esteemed status that firstborns occupy and the enormous influence and power that they wield in many African societies (Aigbadumah 2011; Manus 1993, 55; Nyamiti 1991, 6). It also stems from the biblical depiction of Christ as a brother to Christians (Mark 3:35; Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11–12 Nyamiti 1984, 16, 23; 2005, 65–146; 2006, 24; Kabasélé 1991a; Bediako 2015, 197). Nonetheless, it bases its depiction of Christ's sufficiency more on the African cultural responsibilities shouldered by elder brothers than on the biblical teachings about Christ as elder brother. Furthermore, it says nothing about preaching the gospel or the need to believe the gospel message.

Some African theologians (e.g., Pobee 1979, 81–98; Manus 1991; 1993; 1998; Kabasélé 1991b, 103–115; Akrong 1992, 119–130) posit that when Africans think of Christ in the similitude of an African king/chief, they will consider him sufficient for them. This view has both biblical and cultural underpinnings (Isa 9:6–7; Dan 7:13–14; John 18:36; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 19:13–16; Orobator 1994; Bozongwana 1983; Atansi 2020, 53; cf. Banda 2005, 16; Waruta 1991, 60–61; Kabasélé 1991b, 105–112; Sanon 1991, 88, 93; Nyathi 2001, 33; Darko 2020, 191). However, just like the “divine conqueror” portrayal of Christ's sufficiency with which it shares *Christus victor* approach (Clarke 2005, 149), the conception of Jesus as a “king”/“chief” is distorted as it is a theology of glory devoid of the theology of the cross [suffering] (Pobee 1979, 97–98).

Unarguably, the all-inclusive duties priests played in traditional Africa (Opoku 1978, 74, 148, 150; Bannerman-Richter 1982, 9; Idowu 1991, 200; Darko 2020, 173–175; Samuel 2022, 117; cf. Coody 2018, 846) motivates the portrayal of Christ as a priest so that Africans can consider him as sufficient for them (Bediako 2015, 197). This position is more appealing not only because it is biblical (Heb 4:14–15; 5:1–10:20; cf. John 17:15) but much more because it takes place in the supernatural realm where it matters

most beyond the level of traditional priests (Bediako 1990, 37–38; 2004b, 26–29; Adeyemo 1998, 209; Amolo and Oladimeji 2003, 173). However, it does not underscore the need to preach and believe in the gospel message itself.

While the ancestral portrayal of Christ's sufficiency is a more common suggestion within the academic circle, the "divine conqueror" portrayal of Christ's sufficiency is the foremost and most widespread understanding of Christ's sufficiency among Africans (Mbiti 1972, 51, 54; Agyarko 2017, 10, 26). This is because it speaks satisfactorily to many Africans' need for a powerful protector from the evil powers they fear (Mbiti 1972, 54, 55; Bediako 1990, 8; 1994, 93; 1983; Nyamiti 1991, 4). The "divine conqueror" derives from the ransom theory of atonement¹ and its *Christus victor*² understanding as revisited and revived by Gustaf Aulén (1931) who strongly believes it was the dominant atonement view in the New Testament and the Church Fathers (Aulén 2003, 4–6).³ Consequently, like the atonement theory it emerges from, it accentuates Christ's victory over all evil powers as well as how this victory qualifies him to protect his people from all these powers (cf. Mbiti 1972, 54–55). It is a more

1 The ransom theory of atonement is tagged "classic" because it is said to be the first atonement model and that Irenaeus, an early African Church Father, introduced it (Agyarko 2017, 15). This atonement theory posits that God exchanged Jesus with the people held in Satan's captivity but Satan lost both Jesus and those in his captivity as Jesus's goodness overcame him and he could not retain Jesus with him in hell (Falconer 2013, 24). Jesus, therefore, resurrected victoriously from the grave on the third day and he left with Satan's captives (cf. Eph 2:1–4; 4:8).

2 John Mbiti (1972, 51, 54), the first African theologian to observe the predominance of "divine conqueror" Christology in the continent, engaged and applied the *Christus victor* portrayal of Christ to the African context.

3 According to Aulén (2003, 4–6), the victorious Christ (*Christus victor*) defeated Satan and his kingdom in a cosmic battle that involved the latter versus God and his kingdom.

convincing understanding of Christ's sufficiency for two reasons. The first reason is its affinity with the acclaimed oldest atonement theory and traditional African view of salvation (Agyarko 2017, 24; cf. Aulén 1931). While the second reason is its appeal to the average postmodernists who believe that it addresses "the problems of endless suffering and evil on a cosmic level" (Falconer 2013, 3; Harper 2001, 5–6, 10; Col 2:14–15). Despite its convincing value, depicting Christ as a divine conqueror has its flaws that disqualify it from being an evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency for Africans. The first is that it does not emphasize adequately the penal substitution aspect of Christ's atonement (Harper 2001; Falconer 2013; cf. 1 Cor 15:3; 1 Pet 2:24), thus failing to reasonably validate Christ's demeaning and painful death on the cross as merely to overcome evil powers (Rutledge 2015, chap. 9). Similarly, it does not emphasize the full deity and full humanity of Christ in its articulation of Christ's sufficiency for Africans (Agyarko 2017, 27; 2009, 9 n. 4).

The holistic understanding of health and healthcare in Africa (Stinton 2004, 64; Atansi 2020, 49; Ezigbo 2010, 120–122; also Clarke 2010, 122) and the Gospels' records of Christ's healing ministry (Matt 9:36; 15:30; Mark 1:41; Luke 4:40; Schreiter 2008, 126) synchronize to influence the portrayal of Christ as a healer. This addresses Africans' dire need for healthy living in all ramifications (Kolié 1991, 132), which many of them believe Christ can meet if they call him their healer (Atansi 2020, 47; see Keener 2001; also Milingo 1984). This reflects an early Christianity's perception of Christ as "*Christus medicus*" (Honecker 1985, 310–23) and depicts him for Africans as all they need for their total well-being (Shorter 1982; 1985; 2000; see Domingues 2000, 65; Atansi 2020, 88–92). It is, therefore, a common understanding of Christ's sufficiency in Africa with respect to every aspect of life (Ezigbo 2010, 120–26, 139; Atansi 2020, 49; see Georgen 2001, 10; Clarke 2010, 172–173). This portrayal of Christ's

sufficiency, however, does not emphasize Christ's death and resurrection as foundational to salvation and the primacy of preaching this as the gospel.

In the African context, Christ's sufficiency has also been portrayed by calling him a liberator (Maimela 1982; 1987; 1991; 1992; Imasogie 1985, 225; Magesa 1989, 85, 91; Bohache 2008, 75; see Stinton 2004, 205–7; Orobator 2008, 77–79), an understanding that emerged from liberation theology.⁴ Portraying Christ as a liberator has a biblical basis (cf. Exod 14; Judg 2:16; Isa 59; 61:1f.; Amos 4:1f.; Luke 4:18ff.; Adamolekun 2003, 389; Cone 1979, 20). This liberation encompasses every aspect of life (Appiah-Kubi 1987, 74; Bujo 1992, 130; Pobee 1992, 16; Nwankpa 1994, 9; Nyamiti 1994, 66; Oshun 1998; Asamoah-Gyadu 2000, 181; Stinton 2004, 207–213; Githii 2007, 31–32; Agyarko 2017, 19), which explains why some Protestants tag salvation as “liberation” (Martínez-Olivieri 2015, 87). The emphasis of depicting Christ as a liberator on the temporal and societal implications of salvation, however, results in an unhealthy and unbiblical de-emphasis on personal conversion, which is crucial to achieving the societal *shalom* it seeks to achieve. This de-emphasis on individual salvation from sin, which is responsible for the societal malaise that liberation Christology seeks to squash, makes it deficient to be considered an evangelical portrayal of Christ's sufficiency. Portraying Christ as liberator has the same undergirding philosophy as that of Christ as divine conqueror, but it

4 Liberation theology, as rightly defined by Martínez-Olivieri (2015, 82), is “a range of explicitly contextual theologies” that seek to address existential problems of “oppressions, violence, and discrimination” through interaction between the Bible, the church, and the world. It portrays Christ as one who he frees people from all “societal manifestations of sin in present historical experience,” such as “poverty, oppression, and violence ... international economic oppression ... classism, racism, gender, and sexual violence,” and all real “economic, socio-political, and cultural” problems (83, 91).

differs from the latter as it approaches Christology from below rather than above (Agyarko 2017, 11, 14), thereby focusing more on his humanity at the expense of his deity.

In more recent times, Magezi and Magezi (2016; 2017a; 2017b) argue that when Christ is presented to Africans as the New Adam, they will consider him as sufficient for them by virtue of his incarnation, which shows that he identifies with every aspect of their lives and is thus willing to address all that pertain to their lives. Bediako (1995, 84–85; 2004a, 23–25) had earlier suggested this understanding of Christ's sufficiency, arguing that it will make Africans believe that Christ understands their needs and fears, having become like them in his incarnation, and so he can deal properly with these needs and fears. This portrayal of Christ's sufficiency, however, does not emphasize the need to preach and believe the gospel message nor does it emphasize the cross-event as it is expected of an evangelical theology of Christ's sufficiency. It also fails to elaborate how the perception of Christ as the New Adam appropriately addresses the African life situation as expected of the gospel message itself (cf. Galgalo 2012, 101–102), especially on matters of ill-health, evil attacks, and other needs and fears of Africans.

In light of his being fully God and fully human, Obaje (1992) and Ezigbo (2008; 2010; 2015) propose that Christ should be depicted as a revealer to Africans so they can think of him as sufficient for them. This means that Christ, as God, reveals God fully to human beings and can meet all their needs (Obaje 1992, 47, 50; cf. Ezigbo 2015, 57), including spiritual threats (Ezigbo 2010, Chap. 6). This portrayal of Christ's sufficiency, however, lays more emphasis on Christ's earthly ministry than on his death through which he overcame the evil powers that Africans fear (cf. Col 2:15), thus evoking a partial representation of the biblical records of Christ's victory over evil forces. Furthermore, it does not emphasize

how Christ's deity makes him superior to evil forces. Similarly, it does not emphasize the need to believe in the gospel message or to preach it.

Another suggestion is to portray Christ as a guest in light of how Africans, especially in Nigeria, treat guests with utmost respect and care (Udoh 1983; 1988; cf. Olikenyi 2001, 106; Cook 2009, 681). The intention is that after Africans have welcomed Christ as a guest, they will later accept him as their relative and then ultimately as their Lord (Udoh 1988, 14–15, 244–245). This approach, however, divests Christ of his deity (222, 223), which Udoh, its advocate, claims that Africans find such as problematic (80), offensive (83, 210, 211), and sacrilegious, such that it makes some remain syncretistic (74, 263). Furthermore, it does not emphasize the need to preach and believe in the gospel message; neither does it derive from the Bible, nor does it even speak of Christ's atoning death.

None of the foregoing major African readings of Christ's sufficiency meets all the core tenets of an evangelical theology simultaneously. All of them are devoid of one or more evangelical tenets, so they cannot be considered as evangelical theologies of Christ's sufficiency. Furthermore, most of these readings prioritize Christ's functionality (what he can do for Africans) over his ontology (who he is), which is a faulty understanding of Christ's sufficiency because the sufficiency of what Christ does is based on the sufficiency of who he is (his person). This attests to the need for an adequate evangelical theology of Christ's sufficiency. In order to develop such a theology, this study will engage Colossians 2:1–10 as its springboard.

4. The Relevance of Colossians 2:1–10 for the African Challenge of Christ's Insufficiency

The exegesis of Colossians 2:1–10, carried out in the dissertation, points to three main needs in the African milieu over which Christ's sufficiency is

denied. These three needs are the need for a sufficient provider who meets their existential needs, the need for a sufficient mediator who addresses their existential threats, especially those coming from the spiritual world, and the need for a revealer on whom they can depend for guidance and direction in all aspects of their lives. Ezigbo's (2015, 54) research confirms that these three needs are the primary instigators of seeking quick solutions to problems from traditional religious practitioners among some African Christians.

Christ adequately meets the African need for a sufficient provider as he fills (completes) them spiritually in him (Col 2:10; see also John 4:14; 6:35; 10:10) such that they are not deficient in any way. Therefore, African Christians do not need any other activity, ideology, personality, power, or object to make them "fuller" or complete, as they are already complete in Jesus Christ. They need not resort to any power for anything as they have all they need in Jesus Christ and are filled up such that they have no space in them for any other alternative or supplement to Jesus. They are not to seek sustenance or guidance from their ancestors, deities and traditional religious personnel. This understanding entrenches the belief that Christ is sufficient for Africans.

Christ, similarly, meets the African need for a sufficient mediator by virtue of his deity. Colossians 2:9 describes Jesus as God (see also John 1:1; Rom 9:5), signifying that Jesus has everything that God has and there is nothing about God which can be found outside of Jesus, so Africans do not need to confer or consult with any other spiritual power to reach God or seek his help. His perfect, permanent, complete, and comprehensive sacrifice (cf. Heb 1:3c; 9:26) revokes the need for sacrifices as well. In addition, by his sacrificial death and his intercessory ministry, he provides the ultimate mediation between God and humans, thus putting and to all kinds of mediators. As the head over every spiritual power (Col 2:10; cf.

Matt 28:18), Christ determines the limit of what these powers can do, so Africans can think of him as sufficient to help them overcome these powers that they hitherto fear. As the embodiment of God's fullness (Col 2:9), Jesus now replaces the temple (John 2:19–21; Rev 21:22; cf. 1 Kings 8:12; Ps 68:16; 132:13–14) so Africans do not need to visit any acclaimed “sacred” or special location to access God since Christ himself, the fullness of God's presence, now lives in them (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; cf. Gal 2:20).

The African need for a revealer, as seen in the unending quest for spiritual guidance from religious leader, is met in Christ when African Christians come to possess all the riches of full assurance of understanding through their knowledge of Christ, the mystery of God (Col 2:2). Therefore, Africans who believe in Christ have all the understanding through their knowledge of Christ and this gives them complete assurance in Christ as sufficient for them. Their knowledge of Christ, in turn, determines their feelings, perceptions, desires, obligations, and activities (Vaughan 2017), and so they consider him sufficient to address every aspect of their lives. This is because all they need to know about God and his interaction with the cosmos are revealed in and through Christ.

5. Towards an Evangelical African Reading of Christ's Sufficiency

The lack of an adequate evangelical theology of Christ's sufficiency for Africans necessitates the development of one, and this will be done based on the findings from the exegesis and application of Colossians 2:1–10. This study proposes a “comprehensive Christology”⁵ that allows

⁵ This study opts for the words “Christology” and “comprehensive” because “Christology” intertwines with the thought of Christ's sufficiency and because it proposes a comprehensive depiction of Christ's sufficiency that is pertinent for sub-Saharan Africans whose worldview is comprehensive.

for every biblical depiction of Christ's sufficiency and adheres to all four core evangelical tenets. This position derives from how no biblical writer expressed Christ's sufficiency with only one or two categories and how the NT writers utilized different concepts only derived from the OT [a special revelation] without recourse to cultural or pagan concepts to demonstrate Christ's sufficiency for their readers. Similarly, Christ is to be portrayed holistically as derived from the NT understanding of his sufficiency, and the significance of his person and work are to be explored holistically for the African context. This implies a perfect blend of Christ's ontology and functionality as the basis for his sufficiency, while reiterating that his works are sufficient because his person, as truly God and truly human, is sufficient. This helps to correct the functional approach to religion among Africans which prompts their predisposition to perceive Christ's sufficiency for them primarily in terms of what he does or can do for them, without thinking of his sufficiency for them in terms of who he is to them.

Comprehensive Christology places Christ at the center of Africans' worldview, such that this worldview is transformed as a result of their repentance and conversion. This affects their view of the spiritual world as they affirm Christ's victory and supremacy over the evil spirits feared by many through his death and resurrection. Comprehensive Christology also acknowledges the comprehensive nature of Christ's salvation as seen in the NT's use of numerous terms to describe salvation (Yeo 2017, 7; Ngaruiya 2023, 241). These terms include *ἱλαστήριον* ("propitiation,"/"expiation"),⁶

6 Yeo (2017, 5–6) notes that *ἱλαστήριον* can mean "propitiation," the appeasement of God's wrath against sin (as in Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5), as well as "expiation" the cleansing of humans' sins, which incurred God's wrath (as in 1 John 2:2; 4:10) (O'Collins 2007, 23).

καταλλαγή (“atonement”/“reconciliation”),⁷ ἀπολύτρωσις (“redemption”),⁸ δικαιώω (“justify”),⁹ and ἐλευθερία (“liberation”).¹⁰ The multifaceted meanings of these terms further underscore the comprehensiveness of Christ’s salvation, such that it ensures total well-being of the saved (Yeo 2017, 6), which obviously aligns with the traditional African concept of salvation. Comprehensive Christology deliberates on how God interacts with humans through Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives in order to ascertain Christ’s sufficiency for humans in all these aspects.

7 The word καταλλαγή, which William Tyndale translates as “atonement” while some ETs translate as “reconciliation,” is another favourite word for salvation in the NT (Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–20). Yeo (2017, 5) observes that while Tyndale’s translation focuses on “overcoming the enmity between God and humanity rather than the broken relationships among people,” Paul’s use of the word in his writings is most likely from “the Graeco-Roman background of transforming hostility into friendship or love” rather than the OT/Hebraic concept of atonement (as in Lev 16). This means that the reconciliation Jesus provides is comprehensive as well, reconciling humans with God and others.

8 The noun ἀπολύτρωσις (“redemption”), another cognate of salvation, is regarded as a gift of God (Rom 3:24), and its reach is comprehensive. The NT teaches that Christians are redeemed from God’s wrath (Rom 5:9), sin’s power (Eph 1:7, 14; Rom 5), death’s power (Rom 6:23), the curse of the law (Gal 3:13), and the devil (Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

9 The verb δικαιώω, which means “justify” (as in Romans 3:24) can also “mean ‘vindicated’ in the context of justice where God stands with the weak or the oppressed, thus justifying them (Ps 82:1–3) ... reversing the lowly from shame to honor (Ps 31:1–2); thus the shameful cross in the New Testament sets right the distorted value system of glory (aesthetic) and obscenity (shame)” (Yeo 2017, 5; Jewett 2006, 281). What this implies is that justification is not only about being reckoned as righteous in God’s eyes but also about ensuring that there is justice in the world.

10 The noun ἐλευθερία (“liberation”) and its family-words are used as cognates of salvation and they refer to personal (John 8:36), socio-political (Rom 8:2), and cosmic (Rom 8:21) aspects of salvation (Yeo 2017, 4). This means that liberation, Jesus’s action for which he is called a “liberator” (see §5.3.7), is not merely socioeconomic or political but also spiritual, so it is comprehensive.

Comprehensive Christology advocates a comprehensive transformation of human beings in a way that affects every aspect of their lives, such that Christ determines all they do in every aspect of their lives. This reveals an emphasis on the evangelical tenet of conversion. To achieve the complete transformation of humanity, comprehensive Christology proposes an evangelistic approach where individual conversion leads to holistic redemption, improving societies and the cosmos by meeting all human needs and addressing every facet of life. In addition, comprehensive Christology emphasizes the evangelical tenet of the Bible by taking into consideration the biblical depiction of salvation as comprehensive, encompassing every aspect of human life. It also does this by imitating the Bible in its depiction of Christ with the use of all the biblical titles and categories ascribed to Christ. In the same vein, comprehensive Christology adopts an all-inclusive understanding of Christ's death and resurrection by integrating the moral influence, ransom (*Christus victor*), satisfaction, penal substitution, sacrifice, and governmental theories of the atonement, all of which contribute to an evangelical understanding of the atonement (Bloesch 1978, 158; Morris 1984, 100–102). This comprehensive understanding of the atonement is biblically valid considering that the unsaved man's situation is so complicated and “disastrous” and any atonement that will rectify such a situation “must necessarily be complex” (Morris 1984, 102). The foregoing shows that comprehensive Christology adheres to the four core tenets of an evangelical theology, so it is an adequate evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency for Africans.

6. Towards a Real-World Application of Comprehensive Christology

Not only is comprehensive Christology an adequate evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency for Africans, but it is also a hands-on theology for the African context. Comprehensive Christology eventually results in a Christocentric worldview which places Christ's person and work at the center of Africans' mind-set as they interact with the world in which they live. A Christocentric worldview views Christ as sufficient to govern and control every aspect of one's life, so it aligns fully with and lives according to the teachings of the Christian faith. Consequently, it eliminates alternative worldviews that instigate the thought that Christ is not sufficient for them and makes Africans have no sentiment or consideration for traditional religious alternatives or opinions in any and every matter of their lives, because Christ is the nub of what they think and do at all times. A Christocentric worldview causes Africans to leave nothing out of the lordship of Jesus Christ and do everything in submission to him (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:23), because they find Christ to be sufficient for them in every aspect of their lives.

A Christocentric worldview demonstrates Christ's sufficiency in matters considered sacred and those considered secular, thus uprooting the sacred-secular divide mentality prevalent in the minds of some Africans. In the same vein, it speaks to matters in both the sacred and secular realms of life. It finds out from the Bible how Christ deals with sin, spiritual powers, curses, spiritual dissatisfaction, African religiosity, and Christian ministry, within the African context, and live in light of what the Bible says. It does the same with life's realities such as culture, family life, work, economy, healthcare, education, politics, societal ills, human rights, and environmental care in Africa. This study painstakingly demonstrates

in its sixth chapter how a Christocentric worldview can demonstrate Christ's sufficiency for Africans in the aforementioned aspects of life.

7. Conclusion

A sufficient Christ for Africans addresses every aspect of their lives, leaving none out of his influence, but many Africans do not think that Christ is sufficient for them. This has led many theologians in Africa to propose different portrayals of Christ's sufficiency so Africans will believe that Christ is sufficient for them. None of these commendable efforts to entrench Christ's sufficiency for Africans, however, possesses all the core criteria that would have qualified them as evangelical. This necessitated the development of an adequate evangelical theology of Christ's sufficiency and the researcher proposed comprehensive Christology as the preferred evangelical understanding of Christ's sufficiency for Africans. Comprehensive Christology produces a Christocentric worldview, which in turn applies the thought of Christ's sufficiency to every aspect of life.

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Toward a 21st Century Interdisciplinary Pentecostal Catechesis in Four Pentecostal Denominations in the United States

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Abstract

This research seeks to answer the question, “How could the current method of theological instruction in four Pentecostal denominations located in the United States be improved, moving toward an Interdisciplinary Pentecostal Catechesis relevant for the twenty-first century?” Based on a modified form of Browning’s Practical Theology Model, this study begins with an evaluation of the current discipleship practices in four U.S. Pentecostal denominations: the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Church of God in Christ, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), and the Assemblies of God. The research then turns to the biblical and historical methods of

catechesis, followed by an evaluation of the concerns facing the Church currently in the U.S. The resultant research indicates that a discipleship crisis is evident. Suggestions for a revised catechetical discipleship model for the Pentecostal denominations, specifically and for the Church were offered. It was determined that an interdisciplinary Pentecostal catechesis should include a biblically and theologically based catechism, representing the first part of the discipleship journey. Equally important, but rarely emphasized, are the practical aspects of discipleship, which emerge when the doctrine learned becomes “doctrine in action.” This incorporates sociology (social awareness and care), psychology (knowing oneself and others), and missiology (cultural awareness), all of which provide a holistic method of catechesis that leads to transformational discipleship relevant for twenty-first century believers.

1. Preparation—An Introduction

The mandate in Matthew 28:19–20 has inspired the Church to make disciples of all nations, transforming lives into the image of God through discipleship. The New Testament introduces the term catechesis (Gr. *Κατηχέω*; *katēkhēō*, “instruct orally”; Spinoza and Johnson-Miller 2014, 16), which has taken many forms since the Church began. Catechesis (discipleship) is the process of guiding people to experience a deeper relationship with God through the study of biblical truths and doctrine (catechism), but more importantly, through the practical expression of that doctrine in their daily lives (praxis). These two components (catechism and praxis) are meant to be blended; however, it has been revealed that an emphasis has been placed on the theoretical rather than the practical, causing an imbalance in the catechetical process. This article represents a

summary of the wider results of the original study, capturing the essence of the research, which seeks to encourage churches to provide a holistic catechesis, applying an educational strategy that integrates the head, heart, and hands components through the use of multiple learning styles.

Traditionally, catechesis has developed into a successful tool for discipleship within the faith community; however, many Protestant denominations have distanced themselves from the model due to its ties with the Roman Catholic Church, labeling it ineffective and ritualistic (Smelley 2016, 49). More specifically, Pentecostals object to the traditional rote method of the standard catechism as too liturgical, thus hindering the move of the Holy Spirit (cf. Blumhofer 2003; Pupcheck and Mills 2008; Cain 2022). According to Packer and Parrett (2010, 22–24), “the church in the West has largely abandoned serious catechesis as a normative practice” in favor of the informal Bible lessons taught in the Sunday School model. Trained catechists have been replaced by untrained lay members who teach Bible stories rather than biblical doctrine and foundational ethics.

The motivation for this research materialized due to an observed decline in discipleship in the Pentecostal Movement in the United States, especially as it pertains to the depth of understanding of biblical truths and doctrine and how to apply that doctrine practically through lifestyle worship, social action, and mission.

1.1. Theological and Practical Significance

It was determined that an interdisciplinary Pentecostal catechesis should be biblically and theologically based, teaching doctrine that is necessary for all Pentecostal believers. Furthermore, disciples should be able to articulate what they believe regarding God, creation, the universe, heaven,

and hell, as well as why they believe that all to be true. In addition to biblical aspects, the catechism should address social and psychological concerns leading catechumens to an enlightened view of their immediate community and, ultimately, the world in the form of social action and mission.

There is a separation in theology and practice in the lives of many Pentecostal Christians today due to difficulties in relating theology to authentic life in faith (Cameron et al. 2010, 18). Therefore, an effective Pentecostal catechesis should build on biblical, theological, historical, contextual, and missional foundations, which prepare believers to apply that knowledge in a practical setting in their own lives, faith communities, and ultimately guide believers to a better understanding of their role in the world. The revised catechesis should represent more than memorization and recitation, and should make an impact on the lives of the participants, creating a lifestyle of worship, guiding them in all facets of their lives, representing “doctrine in action.”

1.2. Research Design and Methodology

The research design utilizes a mixed-method approach with the methodology based on an adaptation of Browning’s model for practical theology (See Figure 1.1). Rather than relegating practical theology to a sub-discipline, he proposes a practice-theory-practice model (Browning 1991, 55–57) encouraging an interdisciplinary model that focuses not only on the intellectual aspects of theology, but also supports the expression of that intellect practically, through a lifestyle of worship within the faith community, social action, and mission. For Cahalan (2005, 86–87), practical theology intertwines biblical, historical, and theological fundamentals

with moral, cultural, social, and missional components in a way that is contextually relevant for contemporary thought and life.

The modified research model is cyclic since life and praxis are fluid. The strategies implemented in any catechesis should be revisited regularly to ensure that the praxis is adapting to the changing world, while staying true to the doctrine found in scripture. The inner core of the model represents the crisis in discipleship identified in the four chosen U.S. Pentecostal denominations. Specific questions were crafted that encourage a more profound reflection of each sub-category, beginning with descriptive theology, whose answers lead to the subsequent sub-categories (historic, systematic, and strategic practical theologies), ultimately resulting in an informed resolution to the identified crisis.

Two sub-disciplines are highlighted, including practical theology and church and society, which integrate biblical, historical, and theological

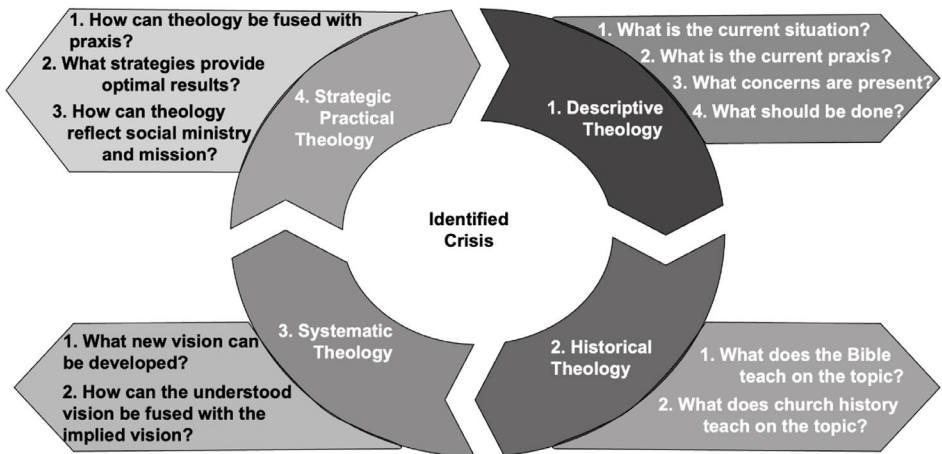


Figure 1.1 An Adaptation of Browning's Methodology (Vaughan 2022)

thought with social, moral, and missional praxis, giving special attention to the fields of Christian education and mission.

2. Investigation—Descriptive Theology

Descriptive theology is an in-depth explanation of the problem through a study of the narrative embedded in current praxis. Browning (1991, 47–48) rationalizes this segment with the term *hermeneutic sociology*, which allows this researcher to begin a dialogue between her preunderstanding of the problem and that of the subject being researched. A religious community will begin to ask questions about an existing program that is experiencing problems and proposes to formulate a view that begins with practice, examines the theory surrounding the practice, and then formulates a new and improved practice (6–7).

The four U.S. Pentecostal denominations chosen for this study are: the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (CG), and Assemblies of God (AG). Pentecostalism and education have had a tenuous relationship since the early years of the movement. Anderson (2004, 244) identifies a tension “between academic integrity and spirituality” as early Pentecostals emphasized spiritual rather than theological training. Vaughan (2016, 284) adds that many early Pentecostals “were opposed to intellectualism ... they were not against education, per se, but they opposed knowledge that would diminish their dependence upon the Holy Spirit.”

The Sunday school format is the chosen method for discipleship in all four denominations under review; however, transformational discipleship is not necessarily the end goal. The curricula prove to be biblically based and relevant for specific age groups, with periodic updates

occurring in the last thirty years; however, practical application of the material throughout the week is decidedly absent. A catechetical class is not typically required for membership in the denominations, thus propagating an incomplete understanding of the Bible, doctrine, and specific beliefs of each denomination. Due to the autonomous nature of the local churches, as well as the overabundance of discipleship materials provided by the denominational publishing houses and bookstores, the lack of unity within each denomination is apparent. In addition, the instruction of the material relies on a staff of volunteers who are sometimes unprepared or ill-equipped to teach the lessons. Pastors, teachers, and leaders within all four denominations express the need for better forms of discipleship, with some labeling it a discipleship crisis (Bowers, Jones, Lewis, Marroquin, and Merrill). Several of the denominations understand the need for a uniform method of instruction corresponding to a formal catechesis but are hesitant to implement this denomination wide.

2.1. Curriculum Evaluation Method

An evaluation of the curricula is based on their theological emphasis, methodology, and life application. Pazmiño (2008, 232–233) believes “an effective curriculum weds Christian content and experience and thereby is potentially life transforming.” Johns (1993, 122) explains that a Pentecostal catechesis should promote a Christian faith that is continually lived, both locally and globally, with the student existing as an active participant in the kingdom of God. Doctrine should be demonstrated in the daily life of the catechumen, as well as their interactions with the faith community, local neighborhoods, and the world; in other words, the catechesis should not only inform but also transform the disciple.

2.2. International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC)

The IPHC material is relevant and biblically sound; however, some leaders in the denomination fear that the literature is not sufficiently training their believers in true discipleship. Citing a lack of “uniformity regarding spiritual formation pathways,” Lucas (interview by author, June 27, 2022) is worried about the path discipleship is taking within the IPHC churches due to the use of non-denominational literature and the decrease in Sunday school participation. Russell Board, IPHC missionary and author (interview by author, June 17, 2022), is concerned that “we [IPHC] have dropped the ball” in terms of discipleship, but, if approached correctly, IPHC is in a wonderful position to help develop a Pentecostal catechesis.

2.3. Church of God in Christ (COGIC)

The discipleship program for COGIC predominantly supports the Sunday school program, and the material is well-rounded, providing biblically based lessons. The COGIC has initiated a positive step in updating their discipleship program through the publication of *Understanding Bible Doctrine as Taught in the Church of God in Christ* (Brooks and Hawthorne 2002); however, it is only required for those seeking credentials. Several leaders in the denomination, including Hodge (2022) and Akins (2016), realize the need for renewed methods of discipleship, recognizing that transformational discipleship is the biblical mandate for believers.

2.4. Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (CG)

An overview of the CG educational program reveals that their material is theologically and biblically sound; however, problems arise with the

lack of uniformity within the denomination as well as the delivery of the material. The CG is at the forefront in revising their discipleship program with the introduction of A Pentecostal Teaching Catechism of the Christian Faith (Beaty 2020), supplemented by Exploring the Declaration of Faith (Arrington 2003). This is a brave step for the denomination and provides the necessary curriculum needed to establish a unified catechism, not only for the CG, but also for all Pentecostal denominations.

2.5. Assemblies of God (AG)

The AG is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world and provides vast resources that are relevant and theologically sound. Evangelism has been the main emphasis of this fellowship since its beginnings, and while this is commendable, AG leaders have realized this emphasis has come to the detriment of discipleship (cf. Merrill 2017; Jones 2021). In response to a marked decline in Sunday School attendance, Marroquin (interview by author, June 24, 2022; August 13, 2024) designed the Disciple Well Initiative, a heavily anticipated program that restructures the discipleship process within the fellowship, ultimately changing the dynamics of their understanding of discipleship.

2.6. Summary of Findings

The absence of a uniform catechism and the autonomous nature of each denomination researched communicates a lack of unity on behalf of leadership as it pertains to their vision for discipleship. Since the pastor or education director determines the curricula in each church, one foreseeable problem would be the successful implementation of a uniform catechism as a recommended part of the much broader concept

of catechesis in local churches. The most startling observation is the lack of continuity between the doctrine learned and its application in the daily lives of the faith community. While each denomination supports various outreach possibilities, they are only suggestions for those who have time to participate rather than an integral part of the discipleship program. Discipleship is not solely the accumulation of knowledge, but a progressive integration of understanding, truth, and experience that leads the disciple to reflect the image of God daily. A summary of the findings in the curricula for the four denominations is found in Figure 2.1.

3. Declaration—Historical Theology

Historical theology asks what the normative texts already reveal about praxis, including “the traditional disciplines of biblical studies, church history, and the history of Christian thought” (Browning 1991, 49). An investigation of the teachings of scripture (Deut 6; Ps 78; and Luke 24) and the existing literature from the Catholic and Lutheran denominations provides a foundation on which to build the revised Pentecostal catechesis.

3.1. Biblical Aspects of Discipleship

The foremost method of instruction in the Bible was memorization and repetition, with the subsequent catechisms structured similarly, teaching doctrine in the form of a question-and-answer format. Three institutions were identified that provided the biblical system for transmitting information from one generation to the next, namely, the home, the temple or church, and the school (Rico 2008, xi), emphasizing the importance of family and intergenerational instruction. The three chosen passages

	International Pentecostal Holiness Church	Church of God in Christ	Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee	Assemblies of God
Uniform Catechesis	No, curriculum is chosen by leadership	No, curriculum is chosen by leadership	No, curriculum is chosen by leadership	No, curriculum is chosen by leadership
Curricula	• <i>One Accord</i> • <i>In-Between</i> • <i>Rooted</i>	• <i>Annual Sunday School Lesson Commentary</i>	• <i>Living What we Believe</i> • <i>Catechism</i>	• <i>Radiant Life</i> • <i>Bible Engagement</i> • <i>Disciple Well</i>
Biblical Theological Emphasis	• <i>One Accord</i> : continuity from one age group to the next • <i>In-Between</i> focuses on discipleship	Well-rounded, biblically based lessons	<i>Living What we Believe and Catechism</i> : teaches CG doctrine	• <i>Bible Engagement</i> : family discipleship • <i>Disciple Well</i> : discipleship & evangelism
Social and Psychological Aspects	Targets developmental stages	Adaptable to special needs students	Adaptable for various ages	Most diverse with resources for all ages
Methodology	•Sunday school •Bible Study	Sunday school	•Sunday school •Small Groups	•Sunday school •Bible Study
Amistration	•Volunteer teachers without professional training •One-hour lessons • <i>In-Between</i> : a lesson for every day	•Suggests qualifications for teachers, but relies on volunteer staff •One-hour lessons	•Volunteer teachers without professional training •One–two hour sessions per week	Volunteer teachers with training through continuing education
Life Application	Programs are suggested, but not required	•Community enhancement •Prison "ReEntry" program	•Operation Compassion •MWOA •YWEA	• <i>CompassionLink</i> • <i>Little Missionaries</i> •Teen Challenge
Supplemental events or meetings	• <i>Accelerate Fire Conference</i> • <i>Encounter Weekends</i>	None	• <i>Kidfest</i> • <i>Winterfest</i>	•Royal Rangers
Digital	<i>Wonder Ink</i> encourages discipleship through the week	• <i>COGIC TV on Demand</i> • <i>Sunday School Live</i>	• <i>Digital Church Discipleship</i>	• <i>Disciple Well Initiative</i> • <i>Bible Engagement Project</i>
Catechism	• <i>Light for the Journey: A Fresh Focus on Doctrine</i>	• <i>Understanding Bible Doctrine as Taught in the Church of God in Christ</i>	• <i>A Pentecostal Teaching Catechism of the Christian Faith</i>	• <i>Disciple Well</i> Initiative program rather than formal catechism
Evaluation from leadership	A uniform catechesis is needed, but difficult to implement	Transformative discipleship is deficient within the local congregations	A need for renewed spiritual-theological vision in discipleship	Discipleship deficit due to lack of systematic study of the Word of God

Figure 3.1 Comparison of Four U.S. Pentecostal Discipleship Programs

illustrate the various approaches to education from the OT Hebrew faith of the Torah, Wisdom Literature, and the NT Christian faith through the example of Jesus.

3.1.1. Discipleship in the Old Testament

The Old Testament presents the foundation for Christian education with its emphasis on sharing the covenant of God with subsequent generations. Celebrations and feasts were excellent settings for educational opportunities, supporting the importance of family and community through visual and practical examples (Reed and Prevost 1993, 47–48). The atmosphere of celebration permeated the first OT passage from Deuteronomy 6, where Moses reminded the children of Israel about God's faithfulness throughout their exodus from Egypt. This narrative emphasizes the significance of an intergenerational catechesis, ending with the foundational understanding that doctrine should always be taught as a natural part in the daily lives of the disciples, resulting in a deeper relationship with God.

The second OT passage from Psalms 78:1–8 demonstrates the catechetical teaching modeled in the wisdom literature as it pertains to instruction by example. Asaph begins with an exhortation of the theory, followed by a demonstration of how that theory may be passed to others, building on the intergenerational example of Moses. This model reflects the importance of testimony within the faith community and that teachers should not only instruct but also model what is being taught to their students. As a result of these gatherings, the Law and life converge, expressing the participation of head, heart, and hand in the educational process.

3.1.2. Jesus's Teaching Method in Luke 24:13–35

The passage from Luke 24 provides an excellent pedagogical example from the Master Teacher, Jesus, demonstrating the entire catechetical process in one visit. Preferring an informal setting, Jesus taught while he walked, talked, ate, and prayed supporting the relational aspects important to the teaching process. Jesus models a relationship between the teacher and student that is communal, with the lesson continuing as the disciples became the teachers, sharing the message with others. Furthermore, this interaction serves as a preview of the events that would occur at Pentecost and the mission of the church that would follow. A chiasm modified from Joel Green (1997, 842) emerged from this passage describing the parallelism of the events that occurred in this pedagogical model.

- Journey from Jerusalem—Discussion (vv. 13–15a)
 - The teacher arrives—Inquiry (v. 15b)
 - Mistaken interpretation—Confusion (vv. 16–24)
 - ◆ Truth Revealed—Lesson (vv. 25–27)
 - ◆ Fellowship and Blessing—Demonstration (vv. 28–30)
 - Accurate interpretation—Discipleship (v. 31a)
 - The teacher leaves—Transmission (v. 31b)
- Journey to Jerusalem—Evangelism (vv. 32–35)

This paradigm story can be seen through catechetical lenses as follows: as Jesus (the catechist) walks with two disciples (the catechumen), he shares his knowledge (the catechesis) with them, then celebrates the lesson over a communal meal, and, as a result, the disciples want to share their knowledge with others (evangelism). Jesus utilizes a fourfold commitment

to teach: (1) building community through listening, (2) sharing scriptural truths, (3) prayer and fellowship, and (4) engaging in witness and mission (Croft 2017). The goal of education should be holistic in that it edifies the mind but also addresses the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of the life of the individual.

3.2. Historical Aspects of Catechesis

Catechesis is the classical approach to developing disciples through “the process of instructing new believers in the most basic pillars of the one faith handed down through the ages” (Hollon 2019, 4). This is accomplished by the six tasks of the catechesis, including “knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, formation in prayer and methods of prayer, education for community life and missionary initiation” (Sultana 2018, 23). For centuries, the Roman Catholic and Lutheran denominations have used a similar form of catechism that represents the historical method of catechesis.

3.2.1 Roman Catholic Church (RCC)

The Roman Catholic Church is acknowledged to be “the longest-enduring institution in the world,” with an affirmation to pass the faith tradition from generation to generation by the Holy Spirit (Hitchcock 2012, 11–13). The *Didaché*, which is from the Greek word *Διδαχή*, meaning “teaching,” is possibly the first written catechism (c. 50–160 AD) containing guidelines for Christian communities (*Didaché* 2022). In response to threats posed by the Reformation, the RCC chose to embrace the church’s doctrinal traditions rather than scriptural truths in its catechism, publishing the

Roman Catechism, which became the official manual for the Church (Wilhelm 1912). Throughout the years, the catechism has been regarded as a successful educational strategy that utilizes the process of rote learning wherein the catechumens learn not only the answers to the questions, but also the questions themselves.

The twentieth century witnessed a much-needed renewal within the RCC, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) conveys the vision of the denomination to transmit the faith to the third millennium (Kelly 2000, 7). Continuing the attitude of renewal, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) shifts the emphasis of catechism from children to adults, recapturing the importance of the Bible in the lives of the disciples. In addition, the *Directory for Catechesis* (DC) provides the deep foundational material necessary to prepare catechists, proving to be an excellent template when designing the Pentecostal catechesis.

3.2.2. Lutheran Church

The Lutheran Church realized the need to identify their beliefs separate from the RCC and published the *Book of Concord* in 1580, which remains the standard for Lutheran doctrine (Edwards and Ludder 2018, 10). Luther maintained that scripture should be the exclusive authority for spiritual truth, which was in direct opposition to the RCC's emphasis on church tradition. Kidd (2017, iii) resolves that the Reformers returned the Bible to the people by developing catechisms that taught the doctrine of the church.

The ELCA is the largest Lutheran organization in the U.S., and the official Confession of Faith is strongly influenced by both testaments, the Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian Creeds, and the Lutheran confessional

writings in the *Book of Concord* (ELCA 2023b). There is a concern within the denomination that catechesis is not prioritized as it was in the past, and the negative effects have been witnessed in local churches (Duckworth 2006, 11, 23). Supporting the continuity of the theoretical with the practical, the ELCA encourages participation in society by serving others in the community, highlighting its commitment to minister to those on the fringes of society through its stance against social and cultural injustices.

The research revealed that offering a uniform method of catechesis does not guarantee the success of the program or that transformational discipleship will occur, but it does offer unity within a denomination, enhancing the sense of community among its believers. The catechism itself is not in question; it is that the entire catechetical process has been reduced to this component alone. True catechesis involves a discovery of Jesus Christ as they develop a lifestyle of worship that not only edifies the individual but also the faith community, local neighborhoods, and ultimately, the world through social action and mission.

4. Explanation—Systematic Theology

Systematic theology identifies the major issues facing the contemporary church in seeking to integrate what is missing from the current praxis with the historical aspects of the catechesis. Browning (1991, 51) uses Gadamer's perspective of systematic theology as the "fusion of horizons between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of normative Christian texts." A dialogue between education, practical theology, spirituality, and mission is introduced to build a Pentecostal pedagogy that is solid in theory and praxis. Even though biblical truths and foundational doctrine remain timeless, the world is

constantly changing. An important aspect that has contributed to the decline in discipleship is reflected in the words of Hembrow (2016, 71), “Western society is no longer ‘Christian’ but is now ‘pluralist’ where there is a diverse range of competing religions and ideologies ... if Christianity seeks to successfully engage with post-Christian society it must review how its message is communicated and lived out.” As a result, the contemporary catechesis should be holistic, reflecting the diversity of the participants, providing the necessary tools to prepare disciples to live and defend those beliefs in a secular world.

4.1. Themes in Contemporary Society

Discipleship has been affected by the many influences in contemporary society, with a portion of the blame resting on the evangelistic push of the 1970s. When evangelism is emphasized at the detriment of discipleship, the church merely fills its pews with Christians who enjoy the fellowship within the church but do not have a deep understanding of what they believe or why. Root and Dean (2012, 3) believe the Church has failed to communicate theology as relevant to the current generations, with Rojas (2019, 32) suggesting that “people are being disciplined by the media and millennial philosophical thoughts.”

The changing dynamics of the family unit and the generational segregation of worship services have resulted in little or no interaction between the different generations in the faith community. Following years of inadequate training, parents (when present) were ineffectively equipped to be spiritual leaders in the home or beacons of light to the community, thereby repeating a downward spiral of discipleship from one generation to the next. The Church is called to build a bridge connecting the home and church through a faith community that will complement the natural

family and not detract from it. One common error occurring in the Church is avoidance as it pertains to difficult topics. Leadership often chooses to ignore the awkward and controversial issues relating to sexuality, alcohol, drugs, science, politics, and environmental issues. When these topics are not addressed, they are “communicating that these issues are either unimportant or unrelated to Christian life and thinking” (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 97). This not only leads to a decrease in disciplined individuals, but it also creates a deficit of talented, energetic young people who would be able to assume leadership positions in the church.

Generational shifts have resulted in a modification in the view Millennials have toward many topics, including authority and leadership. Gibson (2015, 21–22) believes “the authoritative, top-down approach towards teaching” is rejected by Millennial students, with Benefer and Shanahan (2013, 11) claiming that recent generations would rather have a more collaborative learning environment, resembling a co-partnership between students and teachers. More generations are living at the same time than ever in history, with six generations represented currently. Da Silva (2019, 14) classifies the first three as *digital immigrants* (those raised before the digital age) and the last three as *digital natives* (those raised amid current technology). While the discipleship crisis may appear bleak, Hembrow (2016, 6) is not disheartened, reasoning that Millennials, Generation Zs, and Alphas are simply approaching faith from different perspectives than past generations. In addition, technology has proven to be a wonderful tool in discipleship; however, many educators have failed to utilize the countless opportunities available to them.

4.2. Response of the Church

The goal of catechesis is transformational learning, in that the catechumens not only learn doctrine but also experience a change in their own lives and worldview. Once the foundational catechism has been established, the methodology and delivery of the catechesis must be fashioned by trained catechists according to the specific needs of the denomination and the demographics of the church body and surrounding areas. The goal of catechists is to reach not only new catechumens who are unfamiliar with the church and its doctrine but also those inside the faith community who are struggling to understand their lives and relationship with God. It is important to design a program that places the catechumens' story into the much larger narrative of salvation, speaking to the hearts of Millennials who desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Da Silva (2019, 17) calls for dialogue that reveals shared experiences, information, emotion, and perspectives in a process called "active listening." This places the catechists' testimony above their theological knowledge, providing an interactive learning environment wherein multi-directional learning is achieved. Millennials desire to be active in their spiritual journey, and these interactive methods of learning offer a means to work through their issues, while at the same time, learn the central truths of the gospel message.

When the catechesis is intentionally designed to incorporate the faith community, through sharing knowledge, life experiences, and worship, it is functioning at its fullest potential. In response to contemporary society, Hembrow (2016, 58) cites the argument of Zschech concerning contemporary worship, reasoning that the "*Why* (theology and philosophy) or ministry must be taught alongside the *What* (skills, content, styles) of ministry." The communal aspects of rituals encourage

intergenerational communities through the sharing of stories, life lessons, failures, and hope for the future. Once the faith community has established its lifestyle of worship, it can then express the doctrine learned through social action, both within and outside the church walls. The social witness of the Church is an excellent way for the unchurched to become curious about God and His presence in the world. Introducing the theme of practical ministry as an outgrowth of the catechesis, Dunahoo (2021, 25) states, “the evidence of salt and light is on the street, not under the steeple.” Current culture embraces individualism, but holistic discipleship draws individuals toward service not only within the faith community but also outward to the neighborhoods surrounding the church and the world through mission.

The twenty-first century introduces challenges that are unique but also offers new and exciting opportunities for discipleship formation. Furthermore, these challenges demonstrate the need for improved methods of discipleship, especially within Pentecostal churches.

5. Application—Strategic Practical Theology

For Browning (1991, 55–57, 105–108), strategic practical theology transforms a system through the following levels: (1) visional—a modified perception of a community or person; (2) obligational—an amalgamation of old traditions and practices; (3) tendency-need—ability to permit people to intentionally manage their specific needs; (4) environmental-social—transformation for the community reflecting theological convictions; and (5) rule-role—transformed patterns for expressing that theology daily. The revised catechesis should provide a method of instruction that teaches Pentecostal doctrine, but also encourages catechumens to apply that

doctrine practically within the church walls, outside in the surrounding neighborhoods, and in the world through lifestyle worship, social action, and mission.

Challenges such as racial diversity, homosexuality, gender identity, environmental sustainability, and social justice are controversial topics that Pentecostal denominations must address. Rather than conform to those ideals, falling prey to the secular mindset, the Church should stand firm on the biblical principles found in the catechism. The Church is called to meet the needs of its congregants and be aware of the needs of the surrounding communities. When the catechesis is prepared and executed properly, the catechumens' (and hopefully, the catechists') worldview changes, affecting their behavior and decision-making.

5.1. Holistic Pentecostal Catechesis: An Intergenerational Learning Experience

A holistic Pentecostal catechesis requires a multifaceted curriculum that is relevant to all who wish to participate in the discipleship journey. "Theology and ethics, worship and liturgy, prayer and sacraments, mission and witness are all implicated in the practices of Christian catechesis" (Murphy 2004, 25). The curriculum should not only involve traditional classroom instruction but also incorporate other methods of pedagogy that support the praxis of that theory for a more personal and in-depth understanding of doctrine.

It must be understood that doctrinal instruction represents one-fourth of the catechesis, with the other three-fourths emphasizing a lifestyle of worship in the faith community and praxis through social action and mission. Unfortunately, most programs investigated were more concerned with the theoretical portion, with many teachers believing their

task was accomplished when the class ended. This mindset discounts the main objective of discipleship—the opportunity to model discipleship daily. Murphy (2001, 324–325) explains, “What we *do*, how we *act*, in the liturgical assembly shapes us in particular and powerful ways and is both formative of identity and catechetical in the most basic sense.” Therefore, worship is not an educational tool of catechesis; worship liturgy is catechetical and helps to form the faith community. Quimson (2020, 47) believes catechesis reaches beyond head-level faith, “not only about ‘banking’ necessary doctrines or teachings of the faith, rather, it must go beyond our learning and radiate its fruits through active involvement or social action and celebration of faith in worship.” Embracing fellowship within the faith community and translating theory into action within the broader community through social action and mission often remains overlooked within the confines of the Sunday school classroom. Taking the doctrine learned in class to the surrounding neighborhoods may be expressed through projects targeting specific needs in the community with intergenerational participation. In addition, incorporating short-term mission trips extends the ministry of the church to the world, allowing the faith community to experience other cultures through doctrine in action.

5.I.I. Catechists

Catechists represent the hinge on which the door to holistic discipleship rests; either closing, resulting in confusion and ignorance, or opening for growth and learning. Rather than viewing the task as merely didactic, catechists should be encouraged to take an active role, viewing their part in the discipleship process as more than sharing doctrinal instruction, but as a spiritual calling. Catechists should be witnesses to the catechumens through their worship, participation in prayer, the Sacraments, and

the faith community, teaching by example. It is important to share relevant life lessons, allowing instruction to become more than theory or indoctrination but expressions of faith that touch the hearts of the catechumens. To be truly holistic, the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of the catechumens must also be taken into consideration, requiring more than a ready-made catechesis—it must be adapted to the target audience for maximum effectiveness.

5.1.2. Catechumens

In light of the ever-changing worldview and questions regarding God and their existence, current generations are uninterested in the theological indoctrination their parents and grandparents experienced. Simply relying on past beliefs and a superficial understanding of doctrine will not successfully prepare disciples to live in the current cultural landscape. When catechumens understand biblical truths and doctrine and their identity in Christ, they not only reconcile their existence as individuals but also their role in the faith community. The external expression of Christlikeness should be a natural action that originates from a transformed heart and should be encouraged in the catechism—theory and praxis in every lesson leads to experiential learning.

5.1.3. The Faith Community

The United States is very diverse culturally, socially, and economically, and the catechesis should reflect that diversity through its worship and interaction within the faith community. For Pentecostals, an intergenerational faith community represents an important part of their heritage, but it also offers real-life examples of people from all generations

worshipping together, sharing their testimonies, and encouraging others as they struggle in their daily lives. As a result, they not only inspire hope but also unconsciously share doctrine, “... as the community listens to the brief narratives, each member is transformed by the mutual exchange of experiences. A powerful synergy of teaching and learning is enjoined in this didactic moment” (Alvarado 2012, 149). Genuine liturgy is a means of education and transformation that begins within the faith community but then continues when the believers leave the church and enter the world around them. Holistic catechesis requires more than what is offered in the Sunday service—it occurs when the faith community, who is educated and transformed into disciples of Christ, interacts with their families, neighbors, co-workers, and friends daily.

5.1.4. Doctrine in Action

Holistic catechesis is doctrine in action, not only within the lives of the catechumens but also within the faith community through its ministry to others. Humanity was not created in isolation; therefore, each individual is part of a larger worldview, forming a framework of thoughts and experiences that make up everyday reality. Reflecting the roots of the Pentecostal Movement, ministry to various people groups both locally and worldwide is a part of their identity, especially with the marginalized and those on the fringes of society. “Pentecostalism’s subsequent globalization and indigenous character has only proliferated its multi-racial and multi-cultural complexion” (Dempster 1993, 6). Pentecostals, especially current generations, have a desire to be agents of social transformation and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit not only emboldens individuals in their relationship with God, but it also equips them for service to others. Through this empowerment, the faith community can reach beyond

the ecclesial boundaries to express their faith in praxis by engaging the current culture, not embracing it—there is a difference. Figure 5.1 provides a guide to aid the four U.S. Pentecostal denominations in visualizing the concept of a twenty-first century holistic Pentecostal catechesis.

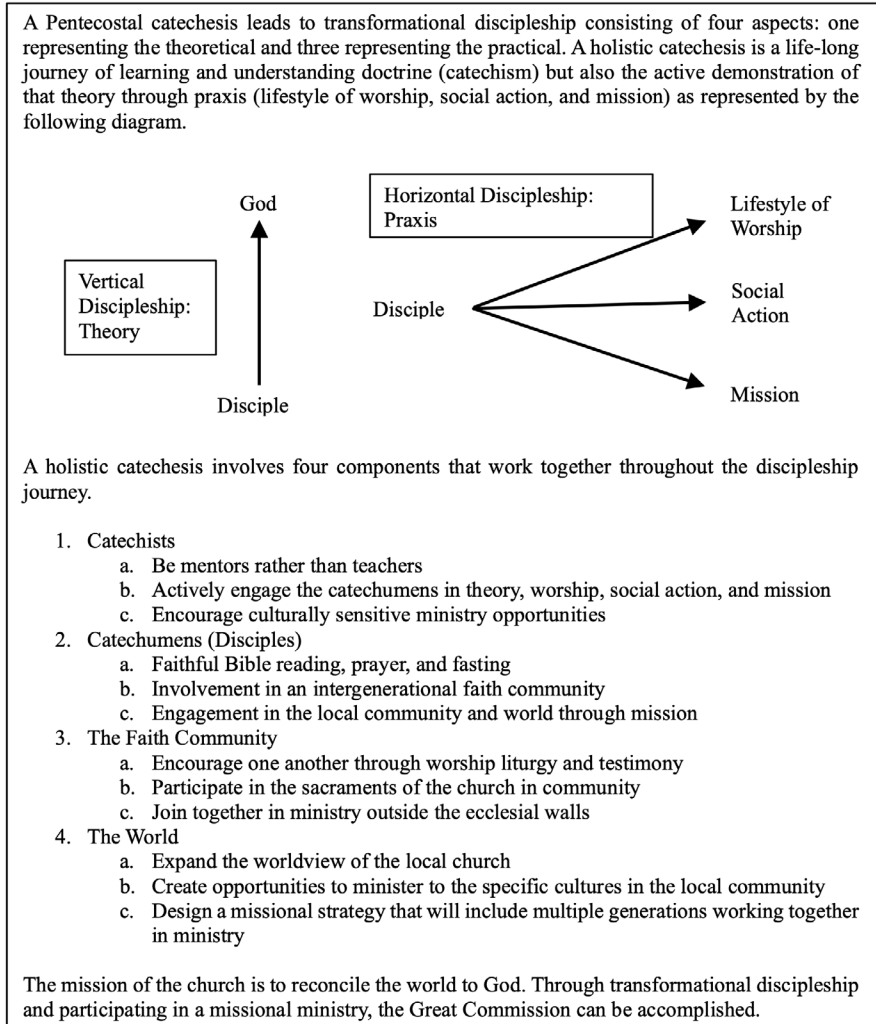


Figure 5.1 Guide Toward a Twenty-First Century Intergenerational Pentecostal Catechesis

6. Conclusion—Celebration

Catechesis in the past focused primarily on doctrinal instruction with little or no engagement with the multidimensional aspects of Christian faith and humanity's role in living that faith daily. An interdisciplinary approach for a revised Pentecostal catechesis would combine the skills found in pedagogy with the spiritual benefits of a relationship with God and the faith community, incorporating the psychological and sociological abilities necessary for practical ministry, bringing the catechism to life.

Due to its rich foundation in Pentecostal theology, it was recommended that the catechesis should build on the catechism, *A Pentecostal Teaching Catechism of the Christian Faith* (Beaty 2020), providing the theory. To ensure individuality concerning each Pentecostal denomination, supplemental material could be drawn from existing literature concerning their distinct doctrines, sacraments (ordinances), and statements of faith (i.e., *Questions and Answers on the Scriptures and Related Subjects*—IPHC, *Understanding Bible Doctrine as Taught in the Church of God in Christ*—COGIC, *Living What We Believe and Exploring the Declaration of Faith*—CG, and *Disciple Well*—AG). It was also determined that a thorough preparatory manual should be written, including sufficient material to train catechists for in-depth discussions, as well as recommendations for interactive learning and suggested praxis. As a means of honoring the rich history of the Church, a study of the historic creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian) should also be included in the catechism. Once the foundational doctrine has been conveyed, the expression of that knowledge should be modeled practically through interaction within the faith community, developing a lifestyle of worship, and then encouraging praxis through social action and mission.

The implications of this research make original contributions to practical theology through an adaptation of Browning's model for research. Regarding practical theology, this research contributes to the sub-discipline, church and society through a revision in the mindset concerning the discipleship process. Catechesis should be viewed as a dynamic, life-giving journey that is not representative of an accumulation of knowledge, but a continual integration of that knowledge to reflect the image of God daily through transformational discipleship. Rather than concentrate on the theoretical aspects of the catechism, the revised catechesis would extend beyond the classroom to become doctrine in action. The catechists, catechumens, and the faith community would develop a lifestyle of worship in an intergenerational setting, bringing doctrine to life through social action and mission. In addition, it is my hope and intent that the proposed recommendations for a revised catechesis would not be limited to the four Pentecostal denominations but also be relevant and applicable to all Christian faith traditions.

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Polysystem Analysis and Bible Translation: A Wedding of Theory and Practice to Create a Holistic Model to Guide Bible Translation and Biblical Exegesis

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Supervisor: Prof Ernst Wendland

Abstract

The latter half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century have been the greatest period of Bible translation in the history of the world. Tied to this revolution has been intensive research into translation theory, both biblical and secular.

Focusing on this mass of theoretical writings theory involved three stages: first, theoretical research into all literature on translation theory in the biblical as well as secular arena; second, selection of the best and most holistic of the theories; third, application of these best theories to

the construction of a Bible translation polysystem model which embraces all aspects of Bible translation and its definable systems into one all-encompassing polysystem model.

This Bible translation polysystem model (BTPM) was then tested by applying it and the Wendland frames of reference model to translations from different periods and in different languages. The result was a more thorough evaluation of these translations and the “recipe” of systems that they used. The final stage of this application was a case study using the BTPM on an active translation project, the Luxembourgish Bible translation.

A further demonstration of the value of the BTPM was discussion of specific exegetical problems in translation and how the BTPM’s application to specific Bible passages greatly facilitated in clearing up these problems where more traditional research had failed.

1. The Bible Translation Revolution

In addition to being the greatest period of Bible translation in the history of the world, the latter half of the twentieth and early years of the twenty-first centuries have been part of a revolution in Bible translation writings, theories, and ideas. The revolution has included theory, Bible translation practices, new organizations, and new approaches, and has gone far beyond the previous centuries of Bible translation in sheer numbers. This revolution cannot be attributed to any one factor or the work of any one person; therefore, if the theories, practices, and approaches are to retain the lasting value of all this work, they must be put into a proper perspective.

In looking at these various theories and approaches in this light, we see certain relationships. The “equivalence wars” of the latter half of

the twentieth century, which Snell-Hornby described as “an explosive proliferation of equivalence types” (Snell-Hornby 1988, 18–19), the arguments over whether translation is science or art, the competition over literary versus linguistic approaches, hermeneutical translation approaches, even the sociosemiotic approach and the “cultural turn,” all are to some extent a result of partial and microcosmic approaches to translation. Descriptive translation studies (Holmes 2000, 176–182; Hermans 1999, 35; Toury 1982, 24; Castello 2014, 5; Lambert and Van Gorp 2006, 46–47) provided some of the first steps toward breaking free from the microcosmic approach to translation. Polysystem theory (Even-Zohar 1990, 28, 31; Hermans 1999, 102–103) appeared as a useful but not clearly defined way of looking at translation macrocosmically. It also arose in the area of general translation and did not at first adequately isolate and describe the various elements or subsystems of the polysystems. The Wilt-Wendland frames of reference for Bible translation (Wendland 2003, 2008, 2010; Wilt 2003) provided a holistic explanation of the big picture of Bible translation, describing the process in detail. It was an excellent source for explanation and research, but it was not based on system theory and did not stress the interrelationships of the systems and their interactions, though the layering of components demonstrated the relative place of each system within the whole. The need now arises to make a more comprehensive, macrocosmic statement about translation theory and practice to construct the polysystem of Bible translation in particular.

1.1. What Type of Theory are We Looking for?

To proceed from here we must ask the question stated above in the heading, especially in the light of the fact that the early years of Bible translation theory and general translation theory were very much oriented

to creating a “scientific” approach to translation. Eugene Nida’s seminal book on the subject was titled *Toward a Science of Translation* (Nida 1964). Further, the field of general translation studies in Europe at the time was dominated by the technical concept of *Übersetzungswissenschaft*, the German term for “translation science,” associated with Wolfram Wilss and the Leipzig School of translation (Snell-Hornby 1988, 14). This school was going in the same general direction as Nida’s scientific ideas in Bible translation had gone, basing their ideas on deep and surface structure comparisons. As did Nida, these writers assumed that translation was capable of scientific description. In reaction against that idea, those practicing descriptive translation studies opened the dialogue on the subject later, emphasizing that what was needed for translation was not a scientific theory, but an empirical one. Toury draws the distinction in this way:

In contradistinction to non-empirical sciences, empirical disciplines are devised to account, in a systematic and controlled way, for particular segments of the “real world.” Consequently, no empirical science can make a claim for completeness and (relative) autonomy unless it has a proper *descriptive branch* (Toury 1995, 1).

It is important to note that this statement was made long after the heyday of so-called scientific translation, when the apparently unscientific nature of translation was beginning to become more evident. The “equivalence wars” mentioned earlier had already been fought and language had won, demonstrating that equivalence was a more mathematical than linguistic term. The early formula Nida had proposed for readers responding to the message in their culture in the same way the original readers had responded within their culture (Nida 1964, 149) had not proved to be calculable for the most part, and the essential repeatability of a scientific method had not proved possible in translation.

Descriptive translation studies took a different track, beginning with looking for patterns, statistical tendencies, norms of translation, and models of behavior, all geared to the descriptive aspects of translation (Hermans 1999, 35). However, descriptive translation studies were developments in the field of general translation studies, and some time elapsed before they began to have their effect upon Bible translation.

The first evidence of a theory or description of translation akin to polysystem theory was the Wendland-Wilt model of frames of reference, first introduced by Timothy Wilt in a compilation of related articles in 2003 in a book by that name, and then later expanded upon and elaborated on in books by Wendland in 2008 entitled *Contextual Frames of Reference in Translation and Scripture Frames and Framing: A Workbook for Bible Translators*. Neither Wilt nor Wendland called their approach polysystem theory, yet Even-Zohar used the term “framework” in his description of polysystem theory in a very similar way how Wendland described frames of reference.

1.2. Scientific and Empirical Theories Compared

Having made the distinction between a “scientific” theory and an empirical one, it is important to define and compare.¹ The reason “scientific” is in quotation marks is because it carries a special meaning in most people’s minds that involves formulas, procedures, measurements,

¹ The definitions and usages of these two terms in this section, scientific and empirical, are not precise. A truly scientific method should search and find all empirical data available, and an empirical method should be as scientific as possible in the sense of being precise and evaluating the available evidence. In the above discussion, the terms are mostly contrasted in the way that the literature on theory generally has used them.

and repeatability. These things pertain to what is often thought of as physical science. Empirical theories are no less scientific, but they are not only about physical and chemical laws as such. The area of empirical science has to do with models, trends, patterns, norms, and other features particular to a culture, location, or language.

If we apply these comparisons to translation, then a scientific theory of translation would fit computer machine translation rather than human translation, and it would be a formulaic matter that would yield the same results each time. In essence, we would put a verse of the Bible into the process in one language, and out would come the same verse in another language, very much like Google Translate. It is difficult to tell, but since Nida's initial theoretical writings had formulas and procedures and used the term "equivalence" (a mathematical term), we get the impression that he had the hopes of discovering some kind of "scientific" theory of translation. This impression is confirmed by the general tendency in translation studies already noted above.

An empirical theory of translation, on the other hand, would be more like a literary theory or like music theory, that is, it would be something that tells us how people do translation. Those familiar with music theory know that music theory tells us how people write music, but it does not write music itself.

Most developments in Bible translation theory since Nida have either further explored some kind of equivalence or they have moved away from "scientific" theories to empirical ones, and polysystem theory is definitely an empirical theory, more concerned with description of translation than formulating it.

A systemization of Bible translation theories and practices will require a broad, comprehensive framework that will organize the practice of Bible translation within its cultural, linguistic, literary, and multimodal

milieu. Such a broad, comprehensive framework is found in polysystem theory. Also, since Bible translation is practiced in numerous cultures with various mixes of indigenous and external cultural, theological, and intellectual elements, a broad, comprehensive framework unhindered by cultural constraints and able to adjust and allow for various cultural and social systems is needed, and such can be constructed within the systemization of Bible translation polysystems proposed in this study.

2. Polysystem Theory and Bible Translation

Though polysystem theory has not been explored much with specific reference to Bible translation, it seems in many ways to help explain how the process of Bible translation works, and more importantly, it takes into account the presence of existing systems within the receptor culture. Even-Zohar has defined the “literary system,” the heart of polysystem theory, as:

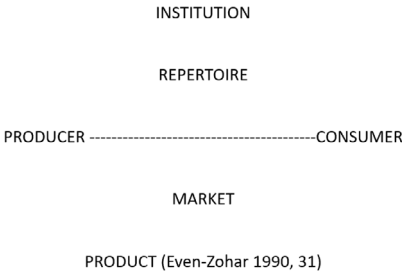
The network of relations that is hypothesized to obtain between a number of activities called “literary,” and consequently these activities themselves observed via that network.

Or:

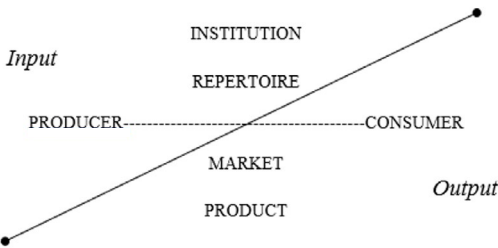
The complex of activities, or any section thereof, for which systemic relations can be hypothesized to support the option of considering them “literary” (Even-Zohar 1990, 28).

This “complex of activities” as applied to Bible translation can be called the Bible translation polysystem. Even-Zohar advanced a schematic representation of his literary system, which is useful for understanding the working of the polysystem and will serve as a starting-point for our own model of the Bible translation polysystem. He states that he

based his schematic on the work of Roman Jakobson’s “famous scheme of communication and language,” (Jakobson 1960, 353) which we will reproduce here with only the terminology Even-Zohar used himself:



In Even-Zohar’s scheme, the institution would be the various organizational entities or structures that, so to speak, “sponsor” the translation, and the repertoire would be the entirety of the literature in the society. The producer is the translator, or translators in some cases as a committee is formed ad hoc for that purpose, and the consumer is the consumer/language/text/group that speaks the particular language, in some cases, a particular subgroup of that language group. The market would be the media selected, and the product is the actual text. We can characterize Even-Zohar’s scheme as divided by a diagonal line to indicate the “input” side on the left, and “output” side on the right of the scheme:

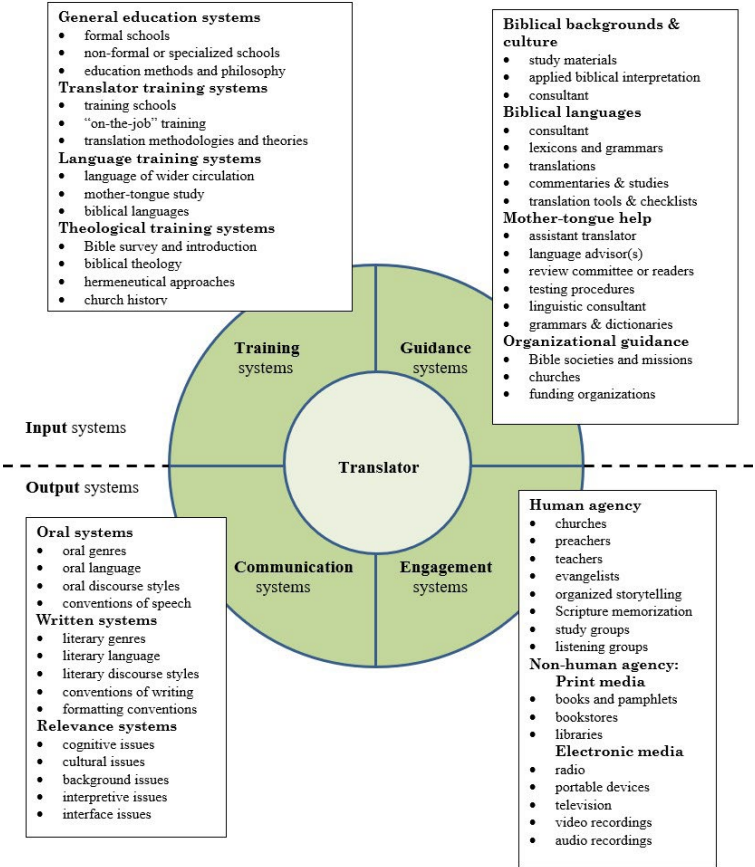


2.1. A Bible Translation Polysystem Model

This paper argues that Bible translation is a complex relational activity within a society consisting of a translator or translators (including support from others within the composite consumer group) surrounded by and utilizing various components or systems. These systems together constitute a single polysystem, with the goal of effectively communicating the message of the Bible to that society. The surrounding systems, comprised of input systems and output systems, are based on the culture or society and its available resources, with the translator or translators at the center. Input systems can further be defined as training and guidance systems, and output systems as communication and dissemination systems. Bible translation, as such a polysystem, can be defined and described in any culture or time period as the sum product of the input and output systems available to the translators either within their culture or borrowed from outside their culture. It is therefore theoretically and practically possible to analyze and map these elements or systems for any given period or culture of Bible translation into a chart that will serve to inform outside observers of the rationale behind the social activity of the given translator or translators, and also will serve as a valuable tool for such translators to define, direct, and evaluate their work. Such a polysystem will incorporate theoretical, philosophical, literary, educational, and practical elements and systems into a coherent whole, where competing elements are not viewed primarily as right or wrong but rather as essential elements of a recipe, the end product being the result of the selection and mix of these elements. The translator, in fulfilling his or her social role within her or his society or culture, will either deliberately or intuitively select or neglect the various elements, create a translation, and then convey that translation

to their society for their consumption and response—whether positively, negatively, or somewhere in between.

Recognizing that every situation for every Bible translation in history has been different in various ways, nevertheless, a comprehensive “typical” model of the polysystems that enable a Bible translator to do their work is called for. The following model is based on thirty years of experience in Bible translation in forty different language groups throughout the world, as well as detailed study of Bible translation practices and methods throughout history:



At the center of the polysystems is the translator (there is usually more than one in any given project). It should also be pointed out that this polysystem model does not address all intellectual and theological development questions that influence the philosophy worldview, organizational influences, and hermeneutics of the given culture. It is meant to focus specifically on the systems that would be used to bring about a translation of the Bible in a specific culture or area of the world. However, the cultural issues of indigenous systems versus borrowed or imported systems also enter into this model and suggest that one of the long-term benefits of polysystem theory is the ability for the consumer culture to determine more specifically the degree, quality, and nature of the “foreign” influences in their Bible translation. Furthermore, it provides a handy checklist of developments for the particular culture and faith community to work toward its independence and self-determination in the area of Bible translation. It does not indicate that it is right or wrong to “import” systems, but rather that the systems must either be compatible with the culture or sufficiently modified to adapt to the culture, in much the same way in which foreign words are borrowed into and indigenized into a host language.

The concept of multicultural competence significantly depends on the ability to identify the elements of culture that are indigenous, borrowed, or foreign, and provide a means of not automatically choosing one or the other, but rather of borrowing, adapting, or synthesizing the systems in question. The Bible translation polysystem model is designed for precisely that purpose; to provide a synthesis and systemization of the operating environment of the translators.

2.2. Interaction of Systems in the Polysystem Model

There is a logical, even initially a chronological order, to the operations of the systems in our model, which is to proceed from training systems to guidance systems, then to communication systems, and finally, to finish with audience engagement systems. However, interaction in various other directions can and should always take place during the translation process. Engagement systems have a direct effect backwards on communication systems, and it is hard even to choose specific communication systems without engagement systems in view. A weakness of the engagement component would be if only one means of engagement is in view, which may be simpler to operate but falls short of real local needs. The selection or use of various communication systems will affect the type of guidance needed for the translation process, which in turn will possibly call for more training.

We could probably say that any system in any sector could and should affect other systems in other sectors, since that is one of the advantages of the mutually integrative polysystem theory model. Compatibility and interaction are key elements in a well-working polysystem, and one of the purposes of a holistic view of Bible translation that polysystem theory provides is to put all the processes and systems into relational perspective.

3. Application of the BTPM to Historical Translations

Having laid out the systems and subsystems of the BTPM, the test of its effectiveness involves applying it first to actual historical translations to see if it is adequate for analyzing and explaining the production “recipe”

for each translation. The original research for this dissertation was conducted on a larger group of translations than will be presented in detail here. In order to have a statistically more significant sampling, the following translations were compared: from the Reformation period, the 1534 German Lutherbibel, the 1535 Olivétan French version, and the 1611 English King James Version; from the early twentieth century, before the advent of dynamic equivalence, the 1918 Franz Schlachter German Version, the 1952 Revised Standard Version, and the 1956 La Bible de Jérusalem (first edition); from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the 1995 Contemporary English Version, the 2000 Parole de Vie Bible, the 2001 Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin Bible, and the 2006 Chadian Sarh Bible. Out of the ten disparate translations studied in this manner, the summary of the findings for one will be presented here as an example.

3.1. The 1952 Revised Standard Version

3.1.1. Background information

The English Revised Version of 1885 was primarily the work of scholars from the Church of England, having been authorized in 1870 by the Convocation of Canterbury (Weigle 1946, 10). The 1901 American Standard Version, while the product of American scholars, was not a new translation but rather the text of the ERV with modifications for American English usage and the preferences in some places of the American revision company. The actual differences between the Old Testament of the ERV and the ASV are listed in the 1901 ASV in an appendix of 25 pages. In spite of the involvement of the American revision company, the ASV never gained wide acceptance in the United States, and in 1928 the copyright for the ASV was transferred to the International Council of

Religious Education, a body that represented about 40 different Protestant denominations in the US and Canada (Weigle 1946, 10), and would eventually become part of the National Council of Churches in the United States. That body appointed a group of scholars to become the American Standard Bible Committee to oversee the text of the ASV and determine if revision was necessary (Weigle 1946, 10). In 1937, work was begun on what would become the first truly ecumenical English Bible translation (Weigle 1946, 11).

3.1.2. Polysystem Model for the Revised Standard Version

Training systems

- General education systems:
 - Formal schools – public education in the United States, leading to colleges and universities. Translators were university and seminary professors in the US.
 - Education methods and philosophy – practically all involved in religious studies of one kind or another.
- Translator training systems:
 - Training schools – none apparent.
 - “On-the-job” training – none evident.
 - Translation methodologies and theories – continuation of KJV practices, more or less literal translation.
- Language training systems:
 - Language of wider circulation – none employed, all translators apparently native English speakers.
 - Mother-tongue study – professorial-level of English language understanding, all translators were scholarly writers and authors.

- Biblical languages – most advanced of North American scholarship at the time, benefit of advances in Hebrew and cognate language studies.
- Theological training systems:
 - Theological systems – Protestant, ecumenical Christian, moderate-liberal theological viewpoint.
 - Hermeneutic approaches – historical-critical.

Guidance systems

- Biblical backgrounds & culture:
 - Study materials – archaeological and geographical resources from a century of exploration and archaeological expeditions.
 - Biblical interpretation – mostly shaped by the historical-critical approaches developed in Germany in the 1800s.
- Biblical languages:
 - Lexicons – Koehler-Baumgartner, Brown-Driver-Briggs available.
 - Translations – primary source ASV, Moffatt et. al. translation, a few other English translations at the time.
 - Commentaries & studies – a wide range of traditional and critical commentaries available.
 - Grammars – Gesenius-Kautsch-Cowley, also possibly Green, Stuart, Nordheimer, Meyrowitz, Moore, Lyons available.
- Mother-tongue help:
 - Language advisor(s) – entire committee, no stylists as such.
- Organizational guidance:
 - Bible societies and missions – not the work of either specifically.

- Churches – National Council of Churches.
- Funding entities – NCC.

Communication Systems

- Literary systems:
 - Literary genres – poetry is treated differently than prose, more respect to differing genres such as poetry, narrative, and wisdom literature.
 - Literary language – only guideline was to use English designed “for use in public and private worship, not merely for reading and instruction” (RSV 1952, vii).
- Relevance systems – minimal notes, primarily textual issues and alternative translations. Relevance not provided directly by the translation for the most part, not an expanded or explanatory translation style.

Engagement Systems

- Human agency:
 - Churches – chapter in separate OT Intro booklet on use of OT in worship.
 - Preachers – chapter in separate OT Intro booklet on preaching values.
- Non-human agency:
 - Formatting conventions – conventional Bible publishing formatting for its time.
 - Books and pamphlets – separate introduction for NT and OT published along with the Bible itself.

The polysystem reconstruction of the RSV calls for some observations. First, the RSV was produced by a significant pool of scholarly expertise and opinion, probably surpassing the English Revised Version for sheer qualifications of the committee. Second, the RSV had a very low-level relevance system within its pages, very few supplementary reader helps, topical page headings but not subheadings in the text, and a minimal number of notes, none of which were explanatory in nature of the historical and cultural aspects of the text. The informative *Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the OT* seems to have been very helpful in its intentions, but it was a separate volume and does not appear to have circulated widely.

Even though the appearance of the pages was rather simple and austere, the RSV presented poetry for the first time in a major Bible in indented line form, throughout the prophets as well. The ASV had produced such a line format in the Psalms, but not elsewhere, as had other translations of the past. This change has become a standard for Bible translation publication since that day.

4. The Luxembourgish Bible Translation Project

Having evaluated ten different translations from the past, and thereby tested the effectiveness of the BTPM, the next step was to apply it to an ongoing actual Bible translation project, in this case the Luxembourgish Bible translation in the small country of Luxembourg in Europe. The following is a brief history of the work Bibles International (BI) has done with the Luxembourgish Bible as recorded in the project histories:

In May 2008 BI staff made the first research visit to talk with specific people in Luxembourg who wanted to do a translation of the Bible

into the Luxembourgish language. This was at the request of an American missionary working in church planting in the country. The people wanting to do the translation were a well-educated Luxembourgish Christian couple with previous experience in both ministry and in translation, a couple who had already translated some portions of the New Testament.

The surprising thing was that even though Luxembourg is a fully modern country and most people in the country speak French, German, and English fluently, the same need for a Bible in their heart language existed there that exists in so many “third-world” countries. Even though the Luxembourgers can speak these other languages, their native language is what defines them as a people, and there is a heightened national interest in not just preserving Luxembourgish but also making it the dominant way to communicate within the country.

Riding the crest of such a social surge, the Bible in their own language is one of the best tools to awaken the Luxembourgers to their spiritual needs. The first translator training took place in December of 2010, and the project has advanced rapidly since then, being aided by the readily available means of Internet teleconferencing.

The Luxembourgish Gospel of John was printed in 2014, followed by the New Testament in October 2017, coinciding with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (Bibles International 2024a).

4.1. The Questionnaire

The research into the effectiveness of the BTPM for the Luxembourgish project took the form of a questionnaire given to the team members for their assessment of each of the parts of the model. The responses were then collated and evaluated to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

4.2. The Luxembourgish Project's Strengths and Weaknesses

It is clear to me from the answers to the questions that the training systems are the biggest strength for this project. I rarely have any translator who knows any Greek or Hebrew, though many of them have had Bible institute training. In such cases, we have had to supply various training modules beyond initial translator training, and we have to expand and bolster the guidance systems to compensate. Such projects require much more checking and help at the guidance level. We can see the same thing at a lesser level in the Luxembourgish project, in that most of the team was not as familiar with Greek, so my expertise in guidance was more necessary for the New Testament. But every member of the translation team has a very adequate knowledge of Hebrew, and that has really made things go forward in the Old Testament. It enables us to have much higher-level discussions about the textual and translation issues.

The second area of strength for this project is in the guidance systems. My translation consultation assistant and I both read and to some extent speak Luxembourgish, so we have never needed an oral or written back translation or an interlinear to evaluate the translation as I usually have had to do in other language groups. That makes us “emic consultants” based on Boswell’s terminology, which he defines as “someone who has been certified as a translation consultant and who has both a demonstrated proficiency in the receptor language (up to native speaker level, in some cases) and a deep cultural awareness” (Boswell 2021, 1). The team also is well outfitted with supplementary helps of all kinds, and we are all well trained in using them. The organizational guidance and support have been excellent, and the only thing we have lagged behind a little on has been translator financial support.

The biggest weakness in this project is not a fault of the team, but the lack of complete stability or development of the language's communication systems. I have been aware of the variations in spelling and dialectical differences for some time, but until I got the questionnaires back, I did not realize how much this needs to be addressed in various ways to help the problem. The team has asked me to do a workshop on discourse analysis, and that will be one step towards alleviating the problem, but we may need more help from language experts in the country than we have realized. The role of translation in helping to establish orthographic, lexical, and grammatical language standards in the country may have been underestimated. The idea that a European language would not have all this worked out seems very strange, but the fact is that many minority languages all over Europe are very much like Luxembourgish. They are "hidden in plain sight," as I heard someone express recently. Most of them are not also a country language like Luxembourgish, but our research into Europe has uncovered quite a number of minority languages that might awaken to the gospel with the right translation.

The final sector, engagement systems, has not been neglected, but to a certain extent it has bloomed all on its own because of enthusiasm over the New Testament and the public reading of portions of the Old Testament. Our translation organization also has not had a dedicated department until very recently that would direct its attention to this need, but the people in that department have their eyes on Luxembourg right now. The response has been at the grass-roots level and largely spontaneous. So, this is another factor relating to Bible translation the BTM has revealed to us that needs to be encouraged and worked at in earnest, lest we lose the advantage of the recent surge in interest.

5. Exegetical Applications

If a Bible translation is the ultimate expression of good biblical exegesis, and the Bible translation polysystem model is an effective description of the whole process of Bible translation, then logically the application of the BTPM to exegesis ought to help to solve difficult exegetical problems. Based on this premise, four different exegetical problems were examined and analyzed in depth. A brief summary of two of them is provided here.

Case #1: Zechariah 5:3

In the midst of a difficult chapter with challenging visions to interpret, a poor translation of verse 3 only adds to the problem. Twelve major English translations make major mistakes in rendering this verse, thus obscuring the meaning of the visions. The core problem in these translations has to do with understanding the Hebrew verbal system and failing to apply the simplest and most direct meaning of the verb to the context.

Hebrew language instructors in the past have generally been rather vague about the Hebrew verbal system, especially outside of narrative, and instruction has focused primarily on selecting the best English tense for correspondence to the Hebrew by context. But what if the tense of the verb is the context, as it is in this case? Here, the thieves and liars either have had something done to them or will have something done to them, and the meaning of the passage hinges very much on the choice of which tense to use. So, the problem cannot be solved without further study and training in the Hebrew verbal system, part of the first quadrant of the BTPM.

The signal work of Longacre and Bowling, both experienced translators, provides the necessary training to make a proper translation of this verse that fits the entire context best. Their comment on the verb tense here is: "Simple qtl in a narrative most frequently indicates a

pluperfect—often in a relative clause” (Longacre and Bowling 2015, 625). The conclusion from this analysis is that any translation that renders נִקְרָה in Zechariah 5:3 with a future tense English verb is not a correct translation. Investigation of the meaning of this verb also shows that most of the English translations have settled on a meaning that is not the core meaning of the verb, probably because that core meaning could not fit a future tense action in this context. The only English translation that seems to have gotten things right is the 1985 Jewish Publication Society translation:

“That,” he explained to me, “is the curse which goes out over the whole land. For everyone who has stolen, as is forbidden on one side of the scroll, has gone unpunished; and everyone who has sworn falsely, as is forbidden on the other side of it, has gone unpunished.”

With all due respect for the JPS translation, and congratulations for getting right what few other translations have done, we need to ask the question if the translation sounds natural and well-formed, based on the communication systems sector and the written systems of English literary language and conventions of writing. Possibly the best way to answer that question would be to compare what I hope is a more natural and readable translation I have made for this verse:

“This is the curse which is going out over all the land,” he said to me. “It goes out because all those it condemns as thieves on the scroll’s one side, and all those it condemns as swearing falsely on the other side remain unpunished.”

Case #2: Matthew 24:34 (Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32)

Much of the interpretation of these verses in the Olivet discourse have focused on the meaning of the Greek word *genea* (γενεά), in an effort to make it mean something other than the immediate generation Jesus was

talking to. The dilemma is that by accepting that meaning, it appears that Jesus was saying that the generation he was speaking to would live to see the fulfillment of his predictions, leading to the conclusion that he was mistaken. The problem with this passage is that focusing on *genea* (γενεά) is the wrong word to focus on, and failure to understand the discourse levels in the Olivet discourse leads to wrong conclusions. The word *genea* (γενεά) in fact means the “people of the same generation,” but this does not mean that Jesus was mistaken.

An important key to this passage is understanding the levels of discourse within the overall structure of the entire discourse. In verses 4–33, references to “you” are to those within the prophetic discourse. Jesus is there not strictly addressing the disciples physically before him, but rather the disciples who will then be on the earth. But verse 34 is the hinge of the discourse. When Jesus says the formulaic “truly I say to you,” he is stepping out of the context of his previous discourse and establishing a new discourse level. This formula, or even the simple “I say to you,” is used to draw special attention to a statement, and sometimes in parables to indicate the switch in a discourse between the story and its application to the immediate audience (cf. Matt. 21:31, 24:47; John 10:7). Particularly notable is the parable in Luke 18:9–14 of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The phrase *legō humin* (λέγω ὑμῖν) “I say to you” in v. 14 concludes the actual telling of the parable, and then Jesus uses *houtos* (οὗτος) “this” in the phrase, “I tell you, *this* man went down to his house justified rather than the other,” to refer the audience back into the parable and make a comment about the tax collector. This structure is parallel to that of the Matthew 24:34 passage, where the “this” refers back to the generation he has just been talking about.

The next word to focus on is *houtos* (οὗτος) “this.” The word *houtos* (οὗτος) does not completely correspond to “this” in English and should be

better translated as “that” in the present context, due to the fact that the word *ekeinos* (ἐκεῖνος) “that” in Greek refers to more remote areas than in English. The resulting translation, addressed to his immediate audience instead of the “you” of the preceding section, is: “Truly I say to you: *that* generation will not pass off the scene until all *those* things happen.”

This is a case where understanding the discourse systems in the source language, also part of the communication systems sector, is all-important to interpretation.

6. Conclusion

We return at the end of this paper to the statement about Bible translation: it is a complex relational activity within a society consisting of a translator or translators (including support from others within the composite consumer group), surrounded by and utilizing various components or systems. These systems together constitute a single polysystem, intending to effectively communicate the message of the Bible to that society. Furthermore, a Bible translation is the end result of the specific combination of systems and sub-systems used to produce it, no one of which is decisive in shaping it. Using our “science” terminology, it is not one “black box,” but rather the result of a combination of many “black boxes,” which is what a polysystem is.

To those who say this approach sounds too complicated and unnecessary, we would say the following: Whether you like it or not, these systems will be selected by someone in the group or team, and they will go into operation, for better or for worse, and thus affect the final form of the translation. Polysystem theory does not make up the systems or the repertoire of a given society; it only organizes them into a more integral

whole, so as to show where all aspects of the translation fit, where they come from, and how they affect each other. One of the purposes of an application of polysystem theory to Bible translation is the BTPM, which is a way to give the translators more control and input, to help them understand where they fit into the process and what resources they have at their disposal—in short, to empower them to do a better job.

We can categorize polysystem theory and the BTPM as being neither liberal nor conservative, neither literal nor explanatory, not produced by a specific church denomination, and as much as this author is able to make it, neither oriented towards the western or the developing world. It is meant to be a flexible system that can be adjusted to suit the situation—once again, a “holistic” approach.

The final conclusion is to remember what our ultimate output and goal for the polysystem is, which is not a printed text nor a recording, but total Scripture engagement, where the readers of Scripture find themselves changed through the Spirit by what they read and hear, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:2–3: “Our message is you, written in our hearts, well known and well read by all people. It’s obvious that through our ministry you are Christ’s message, written down not using ink but using God’s living Spirit, not on tablets of stone, but on flesh-and-blood tablets of the heart.”²

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Perfect Being Theology and the Molinist View of Divine Providence: An Anselmian Critique of Middle Knowledge

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Abstract

This study critiques the Molinist view of divine providence by evaluating it through the lens of perfect being theology. It proceeds in four stages: (1) a biblical assessment of perfect being theology, (2) a historical survey of its development and method, (3) an application of this method to Molinism, and (4) a theological evaluation of Molinism's coherence with perfect being theology. While Molinism has been widely examined through biblical and philosophical frameworks—especially in recent decades—this study offers a distinctively theological critique rooted in the Anselmian tradition.

Perfect being theology asserts that God, as the greatest conceivable being, possesses all great-making properties to the maximal degree. This study argues that middle knowledge qualifies as a great-making property; thus, God must possess it to be a maximally great being. Because Molinism hinges on God's use of middle knowledge to govern creation, it aligns closely with perfect being theology.

While scholars have applied perfect being theology primarily to divine attributes, this study extends its use to evaluate models of providence, such as open theism and Molinism. As such, this study appeals to the long-held tradition of Anselmian perfect being theology to ascertain the theological orthodoxy of the Molinist view of divine providence.

The thesis concludes affirmatively: Molinism is a coherent, intuitive, and theologically rich model that portrays God as the greatest conceivable being. As such, Molinism stands out as a model of divine providence “than which none greater can be conceived,” aligning with the aims of perfect being theology and offering a compelling vision of God's maximal greatness.

1. Introduction

While theologians and philosophers of religion have examined God's providence in the Christian tradition, evangelical philosophers have shown revived interest in Molinism as a view of providence. Many scholars have helpfully examined Molinism biblically and philosophically to determine scriptural fidelity and rational coherence. Still, a distinctive analytic-theological examination of the doctrine, guided by perfect being theology, is lacking. This study will use a novel method of perfect being

theology to examine Molinism's view of divine providence to maximize the great-making attributes in the Anselmian tradition. By appealing to the long-held tradition of Anselmian perfect being theology to ascertain the theological orthodoxy of the Molinist view of divine providence, this study attempts to answer the following question: How might the method of perfect being theology be used to critique the Molinist view of divine providence?

Perfect being theology is one method of answering the following question: What is God? According to this method, God, the source of all things and wholly worthy of worship, must be the most perfect being possible. Morris characterizes the core thesis of perfect being theology as "God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making attributes" (2002, 35). Thus, perfect being theology is a method of constructing a maximally coherent set of great-making attributes of God, sometimes called a maximally great being.

The word *providence* is derived from the Latin word *providentia*, meaning "to foresee." In theology, providence also includes God's active guidance and direction of the course of events to fulfill his purposes. Erickson defines God's providence as "the continuing action of God by which he preserves in existence the creation which he has brought into being and guides it to his intended purposes for it" (2013, 358). Thus, divine providence refers to God's continual action in his creation to bring about his purposes. Differing views of providence result in differing attributes, or more precisely, different models, of God.

In contemplating the magnitude of God's knowledge in light of the various views of providence, reflecting on the scale of his omniscience is awe-inspiring. The providential view called Molinism, which utilizes a doctrine called middle knowledge, understands that God not only

knows what *could* happen and what *will* happen but also all that *would* happen, even events that are never realized, states of affairs that are never actualized, and circumstances that are never reified. The vast knowledge of God in the Molinist view of providence is greater than other views of providence. A being that is deserving of worship is a being who has the greatest extent of knowledge. To analyze the Molinist view of providence through the lens of perfect being theology, an examination of perfect being theology through the lens of biblical, historical, and systematic analysis is necessary to ascertain whether middle knowledge is required to determine the greatest view of providence that can be conceived. Following Osborne's research approach involves considering a certain doctrine, following it through Scripture and the history of dogma, and then articulating it precisely for today (2006, 406–9). This approach offers a theory-to-practice design that aligns with the intended path of this study, which aims to understand the theory and method of perfect being theology as scripturally faithful, historically developed, and systematized for practical application.

2. Scriptural Witness

Scripture gives some liberty for reflecting upon the attributes of God. Resonating with Scripture in apprehending God's attributes is the method of perfect being theology. The two key passages are Isaiah 40:25 and Hebrews 6:13, which describe God as incomparable and the greatest being, respectively. The consistency of these texts with the method of perfect being theology was evident because of their affinity with the biblical material. Thus, there is flexibility in developing a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God via the method of perfect

being theology. We are not limited solely to explicit biblical descriptions of God's attributes because the biblical statements set forth principles from which the fuller notion of perfect being theology emerges.

While the Hebrew (תָּמִיד) and Greek (τελειόω) words for perfection reference God's work and maturity/completion, this is not how the phrase "perfect being theology" uses the word "perfect" (Brueggemann 2016). Perfect being theology is related to how we are to view God, namely, as the greatest conceivable being (or, as modern philosophers phrase it, a maximally great being). Perfect being theology is a method of discerning more value, quality, or significance compared to something else. The passage in Isaiah rhetorically compares God to something greater. At the same time, the text in Hebrews declares that there is no one greater. These texts are consonant with the method of perfect being theology.

When Isaiah 40:25 rhetorically asks, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One," there is no one comparable or like God, the Holy One, because he is the greatest being (Oswalt 1998, 62). Perfect being theology also resonates with this description of God by the prophet Isaiah. While Isaiah does not make a clear declarative proposition about God as a maximally great being, his rhetorical question is clearly answered by the fact that no one is comparable to or like God.

The clearest allusion to perfect being theology is found in the New Testament book of Hebrews: "For when God made a promise to Abraham since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself" (Heb 6:13). No one is greater than God, hence the reason God swears by himself in this promise to Abraham (Schreiner 2015, 199). This passage is seen as one of the most significant and interesting descriptions of God. The idea of God as the greatest conceivable being is not a mere metaphysical speculation but a firm revelation grounded in Scripture (Helm 2011). The

author of Hebrews clearly sees God as the greatest conceivable being, which is congruent with Anselm's declaration. The God of the Bible resonates with the God of the philosophers, seeing God as the greatest being. Helm believes the idea is central to the biblical account of God. From the passage in the following argument can be formulated:

P1: If there is a being greater than God, then God could (and would) swear by a greater being.

P2: God could not (and did not) swear by a greater being than God (when he made his promise to Abraham, because God swore by himself).

P3: Therefore, it is not the case that there is a being greater than God (from 1–2 by *modus tollens*).

P4. Therefore, God is the greatest being (from 3).

This formulation of the argument does not make swearing oaths impossible for God while remaining faithful to what is communicated in Hebrews 6:13 (Helm 2011).

In analyzing Isaiah 40:25 and Hebrews 6:13, we find that they are compatible with the method of perfect being theology. Consequently, perfect being theology is not only compatible but consonant with Scripture to develop an understanding of God that affirms him as a maximally great being who is incomparable and the greatest. This description is faithful to the Bible and faithful to a rigorous philosophical thought of God as a maximally great being. We do not need to limit descriptions of God's attributes to solely biblical descriptions. The biblical testimony has laid the foundation for perfect being theology

to emerge and develop. While not explicitly stated in Scripture, perfect being theology is consistent with Scripture. This consistency suggests two things. First, perfect being theology is an appropriate practice; and second, the method of perfect being theology is harmonious with Scripture.

While many see the origin of perfect being theology in Anselm or even Augustine, the real genesis of seeing the great-making attributes of God as compatible with perfect being theology is Scripture itself. Building upon this scriptural foundation, two conclusions result from this analysis. First, we learn not only that perfect being theology is compatible with Scripture but also that Scripture points in the direction of perfect being theology. Second, perfect being theology is a natural and fitting extension of the scriptural interpretive process. The God of Scripture deserves to be worshipped, and only a fully perfect being is worthy of worship. Therefore, the God of Scripture is a perfect being.

3. Historical Fidelity

In this discussion, the historical development of perfect being theology was explored from ancient Greek philosophy to modern analytic theology. Despite its detractors, the historical record demonstrated a continued and vigorous use of perfect being theology. Perfect being theology is very much evident in the work of both theologians and philosophers of religion throughout the history of Christian doctrine.

The axiom that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived has been held consistently throughout the history of perfect being theology, both before and after Anselm's development. While there are variations of the axiom, the central idea holds throughout all of them.

Even a cursory look at scholars throughout history shows the use of perfect being theology:

- Plato: God is to be understood in “every way in the best condition” (1992, 56–57).
- Aristotle: God is “the best substance” (2004, 382).
- Augustine: He is “the most powerful, most just, the most beautiful, most good, most blessed” (1994).
- Boethius: “Since nothing greater than God is able to be imagined, who can doubt that the thing that is surpassed by nothing is good? Truly reason shows that the Good is God, so that He is completely filled with the perfect Good” (2012, 64).
- Morris: God possesses “the greatest possible array of compossible great-making
- attributes” (2002, 35).
- Rogers: God is “unlimited and possesses every ‘great-making’ property” (2000, 11).
- Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, Hill: God is “a maximally great being.” (2002, 14; 2005, 13–18).
- Mawson: God is “the most perfect being possible” (2019, 9).

Ancient, medieval, and contemporary adherents to perfect being theology all understand God as the best possible being or a maximally great being. Ancient and medieval accounts tend to affirm that God is the most perfect being or greatest conceivable being or the most perfect being, while modern accounts of perfect being theology gravitate to describing God as a maximally great being or a being with all the great-making attributes.

Two of the greatest Christian scholars deserve particular attention: Augustine and Anselm. In early medieval theology, the great Christian

tradition of perfect being theology begins with Augustine. It is present in his work on the great chain or hierarchy of being. God, according to Augustine, is the highest in the hierarchy because in him resides the best instance of every attribute or property (1993, 7–8). Perfection resides in God because he contains the best instances of every attribute. Augustine’s proto-Anselmian perfect being theology anticipates the perfect-being claim that God is the greatest conceivable being.

In the work of Anselm, standing on the shoulders of Augustine, we found the pinnacle declaration of perfect being theology: *et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* or “and indeed we believe that you [God] are something that nothing greater can be thought of” (Anselm 1998a, 87). God is to be correctly understood, according to Anselm, as the greatest conceivable being. If God were greater for having an attribute than not having that attribute, then God has that attribute. God must possess every great-making attribute or property to be the greatest conceivable being.

The modern renaissance of perfect being theology has been found in philosophical circles. A flood of works on Anselmian perfect being theology has been published in the late twentieth century and now in the early twenty-first century. Led by Thomas Morris in the 1980s, this mantle of perfect being theology has been taken up by philosophers who utilized it under the auspice of maximal greatness or a maximally great being (Morris 1984, 1987a, 1987b). Katherine Rogers’s recovery of Anselm developed into a neo-medieval perfect being theology, one that emphasized the medieval metaphysics of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas (Rogers 2000). Other scholars utilizing the method of perfect being theology included Hoffman, Rosenkrantz, Hill, and Mawson (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2002, Hill 2005, and Mawson 2019). Even neo-Anselmian approaches were developed in Nagasawa’s work (Nagasawa 2008, 2017).

The use of perfect being theology in the history of theology has revealed persistent practices and principles in keeping with Anselm's method.

Charting the history of Anselmian theism reveals several consistent themes and recurring elements of the method that need to be noted. These themes and elements include an understanding that God is the greatest conceivable being, the use of intuition as a key method in understanding which attributes are great-making, and the ability to be flexible with perfect being theology to make it conform to the dictates of reason, evidence, and Scripture. These points show that the method of perfect being theology is adaptable without losing its core consistency. Further, they help illustrate that Anselmian theism has provided a promising method for determining the divine attributes that have been utilized for centuries in Christian theology.

The use of perfect being theology in the history of theology has revealed persistent practices and principles with Anselm's method. Just as Scripture itself leads us to the practice of perfect being theology, likewise, historical theology leads us to Anselm's method. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have employed perfect being theology throughout church history. Given this, we should have few reservations concerning the inability of perfect being theology to run the theological race with perseverance as we put into practice the Anselmian principle of divine perfection. In short, perfect being theology should be a key method in doctrinal development (McCall 2015, 49–52; Richards 2003, 30–34; Steffaniak 2020, 380).

4. Practicing Perfect Being Theology

Perfect being theology under the control of scriptural revelation and interacting with historical theology, as it is guided by reason and the use

of intuition, can be systematized in a method that provides guidance and consistency. Developing perfect being theology as a method rather than just a principle or guide revealed that contemporary perfect being theists did not utilize Anselm's approach as a procedure. What is needed is a unique process that filters out certain attributes of God while holding onto others, in which an attribute is introduced, eliminated, elaborated, or refined. Furthermore, this unique method should examine the attributes that are explicit or implied in the various models of God. Given that different models of God carry with them different attributes, this method of perfect being theology should ascertain if the model under consideration understands God in a maximally great way. The novel method developed here suggests that attributes under inspection be filtered systematically, coherently, and deliberately. Recontextualizing Anselm's approach, considering analytic theology's insights, will restate the method of perfect being theology for a contemporary context (Smith 2013, 51–52). The filters developed are called *consideration*, *ascription*, and *revision*.

The consideration analyzes whether an attribute is attainable. Is a property under consideration one that is attributable to God? Is it an attribute that would apply to the nature of God? This process appeals to Scripture and Christian tradition to confirm an attribute and how the attribute maximizes God as the greatest conceivable being (Buschart and Eilers 2015, 15–22; Murray and Rae 2008, 9). The consideration stage reflects upon an attribute, asking if it is one God can obtain, if it is confirmed or permitted by Scripture and Christian tradition and asking if it is better to have or not to have the attribute.

Ascription evaluates how an attribute is to be articulated and conceptualized. Initially, using our intuitions helps determine if an attribute is a great-making attribute, all things being equal (Morris 2002,

38; Rogers 2000, 12; Hill 2005, 9, 13; Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2002, 14; Mawson 2019, 15). Intuitions are mental states in which a proposition *seems* true (Steffaniak 2020, 360). While there is some debate about the use of intuition, objections against it are unwarranted, and the use of intuition is a legitimate endeavor in perfect being theology (Craig and Moreland 2017, 422). Furthermore, if the attribute comes in degrees, we must ascribe it to the maximal degree, given that God is the greatest possible being. The ascription stage asks if the attribute accords with our intuitions to be ascribed to God and, if the attribute comes in degrees, to ascribe it to the maximal degree.

As the perfect being theist gathers attributes for consideration and ascription, revision determines if they are compatible with each other. If they are logically contradictory, one must sort through the process of perfect being theology to determine which stays and which is rejected or if they should be revised for the greatest possible being (Morris 2002, 38). As this process is applied, models of God will begin to develop, and the method should continue by comparing these models to determine the greatest possible being. This process provides a precise method to consider, apply, and revise not only attributes of God but also sets of attributes within various models of God generally, as well as various views of providence such as Molinism in particular. The revision stage determines if the attribute is compatible with other attributes and how models of God compare in the array of compatible great-making properties.

This construction of the method of perfect being theology has provided not only the systematic consideration of the divine attributes but can analyze other doctrines and models of God to envision the greatest conceivable being or maximally great being (Spiegel 2005, 14). Following in the footsteps of Augustine, Anselm, Rogers, Morris, and Mawson, this

unique reformulation of perfect being theology stands under the authority of Scripture while interacting with the Christian tradition guided by reason and informed by our intuition. This new method will help explore the results of perfect being theology's critique of divine providence, specifically Molinism.

5. A Providence Than Which None Greater Can Be Conceived

Different models of providence have varied implications for God and his attributes. Some models include open theism, Calvinism, and Molinism. Molinism refers to the belief that God not only knows what *will* happen in the actual world (which is God's free knowledge) and what *could* happen in all possible worlds (which is God's natural knowledge) but that he also knows what every possible free creature *would* do in every possible situation in which that creature could find itself (which is God's middle knowledge). Molinism maintains an "all-encompassing providence and libertarian human freedom" (MacGregor 2015, 249) that offers a strong notion of God's control of events in the world while holding to a genuine view of free will. It seeks to reconcile God's meticulous providence with libertarian human free will through middle knowledge. Thus, middle knowledge refers to God's knowledge of what creatures *would* freely do in any situation, regardless of whether they are ever in any such situation.

While Luther, Calvin, and Molina built on Aquinas's distinction between natural and free knowledge, Luther and Calvin placed counterfactuals after the divine creative decree. Molina placed them before it (Molina 1988, 204–205). The former eliminates libertarian freedom while the latter preserves it. The placement of counterfactuals before God's divine creative decree provided a new category of omniscience: middle

knowledge. While Scripture supports the idea of counterfactuals (or hypotheticals), Scripture was not determinative of the placement of such statements in the divine cognitive structure.

The development of middle knowledge provided a fruitful key to God's providence. Not only did middle knowledge reconcile divine sovereignty and human freedom, but it also provided a coherent understanding of numerous other issues involving providence, such as the logical problem of evil, Christian particularism, scriptural inspiration and inerrancy, perseverance of the saints, predictive prophecy, and petitionary prayer, amongst others (Craig 2011, 84; MacGregor 2015, 248–69; and Laing 2018, 180–334).

When finally considering the Molinist view of providence, there is no reason to believe that the concept of middle knowledge is unattainable. While it is not explicitly affirmed by Scripture, it is nevertheless congruent with the revealed word of God. The evidence points to the affirmative when pressed with the Anselmian principle on whether it is better to have the doctrine of middle knowledge as part of God's nature. In the Molinist model of divine providence, God knows the counterfactuals of freedom prior to his divine creative decree, thus retaining libertarian free will through his middle knowledge. God also controls which propositions are true in his free knowledge, thus keeping divine control over his creation. Therefore, God predestines all things but does not cause all things in the Molinist model of divine providence (Craig 1989, 155–57). Considering how Molinism's use of middle knowledge explained the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and sovereignty with libertarian free will, some of the advantages that this view of providence offers are extensive. While initially developed to address human freedom and divine foreknowledge, Molinism has emerged as a robust view of providence in theological studies (Craig 2011, 79–100).

Perfect being theology presents God in the highest degree possible, and given that it is greater to have middle knowledge than not to have middle knowledge, it follows that God, being a maximally great being, would have middle knowledge. Given that it is greater to have middle knowledge than not to have middle knowledge because God has all the maximally great attributes, Molinism provides God with literally more knowledge, quantitatively, than what is afforded by other models of providence. It is not always the case that quantity is greater than quality, but in some cases—in fact, in many cases, a greater quantity is better than a lesser quantity. If God not only has knowledge of what we could do in any situation but also of what we would do in any situation, he, therefore, has more knowledge. If we are to understand God as the greatest conceivable being, we should affirm that God has middle knowledge. Since the Molinist view of providence affords the concept of middle knowledge, Molinism should be the preferred model of God's providence.

Since God is a maximally great being, per our method of perfect being theology, God necessarily has middle knowledge. The argument is as follows:

It is greater to have middle knowledge than not to have middle knowledge.

God is a maximally great being.

God has middle knowledge.

Given that God is a maximally great being, God has those attributes that are great-making properties and has those attributes to the maximal degree. Lacking middle knowledge would then cause God not to be a maximally great being, and the being that did have middle knowledge

would be greater, and that greater being would be God. God cannot be perfect if he lacks a genuine great-making property. Middle knowledge is a genuine great-making property. Thus, per perfect being theology, God has middle knowledge because it is better to have the attribute of middle knowledge than not to have middle knowledge. Furthermore, if it is greater for God to have middle knowledge, then the Molinist view is the greater view of providence because it utilizes middle knowledge in understanding God's guidance and governance of his creation. An argument for Molinism logically follows:

- (1) God is a maximally great being (Anselmian principle).
- (2) A maximally great being has those properties that it is greater to have than not to have.
- (3) It is greater to have middle knowledge than not to have middle knowledge.

Therefore, from (1), (2), and (3):

- (4) God has middle knowledge.
- (5) If God has middle knowledge, then the Molinist view of providence is correct (definitional truth).

Therefore, from (4) and (5):

- (6) The Molinist view of providence is correct.

This critique of Molinism by perfect being theology provided the needed analysis of divine providence. Under the lens of perfect being theology, the Molinist view of divine providence is a providence than which none

greater can be conceived. No other model of God meets the criteria of perfect being theology as a guide to theological development. The ability of perfect being theology to examine models of providence has highlighted many consequences.

6. Implications of Perfect Being Theology's Examination of Molinism

Perfect being theology has a rich tradition of use and solid scriptural backing. The contemporary resurgence in the philosophy of religion and analytic theology indicates that it will continue and broaden for the foreseeable future. The ability to portray the maximally great attributes provides a foundation for the theology of God to be continually explored and understood, but the extended use of perfect being theology in areas outside the properties of God provides opportunities for analysis and development in other areas of doctrine, like God's providence.

The use of perfect being theology outside of analyzing the attributes of God has had successful implementation, albeit limited in practice. For example, Anselm, in his *Cur Deus Homo*, used perfect being theology implicitly, examining the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ to synthesize the attributes of God's perfect justice and great mercy (Anselm 1998b, 260–356). Likewise, and more recently, the late Ben Arbour applied Anselm's method to the view of open theism, finding it incompatible with perfect being theology (Arbour 2014). Thomas Morris and David Baggett examined the Euthyphro dilemma in the Anselmian tradition, considering God's unchanging and perfect nature to resolve the predicament (Morris and Baggett 2016).

This thesis has contributed to systematic theology rooted in the history of Christian theology and scriptural fidelity. By engaging in the Anselmian tradition of perfect being theology, the need to ascertain views of providence within the confines of a maximally great being fulfills the requirement of viewing God in the highest degree possible. While any model of God is incomplete and not fully comprehensive, this approach provides an avenue for contemporary theology to adequately analyze the models and views of providence and other doctrines in Christian dogmatics.

The implications of this research are straightforward. One can continue the practice of investigating other doctrines outside of the divine attributes, as is traditionally practiced with perfect being theology, and divine providence, as exemplified in this study. The theological and practical implications of this continuation can help ensure that future doctrinal development is within the scriptural and theoretical bounds of perfect being theology, guaranteeing that models of God, providence, and other doctrines magnify God to a maximally great being. Theologians and philosophers of religion can benefit from this approach by remaining orthodox to Scripture but allowing for reasonable analysis while guiding the critical investigation through the method of perfect being theology.

On a practical note, one of the hopes of the implications of this study is not merely to analyze doctrine through the lens of perfect being theology but to magnify God in our worship. God is a being who is not only maximally great but worthy of all worship. David declares, “I have called upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised” (Ps 18:3 ESV). In contemplating the magnitude of God’s knowledge, reflecting on the scale of his omniscience is awe-inspiring. God not only knows what could happen and what will happen, but also all that would happen. The vast

knowledge of God in the Molinist view of providence is greater than other views of providence. A being that is deserving of worship is a being who has the greatest extent of knowledge. This breathtaking view is worthy of worship.

7. Conclusion

In a sermon on 7 January 1855 at New Park Street Chapel in London, Charles Spurgeon (1899, 156) declared that the “highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.” Without a doubt, contemplating the divine is to swim in waters deeper than humanity can tread, but such endeavors cause the mind to consider depths whose truths we will never exhaust. While much work on the nature of God and his providence is inescapably philosophical, the method of perfect being theology is faithful to Scripture and guided by the idea of Anselm’s approach.

Spurgeon further elaborated in his sermon that contemplating God is so vast an endeavor that we are lost in its immensity. We will never exhaust our knowledge of God, his nature, and his work. Hopefully, this study has provided some clarity on the immensity of the topic. Despite our inability to fully comprehend God, he wants to be known since he has revealed himself through Scripture. It is good to be reminded that God is beyond our understanding, but God is not unknowable. We also need to be reminded, as Paul prompts us, to live a life worthy and pleasing to the Lord in every way to bear good fruit, “growing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10 NIV).

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Strategies for Succession Planning Through Intentional Leadership Development for SIL Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

Succession planning through intentional leadership development ensures that organizations maximize their resources to create a sustainable pipeline of leaders at all levels. The Scriptures provide four distinct examples of leadership succession, as demonstrated in the relationships between Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the Disciples, and Paul and his team. Examining current best practices in other organizations and synthesizing the research with a biblical-theological framework enables organisations to create a unique leadership pipeline tailored to their needs. Clear plans, clear pathways, clear pools, character, and competencies provide structure for organizations to develop leaders

at all levels. Identifying and systematically categorizing both internal and external organizational challenges forms a robust foundation for developing a structured framework aimed at succession planning through intentional leadership development. Preparing future leaders involves offering them diverse experiences essential for effective leadership development. Individuals aspiring to leadership must understand the path to gaining competencies for the next level. Organizations must ascertain the developmental progress of their potential future leaders and evaluate whether they possess the requisite character traits and competencies. Depending on the hierarchical structure of an organization, a pipeline delineating the pathways and pools allows leaders and future leaders a strategic guide for development.

1. Introduction

Succession planning through intentional leadership development emphasizes intentionality. Organizations and their leaders are intentional about developing leaders for leadership roles. Organizations view succession planning as part of their strategy, and leadership development occurs within the strategic framework. Leadership is more than a position and different from management. Leadership differs from management in its focus on constructive and innovative organizational change, while management prioritizes order and consistency.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Succession Planning Through Intentional Leadership Development in Business

Multinational corporations offer examples of succession planning through intentional leadership development, rigorously tested by the demands of making a profit. A substantial body of literature exists, divided into three categories. First, pragmatic books and articles authored by practitioners sharing their experiences (Charan et al. 2011; Charan 2008; Ulrich et al. 2008; Conger and Riggio 2007; Ensher and Murphy 2005; Hladio 2017; Moss 2013). Second, academic articles written by researchers often evaluating practices in organizations (American Management Association 1998; Artis and Bartel 2020; Bradley-Cole 2021; Buckingham 2013; Carlson and Perrewe 1995; Chun et al. 2012; Crisp and Alvarado-Young 2018; De Meuse et al. 2011; Gandossy and Verma 2006; Groves 2007; Kaiser 2011; Kets de Vries and Korotov 2010; Kleinsorge 2010; Liang and Gong 2013; Linscott 2011; Mabey 2013; Pope et al. 2018; Renz and Herman 2016; Shivashankaran and Arnav 2018; Northouse 2019; Timms 2016). Third, business consultants with a particular methodology that they are trying to sell (Cameron and Green 2017; Goleman et al. 2008; Rothwell 2016; Sutton and Chatham 2017; Weiss and Molinaro 2005; West 2017; Covey 1991).

A foundational book integrating succession planning and leadership development is *The Leadership Pipeline* (Charan et al. 2011). The authors bring their experience of consulting with global corporations into providing a framework that has been adopted and adapted by nonprofits, governments, and churches. Researchers (Kaiser 2011; Kaiser and Craig

2011; Kaiser et al. 2011; De Meuse et al. 2011) examined the leadership pipeline and found evidence supporting the claims found in the book.

Succession planning should be part of an organization's strategic vision (Shivashankaran and Arnav 2018; Rothwell 2016; Groves 2007; Timms 2016; Kleinsorge 2010; Charan 2008). Succession planning transcends the mere identification of individuals to occupy future roles within an organization, emphasizing the strategic cultivation of leadership capabilities to ensure sustained organizational growth and resilience. Succession planning includes the competencies and skills required for key positions (not just management positions), providing training and opportunities for in-house staff to gain the competencies and skills, and addressing the future needs of the organization.

Coaching and mentoring serve as fundamental strategies for the effective implementation of succession planning through intentional leadership development. Contemporary individuals increasingly benefit from having multiple mentors, as supported by the findings of Ensher and Murphy (2005), Liang and Gong (2013), and Chun, Sosik, and Yun (2012), which highlight the advantages of diverse mentorship relationships in leadership development. Mentors guide mentees through the organization by sharing wisdom and challenging the mentee to accept tougher assignments. Coaching, unlike mentoring, focuses on specific, task-oriented goals, requiring less emotional investment.

2.2. Christian Leadership

There are numerous books available to assist pastors and ministers in enhancing their leadership abilities. Mohler (2014) outlines essential skills for effective Christian leadership. Mohler argues that Christian

leaders should lead from their Christian convictions regardless of where they serve. Banks and Ledbetter (2004) would agree with Mohler's desire for Christians in secular leadership positions to lead as a practicing Christian. Iorg (2007), and Stanley (2003) stress the importance of character development for Christian leaders. Roach (2016) emphasizes Jesus' servant-leadership style and the importance of Christian leaders to emulate Christ's example.

Two books addressed the Leadership Pipeline (Geiger and Peck 2016; Lake 2020) from a Christian perspective. Other authors (Murrell and Murrell 2016; Plueddemann 2009; Bell 2019; Singfiel 2018; Hall 2019; Halverson 2018; Beach and Rutledge 2019) provide varied perspectives on Christian leadership development.

2.3. SIL Leadership Challenges

Three works address the challenges faced by SIL. Nicholls (2018) notes that the application of business models has limited success within SIL for two reasons. First, most of the published work comes from the United States and presumes American cultural values are universally applicable. Second, business models do not address the complexities faced by SIL. Hong (2014) addresses the complexity of leadership and followership in SIL. Multicultural teams, often geographically dispersed, create leadership challenges in SIL. The leader may not be in the same country or time zone as the follower. Franklin (2017) presents the direction of SIL and its partners for the future. Franklin writes about leaders reflecting missiologically on the problems and issues that face SIL and its partners. By focusing on the mission of God, SIL and its partners can address the complex issues facing all organizations in the world today.

2.4. Biblical-theological leadership development

The Bible provides four clear examples of succession planning through intentional leadership development. Joshua was selected to replace Moses. Elisha was selected to replace Elijah. Jesus trained the disciples to carry out his mission. Paul trained and mentored Timothy, Titus, and others. Additional instances of leadership development, or its absence, can be observed in relationships such as the interactions of Eli with his sons, the mentorship of Samuel by Eli, the guidance of his sons by Samuel, the influence of David on his sons, and the impact of Solomon on his sons.

A review of commentaries on Exodus (Alexander 2017; Bruckner 2008; Garrett 2014; Hamilton 2011; Janzen 1997; Kass 2021; Mackay 2018; Meyers 2005; Ryken and Hughes 2005; Stuart 2006; White 2016; Wright et al. 2021), Numbers (Ashley 2009; Cole 2000; Levine 2000), and Deuteronomy (Merrill 1994; Woods 2011) furnish insight into the development of Joshua as Moses's successor. A review of commentaries and journal articles on Elijah and Elisha (Brueggemann 2000; House 1995; Inrig and Anders 2003; Konkel 2006; Carroll 1969; Fetherolf 2017; Moore 2007b; 2007a; Rice 2006; Zucker 2012; 2013) reveal the development of Elisha as the successor to Elijah. A review of commentaries and journal articles on Jesus and the Disciples (Schnabel 2004; Felter et al. 2013; Ryken et al. 1998; Woodley 2011; Evans 2012; Tew 2012; Osborne 2019; Geddert 2001; Culpepper 2007; Brooks 1991; Swartley 2013; Thompson 2015) provide the background for Jesus's development of his successors. A review of commentaries and journal articles brings insights into how Paul developed future leaders (Åkerlund 2016; Berry 2010; Rios 2016; Silberman 2018; Cavins 2018; Sherwood 2020; Fitzmyer 2008; Keener 2005; Nash 2009; Chapple 2021; Johnson 2001; Ascough 2002).

3. Research Design and Methodology

This research is in the field of Practical Theology. This research is an empirical study of leaders in SIL-PNG to understand how they perceive succession planning through intentional leadership development, or lack thereof. The research employed a qualitative research approach. Initially, the research began with a questionnaire for leaders in SIL-PNG. The questionnaire was reviewed by Dr. David Troolin, with a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Adelaide, and Dr. Matthew Crosland, with a Doctor of Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary. From those who participated in the questionnaire, leaders were asked to participate in interviews to further expound their stories. Background research was centered on four areas: leadership development, succession planning, leadership pipeline, and biblical theology of leadership.

Swinton and Mowat (2016) were chosen as the methodological framework for researching succession planning through intentional leadership development in SIL-PNG. Swinton and Mowat present four stages of research in practical theology. Stage 1 is the current praxis (p. 1618). Stage 2 is cultural/contextual analysis (p. 1627). Stage 3 is theological reflection (p. 1634). Stage 4 is formulating revised forms of practice (p. 1641).

4. SIL Papua New Guinea

Established in 1956, SIL-PNG has a long, well-documented history that the author has divided into seven eras. The first era (1957–1967) is the period of founding and rapid growth. During this era, the Executive Committee (EC) led the organization, and the Director implemented their decisions.

Managers were appointed by the Director and approved by the EC. In this era, the move from a single Director to three occurred.

The second era (1967–1980) marked a significant change as the first New Testaments were dedicated, new works were started, and structures emerged to help manage SIL-PNG. The EC served as the primary leadership and decision-making body. During this era, some of the EC functions began to shift to the Directors and the Managers. By the end of the era, the day-to-day operations of SIL-PNG were in the hands of the Directors and Managers.

The third era (1980–1988) witnessed consistent clashes between the EC and Directors. The first mention of management training occurred at the beginning of this era. The first mention of a lack of trust in leadership also happened during this era. The EC noted that managing SIL-PNG was difficult because everyone believed they needed to be involved in all the management decisions.

The fourth era (1988–1996) marked two important leadership decisions. In 1988, SIL-PNG recognized the need for cross-cultural leadership. In 1989, the EC voted to have training for the Administration (the Directors and their team) to develop leaders. SIL-PNG began to focus on developing national leaders. The EC continued to assert that they were above the Director in hierarchy, and the Director reported to them. Managers gave reports directly to the EC in person. The EC actively engaged in management decisions.

Two important leadership topics began to be discussed: the lack of leaders in SIL-PNG and a discussion on the willingness to serve.

The fifth era (1996–2007) observed a shift from the EC managing SIL-PNG to overseeing the management of the Director. The move allowed the Director more freedom to make decisions without needing

approval from the EC. During this era, discussions of leadership in some form occurred at every biennial gathering. Eventually, a Leadership List was created. The Leadership List was a list of people the members of SIL-PNG felt were qualified to serve in various positions within SIL-PNG. I was unable to find any instance where the list was consulted to find a potential leader for SIL-PNG.

During this era, the first managers were recruited to come to SIL-PNG. Up to this point, translators might serve in different roles, including management.

The sixth era (2007–2015) began the structures for the current era. Human Resources was established, managers no longer needed to be ratified by the EC, biennial meetings focused on spiritual encouragement and less on business motions. The EC finalized the process of appointing a director, which was ratified by the membership rather than the members voting on a director.

The seventh era (2015–Present) witnessed changes in the relationship between the Director and the EC. Decision making was pushed down to lower levels, and issues that took decades to decide were now enacted within two years. Budgets were developed by managers, discussed with the Chief Financial Officer, revised and reviewed by the Director, and approved by the EC. The Senior Managers level was created to allow Directors to focus on strategy and allow consistency in leadership when new Directors were appointed.

The hierarchical structure of SIL-PNG consists of the Administration (Directors, Chief Officers, Senior Managers), Managers, Supervisors, and Individual Contributors. A significant challenge facing SIL-PNG is the consistent turnover of staff. About half of the staff are expatriates. Expatriates hold most of the Administration, Manager, and

Supervisor positions. Prior to 2020, Papua New Guinean staff were unable to become members of SIL-PNG, which created a barrier to leadership.

Finances create another separation between expatriates and Papua New Guinean staff. Expatriates raise their own financial support while Papua New Guinean staff receive a wage. Part of the support that expatriates raise is used to pay the wages of Papua New Guinean staff.

Throughout the research, a questionnaire was available to current and former SIL-PNG staff to describe succession planning and leadership development. Thirty-one people participated, four were Papua New Guineans. Five people who have served or are currently serving in leadership roles volunteered to be interviewed. The questions were emailed to the participants in advance, and the interviews were semi-structured.

Between the questionnaire and the interviews, it was clear that SIL-PNG did not have a succession plan or leadership development strategy. Many of the respondents observed that leaders were selected based more on availability than ability. The interviewees all agreed that previous experiences prepared them for their current leadership role. When asked to rank four statements: opportunity to lead, leadership training, having a mentor or coach, and organizational awareness, each person had a different ranking.

Finally, internal and external challenges were identified. The seven internal challenges are historical, trust, Ukarumpa and the Regions, Human Resources, governance, commitment to change, and localization. The five external challenges are funding, SIL International, Zone and Area, relationships with Wycliffe Alliance Organizations, Papua New Guinean government, and localization. Localization is both an internal and external challenge because of the internal challenges of making

localization work in SIL-PNG and the external pressure from outside the organization to see more localization.

5. Cultural-Contextual Analysis

On June 2, 2025, Google Scholar lists about 6,750,000 books and articles on leadership development, and 2,920,000 books and articles on succession planning. Businesses tend to focus on at least one of the following methods or processes for succession planning through intentional leadership development: formal education, informal training (on-the-job training), hybrid training (combining formal and informal), mentoring and/or coaching, and hiring outside the organization. One model, which seems to merge succession planning with intentional leadership development, is the Leadership Pipeline Model.

The Leadership Pipeline Model deliberately combines succession planning with leadership development. The premise of the Leadership Pipeline Model opposes skipping levels and advocates for the intentional development of leaders within an organization through passages. Each passage requires a change in values, skills, and attitudes. The Leadership Pipeline Model has been effectively implemented in businesses (Charan et al. 2011; Kaiser 2011; Conger and Riggio 2007), nonprofits (Linscott 2011; Quartararo 2015), governments (Fuentes 2020; Meadows 2015), medical fields (Hess et al. 2014; Wiggs Harris 2013), education (Bragg 2007; Davis et al. 2017; White 2020; Artis and Bartel 2020), and the Church (Lake 2020; Geiger and Peck 2016; Adkins 2016).

The Leadership Pipeline Model is bent at every leadership transition. The number of bends depends on the number of levels an

organization has. Each bend represents a significant change needed to meet the demands of the complexity of the next level of leadership. The bends allow leaders to evaluate an individual's transition. Individuals move through the pipeline at the right speed, and their development needs are addressed by mentors, coaches, and immediate supervisors. These organizations tend to have leaders develop quicker because of the clear expectations at each level (Charan et al. 2011).

Three barriers impede organizations from implementing the Leadership Pipeline Model. First, leaders tend to do the work themselves because they can do the work faster and better than their direct reports. This activity stunts the growth of the leader and the direct report. Second, senior leaders do not require their direct reports to develop others. Developing others frees up time in the long run. Third, senior leaders spend their time on today's problems rather than focusing on future issues. Because of this myopic view, organizations are unable to cope with future challenges.

The Leadership Pipeline Model incorporates succession planning and leadership development into a single model. An examination of succession planning and leadership development separately reveals the complexity of succession planning and leadership development.

Succession planning should not be confused with replacement planning. Replacement planning should be viewed as a temporary measure, not a permanent solution. Even when a leader leaves unexpectedly, proper succession planning has already identified the next candidates. Succession planning focuses on developing internal talent rather than outside talent. Bringing in outside talent to fill leadership positions indicates one of three things. First, the organization must undertake a decisive shift in its strategic direction.

There is a time when outside talent needs to be brought in. When the organizational culture is toxic or when a leader has a serious moral lapse are times when outside leadership is needed. Second, it is imperative for the organization to focus on cultivating its internal talent through structured development programs. The time required for a new leader to learn the organizational culture, develop relationships within the organization, and implement his or her vision for the organization ultimately hinders the organization unless the organization is seeking to change its culture. Third, a lack of bench strength, having someone ready to step up and take over as a leader, would be the other time an organization needs to bring in outside talent (Charan 2008; Timms 2016; Plakhotnik and Rocco, n.d.; Weiss and Molinaro 2005; Kleinsorge 2010; Shivashankaran and Arnav 2018; Gandossy and Verma 2006; Rothwell 2016).

Succession planning is structured into six distinct parts. First, the process of succession planning is strategically designed to incorporate thorough planning and critical thinking. Second, measurable goals are established as an essential element of the process. Third, critical positions, including but not limited to leadership roles, are identified. Fourth, the competencies required for each position are explicitly defined. Fifth, talent pools are systematically developed. Sixth, the entire succession planning process is communicated across the organization.

Leadership development fits neatly into succession planning. Based on the six parts, leadership development is vital to each step. Leadership development is a clear component of developing the talent pool. Leadership development expands individuals, teams, and entire organizations, not just the individual being prepared. Organizations should customize and develop their own leadership development

program. While the process may seem daunting, organizations are able to structure the program to meet their unique needs and will develop leaders who fit their culture. Outsourcing leadership development to another organization may seem cost-effective, but in the long run, an organization misses out on opportunities for their leaders to invest in future leaders (Burns et al. 2004; Charan 2008; Sutton and Chatham 2017; Groves 2007; West 2017; Kets de Vries and Korotov 2010; Northouse 2019; Hladio 2017; Timms 2016).

The leadership development process consists of four parts. First, organizations identify potential leaders. Second, potential leaders are developed. Third, organizations invest in potential leaders. Fourth, organizations provide stretch assignments for potential leaders (Burns et al. 2004; Charan 2008; Sutton and Chatham 2017; Groves 2007; West 2017; Kets de Vries and Korotov 2010; Northouse 2019; Hladio 2017; Timms 2016; Falcone 2016; Ensher and Murphy 2005; Lester et al. 2011; Sonnino 2016; Goleman et al. 2008).

Organizations engaging in succession planning through intentional leadership development share five common factors. First, they establish clear plans integrating succession planning and leadership development. Second, they delineate clear paths for individuals to prepare for the next level of leadership. Third, these processes are championed and owned by the organization's senior leadership. Fourth, their strategic plans encompass all tiers of leadership, ensuring a holistic approach. Fifth, a culture of development is cultivated, where leaders at all levels are committed to mentoring and preparing others, regardless of whether those individuals are immediately identified as high-potential candidates or next-level leaders.

6. Biblical-Theological Model

6.1. Biblical Examples

Four examples of succession planning through intentional leadership development were picked from the Bible: Moses-Joshua, Elijah-Elisha, Jesus-Disciples, and Paul-Team. Three features distinguish Old Testament and New Testament examples. Moses and Elijah developed one new leader over a long period. Jesus and Paul developed multiple leaders over a shorter period. In the Old Testament, God directed who would be the successor. In the New Testament, the leader selected who would be developed.

The development of Joshua provides a clear example of succession planning through intentional leadership development. Joshua is first introduced as the leader of the Army of Israel in Exodus 17. In Exodus 24–32, Joshua is introduced as Moses’s assistant and spends time halfway up Mount Sinai while Moses is meeting with God. In Exodus 33, Joshua lives in (or near) the tent of meeting. In Numbers 13–14, Joshua is one of the two spies who had a positive report. In Numbers 27, Joshua is officially appointed as Moses’s successor. In Numbers 34, the LORD tells Moses that Joshua and Eleazar would distribute the land. Joshua is mentioned in Deuteronomy 1:38, 3:21–28, 31:1–3, 31:7–8, 31:14–15, 31:23, and 34:9, with Chapter 31 being the most significant in the succession of Moses. For 40 years, Joshua was developed to lead Israel after the death of Moses. Joshua’s role would be different from Moses’s. Eleazar the High Priest would assist Joshua in distributing the land. The unnamed leaders of the families established in Exodus 18 would assist Joshua as well.

Elijah's introduction into the biblical story is as abrupt as Joshua's. Two chapters in the Bible provide the source of the development of Elisha: 1 Kings 19 and 2 Kings 2. In between these two chapters, Elisha is not mentioned as being with Elijah. We are left to speculate that Elisha left with Elijah in 1 Kings 19 and continued serving with him until Elijah is taken away in 2 Kings 2. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is given three specific tasks by the Lord. He is to anoint Hazael as king of Aram. He is to anoint Jehu as king of Israel. He is to anoint Elisha as "prophet in your place." Elijah sets out to anoint Elisha. Elisha will finish the tasks given to Elijah by anointing Hazael and Jehu.

Analyzing the leadership development processes of Joshua and Elisha presents fewer complexities compared to examining the disciples and Paul's team, primarily due to the more limited scope of available material. Joshua is mentioned in twelve chapters in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and Elisha's events encompass two chapters.

To maintain conciseness, I chose to adopt to take a broader perspective on the four Gospels to focus on the character traits and competencies Jesus was teaching his disciples. First is prayer. Prayer is the most important part of leadership (Woodley 2011; Evans 2012; Tew 2012; Osborne 2019; Geddert 2001). Second is being a servant (Fernando 2010; Trompenaars and Voerman 2009; Tew 2012; Geddert 2001; Iorg 2007; Woodley 2011; Osborne 2019; Evans 2012; Culpepper 2007; Brooks 1991; Swartley 2013; Thompson 2015; Geiger and Peck 2016; Ryken et al. 1998). Third is disciple making (Felter et al. 2013; Schnabel 2004; Geiger and Peck 2016; Osborne 2019; Woodley 2011; Lake 2020). Fourth is how a leader exercises authority (Schnabel 2004; Geddert 2001; Tew 2012; Osborne 2019; Woodley 2011; Evans 2012; Geiger and Peck 2016; Clinton 2012). Fifth is spending time alone (see Luke 5:16, 9:10, Matthew 26:36–

46). Sixth is the ability to teach (Woodley 2011; Lake 2020; Evans 2012; Schnabel 2004). Seventh is delegating (Culpepper 2007; Schnabel 2004; Ryken et al. 1998; Chilton 2004). Eighth, Jesus allowed failure. Failure was not a conclusion, but an opportunity to instruct the disciples. The disciples were in a teachable posture after failing.

Paul invested in multiple people at various stages of his ministry. He worked with and through people. Paul's writings, except for Galatians, include others as co-authors or co-workers. Examining Acts reveals that Paul always worked in a team. Scholars note the difficulty of applying Paul's leadership practices to modern leadership principles (Åkerlund 2016; Berry 2010; Rios 2016). My research revealed thirteen leadership practices of Paul. First, Paul modeled himself to others (Åkerlund 2016; Silberman 2018; Cavins 2018). Second, Paul built teams (Rios 2016; Sherwood 2020; Fitzmyer 2008; Keener 2005; Nash 2009; Lake 2020). Third, Paul demonstrated humility (Chapple 2021; Johnson 2001; Sherwood 2020). Fourth, Paul was cross-cultural (Rios 2016). Fifth, Paul gave grace to those he led (Chapple 2021). Sixth, Paul was willing to suffer (see Romans 8, 2 Corinthians 1, Philippians 3, 1 Thessalonians 2, and 2 Timothy 1) (Rios 2016). Seventh, Paul was ethical (Ascough 2002; Cavins 2018). Eighth, Paul was principle driven (Ascough 2002; Geiger and Peck 2016). Ninth, Paul was adaptable (Åkerlund 2016). Tenth, Paul was relational (Åkerlund 2016). Eleventh, Paul delegated to others (Rios 2016). Twelfth, Paul was agile (Rios 2016). Thirteenth, Paul was accountable and held others accountable (Rios 2016).

From the biblical examination, twelve points are noted. First, an individual's background does not matter. Second, in each case examined, the leader mentored his successor. Third, the leader provided a model for others to emulate. Fourth, the leader is a teacher.

Fifth, the successors had a learner's attitude. Sixth, the four examples examined demonstrate the importance of building a team. Seventh, leaders delegate. Eighth, leaders are approachable, especially to their inner circle. Ninth, leaders and successors demonstrated Godly character. Tenth, leaders seek the Lord. Eleventh, leaders seek wise counsel. Twelfth, leaders are decisive.

6.2. Theological Discussions

One influence on who could be considered for leadership in a parachurch organization comes from a person's denominational background. Depending on a person's denomination, only certain people could be a leader of a Christian organization based on their qualifications. Depending on the scholar, there are three to six different forms of Church governance (Berkhof 1974; Erickson 1998; Grudem 1994; Akin et al. 2004). The six forms of Church governance are (1) no governance (Quakers, Darbyites, and Plymouth Brethren), (2) Erastian system (tied to state), 3) Episcopalian system (bishop led) (only Berkhof separates Roman Catholics from Episcopalian systems), (4) Congregational model, (5) Reformed or Presbyterian system, and (6) National-Church (or Collegial) system (only Berkhof makes this distinction). In a multi-denominational Christian organization, succession planning through intentional leadership development could be challenging for two reasons. First, only "clergy" should lead a Christian organization. Second, on the other extreme, no one is really in charge. The Holy Spirit will move through different people and guide the organization. The challenge for leaders in multi-denominational ministries is getting all people to engage in discussions

and decisions about succession planning through intentional leadership development.

The foundation for all leaders is their character. God is more concerned with the character of a leader than with the number of followers he or she has. Potential leaders' character should be evaluated, and the consequences of failure as a Christian leader should be clearly communicated. Leaders are held to a higher standard, both in the world and in the eyes of the Lord (Covey 1991; Mohler 2014; Ryken et al. 1998).

7. Strategies

7.1. Defining the problems

The first step in developing new strategies for succession planning through intentional leadership development for SIL-PNG is to identify and classify the problems. Problems are classified into four categories: tame, messes, wicked, and wicked messes (Hancock 2010; Woodley 2011; Evans 2012; Lake 2020; Schnabel 2004).

Tame problems have simple solutions. Unfortunately, none of the challenges and problems identified have a single solution.

Problems related to system complexity are referred to as messes. While many of the challenges involve complex systems, there are more than just the system that is the problem.

Behavioral complexity problems are characterized as wicked. Commitment to change, trust, and ethnocentrism are all wicked problems. Each of these problems boils down to the worldview of the various individuals that are involved in SIL-PNG.

The coexistence of a complex system and a complex behavioral problem means that the remaining problems are wicked messes. Historical, Ukarumpa and the Regions, Human Resources, governance, localization, funding, culture, SIL International, Zone, and Area, relationships with Wycliffe Alliance Organizations, and the Papua New Guinean government are all wicked messes requiring multiple strategies.

Five strategies are designed to address succession planning through intentional leadership development in SIL-PNG.

7.2. Clear Plans

There must be clear plans for potential leaders. The Leadership Pipeline Model for SIL-PNG combines coaching, mentoring, experiential learning, action learning, and classroom training. The purpose of the Leadership Pipeline Model ensures that people are prepared for leadership roles within SIL-PNG and allows current leaders to see who is ready for the next level. By not skipping levels, future leaders will be better prepared for their next role. Current leaders need to focus on developing their staff for both their current and future roles. My research into SIL-PNG revealed an organization that has the conviction to develop new leaders and has a culture to sustain the development of new leaders. What has been lacking is the clear plans for the development of new leaders. A leadership pipeline plainly defines the various levels of leadership and provides staff with a clear plan for developing as a leader (Geiger and Peck 2016; Lake 2020; Wilkins 2004).

Current leaders need to make leadership development a priority. I have identified six components of clear plans. First would be new leader orientations. The formal training of new leaders is a small but important part of the development of new leaders and for succession planning through intentional leadership development. Each level would have its own orientation taught by people at the current or next level of leadership.

Second would be modeling. Leaders at all levels will serve as a model, whether they intend to or not. People will be watching each leader and determining whether the leader is a good model or a bad model. Modeling allows leaders to demonstrate the character and competencies required of leaders without having to speak. In a cross-cultural and multi-cultural environment, modeling offers potential leaders the opportunity to learn leadership skills without reading a book (Ulrich et al. 2008; Silberman 2018; Geiger and Peck 2016).

Third would be allowing for failure. Failing as a leader creates a learning opportunity. SIL-PNG could support the development of leaders by teaching that failure is allowed. By sharing stories of how a leader learned from failure, new and potential leaders should understand that failure provides an opportunity for growth. A developing leader evaluates their failure through self-reflection, seeking guidance from mentors, and taking responsibility for their actions (Clinton 2012).

Fourth would be teaching leaders to use a compass rather than a map. A compass represents the guiding principles of the organization and its leaders. A map is the destination. The compass will help the leader navigate the treacherous terrain of decision making.

Fifth would be mentoring and coaching. While all leaders will serve as model, either good or bad, not all leaders will be mentors or coaches. A recommended strategy is to encourage mentoring without making a formal arrangement between mentors and mentees. Mentoring provides another avenue of learning to lead. Coaching is more straightforward than mentoring (Iorg 2007; Ulrich et al. 2008; Lake 2020; Moore 2007b; Geiger and Peck 2016; Ensher and Murphy 2005; Hamilton 2011; Rios 2016).

Sixth would be implementing a Potential-Performance Appraisal system. The identification of who is ready to move to the next level of leadership requires adding a final step to the current performance appraisal process. Upon completing departmental performance appraisals, the Director overseeing each department will convene a strategic meeting with departmental leadership to evaluate outcomes and align them with organizational objectives (Charan, Drotter, and Noel 2011).

7.3. Clear Pathways

The second major strategy for succession planning through intentional leadership development is clear pathways. Individuals have varying developmental needs. Staff members in SIL-PNG will know the importance of Christian character, the competencies required for all levels, and the plans to move to each level. Staff members will be able to fill out an Individual Development Plan and arrange a meeting with their manager and someone from Learning and Development to discuss their pathway within the Leadership Pipeline. To assist individuals on their path, all leaders should participate in an SIL-PNG Leadership Academy. The Leadership Academy would combine

leaders at various levels into a formal instructional group. At the core of the Leadership Academy would be action learning. Potential leaders should be given opportunities to lead. When paired with a mentor and coach, potential leaders should be able to identify what areas they need to develop (Geiger and Peck 2016; Ulrich et al. 2008; Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation 2024).

7.4. Clear Pools

Along with clear plans for succession planning through intentional leadership development and clear pathways for individuals to move through the clear plans, SIL-PNG needs to have clear pools of people ready for each level of leadership. The clear pools are the bench strength of the organization and allow SIL-PNG to respond quickly to the sudden, and unexpected, departure of a leader. Multiple pools exist for each of the four levels. Some pools are external to the organization while others are internal. The advantage of an internal pool is the speed of moving a person to another position. External pools take time to recruit, onboard, and train new staff. Papua New Guinean staff can be hired within a month. Expatriate staff can take up to two years (Ulrich et al. 2008).

7.5. Character

The fourth and most important strategy for SIL-PNG regarding succession planning through intentional leadership development is developing leaders with character. The basis for character is a relationship with Christ; faith in the Risen Savior must be paramount.

Without faith, an individual should be disqualified from leading in SIL-PNG. Faith allows the leader to see what is not there and believe that God is capable of acting. The starting point for selecting future leaders should start with their character. Character will build trust. Leaders with high character will be trusted during difficult times (Clinton 2012; Dungy and Whitaker 2011; Geiger and Peck 2016; Lake 2020; Nida 1986; Rice 2006; Cavins 2018; Mohler 2014).

My research revealed sixteen character traits. Some of the character areas were identified from secular sources. Character development in a Christian organization is more important than competency development. Character development takes longer and can be more difficult to objectively measure than competency development. However, the character of the Christian leader is under constant scrutiny from the world. The sixteen character traits are accountable, approachable, authentic, conviction, courageous, ethical, exercises faith, humble, integrity, loyal, passionate, secure, self-aware, values, virtuous, and willingness to suffer (Mohler 2014; Geiger and Peck 2016; Dungy and Whitaker 2011; Richard 2017; Cottrell 1998; Bradley-Cole 2021; Bye 2017; Chapple 2021; Hurst 2004; West 2017; Northouse 2019; Clinton 2012; Stott, John R.W. 2006; Sutton and Chatham 2017; Iorg 2007; Lake 2020; Whelchel 2024; Campbell 2018; Cavins 2018; Fernando 2010).

7.6. Competencies

Character is critical to leadership, and so are competent leaders. Some competencies are used more frequently at the supervisor level and rarely at the highest levels of organizational leadership. Other competencies are not used at the supervisory level and are only at

the highest levels of organizational leadership. Early exposure to the competencies allows time for future leaders to develop and practice the competencies. High character leaders without the necessary competencies to lead are just as detrimental to an organization as low character leaders who are highly competent. Each level of leadership allows a leader to practice the competency, learn from his or her mistakes, and grow (Mohler 2014; Lake 2020; Geiger and Peck 2016; Halcombe 2024).

My research revealed twenty-three competencies necessary for succession planning through leadership development. SIL-PNG could strengthen and develop leaders by emphasizing competencies grounded in Scripture, proven effective by other organizations, and culturally appropriate to the unique context of SIL-PNG. Task management should not trample over relationships, but deadlines need to be met. Leaders should explain the importance of task management to all staff and plan for potential delays. The twenty-three competencies are agile, communication, decision making, delegation, dependable, determined, emotional intelligence, global thinker, informed, lifelong learner, listening, multi-cultural, planning, prayerful, problem solving, spiritually aware, stewardship, strategic, task management, teaching, team building, and vision casting (West 2017; Cottrell 1998; Mohler 2014; Ulrich et al. 2008; Iorg 2007; Sutton and Chatham 2017; Rios 2016; Geiger and Peck 2016; Goleman et al. 2008; Ensher and Murphy 2005; Dungy and Whitaker 2011; Lake 2020; Livermore 2009; Schnabel 2004; Hladio 2017).

7.7. *SIL Papua New Guinea’s Leadership Pipeline*

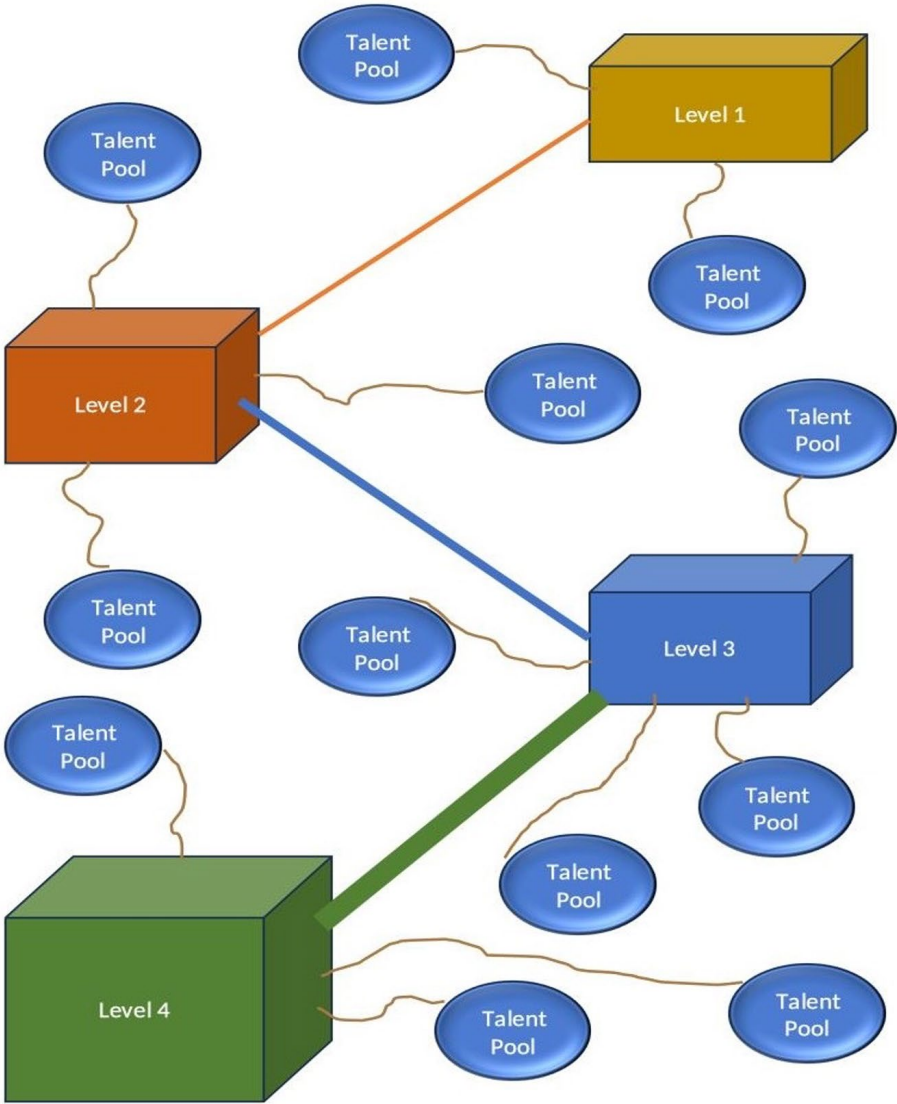


Figure 7: SIL Papua New Guinea’s Leadership Pipeline, Pathways, and Pools

8. Conclusion

Strategies for succession planning through intentional leadership development are found throughout the Bible, well-documented through business books, and stressed in every type of organization. Though Christian leaders may hesitate to adopt business-derived leadership strategies, my research shows that some secular approaches align with biblical principles. Every Christian organization, including SIL-PNG, requires leaders to fulfill its mission and ensure long-term sustainability. Any organization that aspires to survive beyond the founder needs a succession plan. Beginning in Exodus, God laid out a plan for developing leaders for each generation.

While the focus of this research has been on a single organization, there are direct applications to other organizations. The Leadership Pipeline Model is a framework used by various organizations around the world. An organization needs to examine its current structure and identify key competencies for each leadership level. The character and competencies listed above are translatable to other Christian organizations. Organizations should seek to listen to what everyone in the organization says regarding succession planning.

All organizations should have a succession plan. The strategies developed for SIL-PNG are grounded in biblical principles and applicable to other Christian organizations. Christian organizations should be able to examine their organizational structure, identify future leaders at all levels, develop a simple pipeline, and explain how people navigate their personal pathways. Further research could be conducted on any of the five strategies.

Further research could rank character traits and competencies to determine their relative importance across diverse cultural contexts.

Comparative research could be undertaken across diverse cultural contexts to evaluate and rank the significance of character traits within leadership frameworks.

Research could be conducted on whether self-selection, leader-selection, or a combination of both should be pursued in determining who could be developed for leadership. In the four biblical examples, none of the future leaders determined that they would be a leader. Each one was selected by a leader and developed. Granted, our Old Testament examples were selected directly by God, but in the New Testament, particularly with Paul, we still see the leader selecting the future leader.

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An Examination of an Ethical Decision-Making Framework: Applying Divine Command Theory to the Analysis of Ethical Issues Related to Specific Procedures in Assisted Reproductive Technology in Saipan

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Abstract

This research seeks to clarify an increasingly complex field of medical ethics where Christians often face a dizzying array of choices that may be medically possible but not necessarily biblically correct. This study pursues five primary objectives. First, a careful exegesis of select biblical

passages defines good as obedience to divine commands of God and evil as disobedience to God's commands. Second, I trace the history of Divine Command Theory from the classical Greek period to the contemporary period to show its rich history and viability as an ethical system. Third, I refine Divine Command Theory to overcome its inherent weaknesses and fourth, integrate the refined theory into a new functional model of ethical decision-making. Fifth, I apply this ethical decision-making model to Saipan's current assisted reproductive technology practices. Finally, I compare the results of this model with the perspectives of natural law and virtue ethics regarding assisted reproductive technology (ART).

1. Introduction

As the drumbeat of technology continues to move rapidly forward, our world looks very little like first-century Palestine, where Jesus lived and taught. The advanced medical technology that has promised to bring healing to the sick and children to the childless has also brought about a host of ethical dilemmas. Advanced reproductive technology is increasingly encroaching on areas once deemed the domain of God, including the foundation of life. It is therefore vital that Christians live by firm moral principles about such matters, lest the world of ethics becomes a world of exceptions without any rules (Chesterton 2006, 267).

A robust ethical framework is necessary for Christians living in this modern age to properly consider complex issues like assisted reproductive technology (ART), with a primary issue being what type of system should underlie an ethical framework. Many Christians whom I have worked with and ministered to, particularly at the lay level, have held to some form of Divine Command Theory. John Hare (2015, 1) defines Divine Command

Theory as a theory of moral obligations in which an action is obligatory if commanded by God or morally evil if prohibited by God. Strengthening its appeal, Harris (2004, 12) notes a growing interest in Divine Command Theory among academics. Since ethics under Divine Command Theory is universally binding (Morrison 2009, 249–50), which this research uses as the basis for my ethical decision-making framework.

This study is centered on the following question: How might we develop a Christian framework for ethical decision-making to address the issue of ART in Saipan? Accompanying this question are four subsidiary questions:

- i. What does Scripture teach about obedience to the divine commands of God?
- ii. How have philosophers and theologians understood Divine Command Theory?
- iii. How can Divine Command Theory be systematized into a model for ethical decision-making for churches in Saipan?
- iv. How can such a systematized model be practically applied to the real-life issue of assisted reproductive technology in Saipan?

This study makes use of the Osborne (2006) research methodology. As Falconer (2024, 63) notes, the Osborne methodology follows three key steps that align with the subsidiary questions in this research: (1) The development of a biblical theology grounded in the proper exegesis of scripture, which the first subsidiary question develops to demonstrate that good and evil are consistently defined as either obedience or disobedience to divine commands; (2) The historical evolution of a particular theology under examination, which the second subsidiary question shows for

Divine Command Theory, starting with ancient Greek philosophers and ending with contemporary thinkers; (3) The systematization and practical application of theological inquiry, as addressed by the third subsidiary question—particularly objections to Divine Command Theory, which I then incorporate into a new ethical decision-making model. The fourth subsidiary question then applies the new decision-making model to ART, examines the outcome, and contrasts the outcome with the understandings produced by two competing ethical frameworks: natural law and virtue theory.

2. What Does Scripture Teach About Obedience to the Divine Commands of God?

Many contemporary Christian philosophers, even those advocating Divine Command Theory, have noted the difficulty of formulating an ethical system around divine commands (Evans 2013, 6; Mouw 2004, 6–7; Adams 1999, 3; Alston 1990). My research begins by examining how scripture understands God’s divine commands and attempts to link those commands to definitions of good and evil. I primarily examine three different scriptures: (1) Genesis 2:15–17, (2) Leviticus 19:1–4, and (3) Matthew 22:34–39.

When employing the Osborne methodology, one would typically look at a more extensive range of scriptures to develop a biblical theology, but I assert that these three texts are pivotal. This research argues that Genesis 2:15–17 records the first divine commands given to innocent humans and represents a paradigm for all divine commands that follow. Furthermore, these commands precede the entrance of sin into humanity. I focus on Leviticus 19:1–4 because Leviticus 19:2, “You shall be holy, for

I, Yahweh your God, am holy,” is fundamental to Christian living and is reiterated in 1 Peter 1:15–16. Leviticus 19:2 also provides the foundation for the divine injunction of *imitatio dei* (Skolnik and Berenbaum 2007). Finally, Matthew 22:34–39 includes Jesus’s understanding of the greatest divine commands that summarize the whole law and the teachings of the prophets (Matt 22:40).

Several things become apparent when examining the various scriptural commands: First, there is a potential for compliance and the expectation of adherence to the divine directive. Second, the scriptural texts impose a moral obligation upon humanity and, in the case of Adam and Eve, that moral obligation occurs prior to humanity’s fall into sin. Furthermore, God warns about the consequences of not following his commands. Third, in alignment with scriptural understanding, theorists articulate Divine Command Theory as one of moral obligation stemming from divine commands (J.E. Hare 2015, 1; Adams 1997, 422; Alston 1990, 284). Finally, as God’s creations, these divine injunctions point the way to holiness and moral purity, laying the groundwork for comprehension of good versus evil. These commands highlight what we should do to be holy and who we need to be like to be holy.

3. How Have Philosophers and Theologians Understood Divine Command Theory?

It is important to highlight two primary concepts at the outset of a historical query into Divine Command Theory: (1) Divine Command Theory pre-dates Christianity (J. E. Hare 2015, 1); (2) All three monotheistic Abrahamic faiths developed a form of Divine Command Theory (J. E. Hare 2015, 1). My historical query begins with classical Greek

philosophers, moves forward to early Christianity, and continues through the contemporary period.

Advocates of Divine Command Theory have wrestled with Plato's (2021, 139) question posed in *Euthyphro*, "Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?"

The Church Fathers did not assume the same level of authority as the Apostles and often strove to ground morality in the divine commands of scripture. For example, when dealing with a church split, Clement of Rome (2006) sought to use scripture to heal the rift between two groups and urge humility. Not until Augustine did a more systemic approach to Divine Command Theory appear, which asserts that the divine command of God overrules any law or ethical norm (Augustine 1886, 65). While there are some questions concerning Aquinas's views (Boyd 1998, 221–223; Dougherty 2002; Quinn 1992) on Divine Command Theory, other medieval Scholastics like Ockham and Scotus continue to hold Augustine's views on divine commands.

Similar to the medieval Scholastics, the magisterial Reformers Luther and Calvin continued this focus on defining good according to God's divine commands. Contemporary scholars MacIntyre (2007, 55) and Gregory (2015, 203) argue that the magisterial Reformers' substantial shift toward divine command ethics and their break from the Catholic Church's authority allowed for the rise of secular ethics during the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment saw three significant critiques leveled against Divine Command Theory. First, Cudworth argues that Divine Command Theory renders morality arbitrary, similar to Plato's *Euthyphro* Dilemma (Cudworth 1996, 17; Plato 2021, 139). Second, Bentham (1843, 13) skeptically states that having an accurate understanding of God's commands is impossible, making it challenging to derive and develop any ethical system from them. Third, Leibniz (2005, 2) argues that, if God's will

alone determines what is good, then God cannot be good, at least in its commonly understood sense. These and other challenges from ethical thinkers, such as Kant, led to a rise in secular ethics during the Enlightenment. However, as Bahnsen et al. and Miller highlight, Divine Command Theory maintained a strong presence among the American Puritans during this time (Bahnsen et al., 2022; Miller 2020).

Early twentieth-century theologians like Barth and Bonhoeffer broke from the Enlightenment's emphasis on secular ethics and shifted toward Divine Command Theory. For his part, Barth (1957, 2.2.663) believed that God's divine commands so differed from human laws that they were not even to be compared. Barth (1957, 2.2.537) even claims that good derives from the divine command.

Widely regarded as having formulated his own form of Divine Command Theory ethics (Ballor 2015, 1), Bonhoeffer's unfinished book contends, similar to Barth, that divine command is in its own category (2014, 203). He also refutes Kant's attempt to ground ethics in duty by articulating that there is immense freedom in the divine command (Bonhoeffer 2014, 203, 205).

Divine Command Theory has seen a resurgence among contemporary philosophers (Harris 2004, 12). Adams, Alston, and J. E. Hare argue for a Divine Command Theory based on Property-Identity and God's commands (Adams 1999; Alston 1990; Hare 2015). Quinn (2013) argues for a Divine Command Theory based on God's will and rejects Property-Identity. These major contributors seek to systematize Divine Command Theory into new formulations, which have brought additional focus and literature to Divine Command ethics.

4. How can Divine Command Theory be Systematized into a Model for Ethical Decision-Making for Churches in Saipan?

Wainwright (2005, 106) states that it is common for non-theists to raise objections to Divine Command Theory. Moreover, contemporary writers like Adams and Quinn acknowledge the weaknesses inherent in Divine Command Theory (Adams 1999; Quinn 2013). Morriston (2009, 249–50) argues that opponents of Divine Command Theory point out that its pursuit of objective, universally binding ethics cannot be realized. To overcome these objections, this section has three fundamental tasks: (1) to identify the primary obstacles to implementing Divine Command Theory in an ethical decision-making framework, (2) to overcome those obstacles to implementing Divine Command Theory, and (3) to construct a new ethical decision-making model anchored in Divine Command Theory.

4.I. Challenges and Solutions to Implementing Divine Command Theory

Before Divine Command Theory can be utilized in an ethical decision-making model, its six primary weaknesses must be explored and overcome: (1) issues with interpretation, (2) the absence of comprehensive divine commands, (3) conceptualizing moral goodness, (4) the Euthyphro Dilemma, (5) the naturalistic fallacy, and (6) conflicting divine commands.

4.I.I. Issues with Interpretation

Rahimi and Bentham both argued that scripture must be exegeted (Rahimi 2009, 753–54; Bentham 1843, 13). They also note that this process is fraught with subjectivity and inaccuracies, making it impossible to derive

a moral code via Divine Command Theory. As an example of the depth of the problem, I note that Yule and Mayhue both hold to an understanding that scripture is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative (Yule 2020, 124–25; Mayhue 2003, 264); however, they both come to very disparate exegeses of the scripture on spiritual gifts.

To overcome this critique, this study proposes a three-step solution: (1) the presupposition of inerrancy and authority of scripture (France 2007, 17; Wenham 2014, 24–26; Smith 2008); (2) allowing differing interpretations to compete based on explanatory strength and then adopting the one with the greatest explanatory power (Quinn 1992, 499; Vanhoozer 1998, 32); (3) submitting these interpretations to ecclesiastical guidance to further refinement of them and prevent misinterpretation (Bonhoeffer 2014, 209).

4.1.2. Absence of Comprehensive Divine Commands

In Exodus 18, Moses establishes judges to adjudicate various cases following the delivery of divine law. This highlights that gaps in the law needed to be adjudicated early on. Our modern world looks very different from the ancient Israelite world and even first-century Palestine, where Jesus lived and ministered. Hence, a difficulty lies in the fact that there are so many different ethical issues (e.g., IVF) that no divine commands address.

A dual approach is necessary to overcome this objection. First, a five-fold classification of divine commands draws from J. E. Hare's (2015, 32) work, created: (1) precepts, (2) prohibitions, (3) permissions, (4) counsels, and (5) directly effective commands. This system of categorization broadens our horizons when determining divine commands. Second, it is necessary to acknowledge exactly what constitutes a special revelation.

Elwell and Beitzel (1988, 1846) differentiate special revelation from scripture based on divine inspiration. Therefore, special revelation could exist apart from achieving scriptural authority. Thus, in line with Hare (2015, 37–38), I posit that the Holy Spirit may communicate directly to an individual by giving a special revelatory divine command limited to that person and that situation.

4.1.3. Conceptualizing Moral Goodness

Leibniz and Nielsen argue that Divine Command Theory takes issue with the concept of good (Leibniz 2005, 2; Nielsen 1990, 52); the former argues that saying “God is good” loses all meaning, at least in how we commonly use it, under Divine Command Theory, while the latter asserts that Divine Command Theory must appeal to external criteria to define good.

Rae (2009, 49) argues that Nielsen’s critique conflates epistemology with ontology. Rae states that the necessity of the knowledge of “good” does not mean that “good” is independent of God’s commands. Adams (1987, 108) has argued that a Divine Command Theorist could ascribe value to entities independent of God’s commands; the difference is merely that these values would not be moral obligations. Alston (1990, 317) notes that under Divine Command Theory, virtues are moral obligations and values applicable to humans but not necessarily to God. To overcome the idea that virtues attach to humans but not God, Alston (1990, 318) advocates for a moral supervenience principle. Combining Adams’ property identity theory with Alston’s moral supervenience principle refutes Leibniz’s critique.

4.1.4. The Euthyphro Dilemma

Goodman and J. E. Hare argue that the fundamental crux of the Euthyphro Dilemma is whether morality is external to God, thus subjecting him to some law outside him, or internal to his command, thus rendering it arbitrary (Goodman 2011, 138; Hare 2015, 24). This study acknowledges that two solutions can be used to overcome the Euthyphro Dilemma: (1) an unrestrictive Divine Command Theory as championed by William of Ockham (1979, 56–57) and (2) a modified Divine Command Theory along the lines of scholars like Adams and Alston (Adams 1999; Alston 1990). As it does not embrace the arbitrariness in morality, which can be ethically problematic, this research chooses a modified Divine Command Theory.

The modified Divine Command Theories of Adams and Alston allow the Euthyphro Dilemma to be overcome as long as the following four postulates are met: (1) the concept of property identity is applied to divine commands; (2) God is the paragon of benevolence; (3) God does not have moral obligations, but rather his actions invariably correspond to the moral good in the same way humans perform acts of supererogation; and (4) morality supervenes on an action and thus obligates humans but not God.

4.1.5. The Naturalistic Fallacy

Sturgeon (2003, 531) defines the naturalistic fallacy as a confusion of factual or descriptive assertions with prescriptive declarations. Divine Command Theory is subject to this fallacy if it seeks to justify a particular action as good by something other than the divine command. I give the example of the command in Leviticus 18:22 to abstain from homosexuality. If a Divine

Command Theorist were to justify that command as good because of anatomical issues or social instability created by homosexual behavior, they would be guilty of the naturalistic fallacy. While these reasons might justify abstaining from homosexual behavior under Natural Law, the same cannot be said of Divine Command Theory. According to Divine Command Theory, the only reason something can be considered good is because it is commanded by God. Therefore, the way for the Divine Command Theorist to overcome the naturalistic fallacy is to confine one's prescriptions to merely pointing to the divine command as enforcing a moral obligation rather than looking at any other possible benefits.

4.1.6. Conflicting Divine Commands

A cursory reading of Joshua 2 and 6 illustrates conflicting divine commands in the story of Rahab. She lied to the king's messengers, violating the command to be truthful, and, in the process, saved the lives of the Israelite spies. By preserving the lives of the spies, she saves her whole household, and as she is in the lineage of King David and therefore Jesus, as well. There are three possible solutions to conflicting divine commands in a situation like this: (1) non-conflicting absolutism (Ramsey 2003, 1), (2) conflicting absolutes (Howard 1998, 101), and (3) graded absolutism (Du Preez 1997, 98–99).

This study makes use of graded absolutism to reconcile conflicting divine commands. Geisler (2010, 104–6) proposes three categories within graded absolutism: (1) the arrangement of love for God over love for humanity, (2) the superiority of obedience to God over compliance with governmental authorities, and (3) the supremacy of mercy over truth. Using graded absolutism, this study overcomes the final obstacle to

utilizing Divine Command Theory as a basis for an ethical decision-making model.

4.2. An Ethical Decision-Making Model

The final portion of this section focuses on developing an ethical decision-making model based on Divine Command Theory. The model is crafted to enable meticulous decision-making in difficult ethical dilemmas. The model is practical and accessible to any individual Christian regardless of their education or spiritual maturity. The model does not require an advanced degree in theology or Biblical studies to utilize it, as it is optimized for the average congregant. However, for more scholarly-minded people, the model also has a flexible application for deeper engagement. In Chart 4.1, I diagram the steps in this decision-making process.

Step 1 begins by recognizing our foundational assumptions when using Divine Command Theory. Steps 2–3 call for assembling the necessary situational information, moral issues, and divine commands; steps 4–5 call for seeking the necessary biblical research, ecclesiastical, and spiritual guidance for a resolution. In steps 6–7, the central divine commands are examined, using graded absolutism to resolve any conflicts. Steps 8–9 consider the potential consequences, following which a decision is made. Step 10 reviews the decision-making process, gathers feedback, and refines the approach for future use.

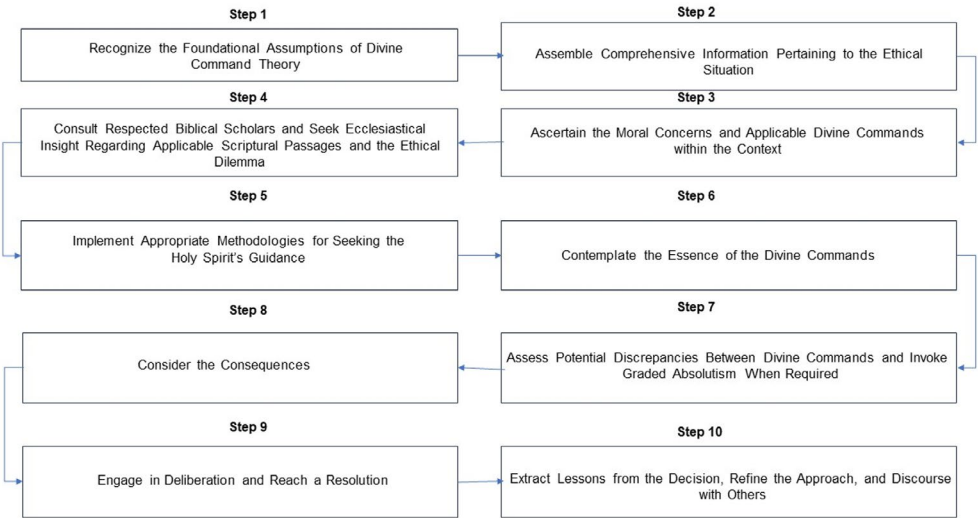


Chart 4.I. - Ethical Decision-making Model

5. How Can the Systematized Model be Practically Applied to the Real-life Issue of Assisted Reproductive Technology in Saipan?

It is necessary to define ART for this discussion. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2023) classifies ART as “any fertility treatment in which the handling of eggs or embryos is involved.” This definition corresponds with those of the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology and the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (SART 2023; ESHRE, 2016, 1639–40).

When considering ART, an essential presupposition concerns the nature of personhood. The central question is whether embryos and fetuses can be considered persons and, if so, when the condition of

personhood applies. This research takes the presuppositional stance that personhood begins with conception. This position is in line with numerous Biblical passages (Ps 139:13–16; Job 10:8–12; Exod 21:22–25; Jer 1:4–5) and evangelical Christian ethicists (Feinberg and Feinberg 2010, 81–82; Best 2012, 34–35; Rae and Riley 2011, 77).

5.1. ART Procedures Examined Under the Model

SART highlights that 99% of all ART are implemented via one of three procedures: (1) in vitro fertilization (IVF), (2) gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), and (3) zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT). IVF is considered the most prevalent of these three procedures because it tends to cost less and does not require a secondary laparoscopic surgery (CDC 2023; Zhu 2011; Negrut and Pop 2020, 8). Furthermore, oocyte, embryonic cryopreservation, embryonic adoption, gamete donation, or surrogacy procedures are fundamentally dependent on IVF, GIFT, or ZIFT; as a result, if IVF, GIFT, and ZIFT are concluded to be ethically untenable, then their dependent procedures, like oocyte or embryonic cryopreservation, become unnecessary.

This research carefully reviews IVF and a hypothetical scenario in which a woman seeks to engage in oocyte cryopreservation and later IVF treatments. This research highlighted three primary areas where IVF violated divine commands: (1) managing personal resources wisely, (2) the issue of abortion in IVF and the death of pre-born persons within the IVF process, and (3) avoiding activities that jeopardize the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

ZIFT procedures are more expensive and invasive and, as Bartolucci and Peluso (2021, 256) note, inferior to IVF and are subject to similar ethical drawbacks. This is because, under ZIFT, as Zhu (2011)

states, fertilization is still done *ex vivo*, similar to IVF. Thus, the same ethical issues are still central, if not amplified, because of the increased risk and cost compared to IVF.

GIFT is often framed differently since fertilization occurs *in vivo* (Negrut and Pop 2020, 8) rather than *ex vivo* as in IVF and ZIFT. However, GIFT and ZIFT share the similarity of both requiring an additional laparoscopic surgery to complete the process (Negrut and Pop 2020, 8). Since fertilization occurs *in vivo*, some Roman Catholic theologians view it as permissible within Catholic doctrine. However, the Roman Catholic church has never uniformly accepted or officially approved GIFT (Institute of Clinical Bioethics 2023; Haas 1998). As Rhonheimer and Murphy (2010, 155) observe, there is very little difference between procedures that fertilize *in vivo* versus *ex vivo*. The only significant ethical difference is that GIFT eliminates the issue of cryopreserved embryos being exploited for money or left to die, since GIFT does not involve cryopreservation. Further, to say that neither medical practitioners nor the patient are ethically guilty for embryos that do not implant under GIFT since it mimics natural reproduction, misses an important point: GIFT is, by necessity, interventionist. As such, both medical practitioners and patients take active roles in intervening in the natural course of reproduction and thus bear the guilt of such an intervention. Therefore, medical practitioners and patients bear the guilt for any non-implantation of embryos or the death of the pre-born, which is significantly high under GIFT.

This study finds that IVF, GIFT, and ZIFT are found to contravene at least three major divine commands: (1) wise use of one's resources, (2) prohibitions against homicide, and (3) protection for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Since these three primary procedures are found to be morally wrong, so are their dependent procedures, cryopreservation, surrogacy, gamete donation, and embryo adoption, rendering the ethical

debate moot. Regardless, this study does examine each one and finds that these dependent procedures violate at least one of the three mentioned moral objections or are highly exploitative.

5.2. ART Procedures Examined by Natural Law and Virtue Ethics

This research begins with an essential definition of natural law and virtue ethics. This study brings together a definition of natural law ethics that incorporates the work of Aquinas (I–II, Q.91, A.2) and Murphy (2019). Three primary insights formulate Natural Law ethics: (1) Natural Law is innately known, and all are bound by it (Aquinas I–II, Q.94, A.2). (2) While all people possess a basic understanding of Natural Law, this understanding may be oppressed or confused by our desires, intentions, and even the inherent complexity of understanding Natural Law (Aquinas I–II, Q.94, A.4; Q.94, A.6). (3) The final fundamental piece of Natural Law is the pursuit of good and avoidance of evil (Aquinas I–II, Q.94, A.2). Virtue ethics is defined by Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2023) as having three primary components: (1) *arête*, the idea of virtue; (2) *phronesis*, more practical or moral wisdom; and (3) *eudaimonia*, seeking and finding a state of happiness or flourishing. The fundamental question of virtue ethics concerns what is classified as a virtue. Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2023) and Foot (2001, 54ff) acknowledge that a certain level of relativism does occur when determining virtue. However, seeking *eudaimonia* is central to understanding how Virtue Ethics works. *Eudaimonia* is a state of happiness rather than a state of gratification. Pursuing things that lead to gratification often does not lead to *eudaimonia* (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2023).

As applied by this study, Natural Law comes to similar conclusions as the model does, albeit for different reasons. The model found IVF,

GIFT, and ZIFT immoral based on the fact that they contravened three divine commands. Natural Law also finds IVF, GIFT, and ZIFT immoral, but based upon two primary ideas rather than divine commands: (1) The separation of the conjugal act from the unitive and procreative, as indicated by Ford (2008, 45). (2) The instrumentalization of a child dehumanizes individuals as simply existing to fulfill the parent's desires (Rhonheimer and Murphy 2010, 156–59). Since Natural Law also finds IVF, GIFT, and ZIFT as immoral, then the morality of dependent procedures, cryopreservation, surrogacy, and donor gametes becomes irrelevant.

This research argues that Virtue Ethicists generally vary in their position concerning ART. The primary ethical consideration in Virtue Ethics is whether an action fosters virtue, which downplays the binary conceptualization of right versus wrong. Therefore, Virtue Ethics does not necessarily hold a unified view of ART. This study notes that a Virtue Ethicist who presupposes that personhood commences at conception would find most ART procedures immoral or unnecessary. However, a Virtue Ethicist who does not have that presupposition would likely see nothing wrong with many of the ART procedures. However, even if a Virtue Ethicist does not hold such a presupposition, they may still find some procedures (e.g., surrogacy and donor gametes) as immoral because of their exploitative nature (Klein 2017).

6. Conclusion

This study integrates a system of ethics, Divine Command Theory, which resonates with the average layperson in the church, into an ethical decision-making model. I applied the model I created to the ART procedure available within Saipan. However, this research clearly shows

that this model is flexible enough to be potentially applied to a number of contemporary ethical issues anywhere in the world. The creation of this model sought to encourage the average church member to integrate Biblical thinking into ethics and approach ethical decision-making more systematically.

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