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

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Foreword

Whenever I write the foreword to a SATS PhD Compendium, I'm always reminded of the Apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians: "...when I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:1b-5). As you know, Paul was a learned man, like any one of us with a PhD. But let us be sober-minded that it was knowing "Jesus Christ and him crucified," together with the demonstration of the Holy Spirit, that bore testament to the power of God. Yet one can only know Jesus and fellowship with him through prayer. As Martin Thornton reminds us, "The whole point of theology can never be of practical use without prayer; ... theology should serve prayer."¹ Indeed, theology finds its ultimate purpose in prayer, for it is through prayer that we grow in our relationship with God and are equipped to lead others into that same fellowship with Christ.

The current issue of the SATS PhD Compendium features an exciting bouquet of theological research fields. The predominant one is Practical Theology, exploring pastoral leadership, conflict transformation, and pastoral care. We also have Ecclesiology, with research on stewardship, multisite churches, church unity, and African Pentecostal ecclesiology.

¹ Martin Thornton, *The Function of Theology* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 19.

Other areas include Systematic Theology, namely, Bibliology—the study of the nature of Scripture—and Anthropology. And it is always wonderful to see students undertaking advanced research in Scripture, exegesis, hermeneutics, biblical theology, and Bible translation, and so we have students contributing to Biblical Studies in this Compendium. I was also pleased to see research in spiritual formation, especially on discipleship, spiritual transformation, servant leadership, and even dreams and visions. Together, these studies reflect both the breadth of research being undertaken at SATS and the strength of our experienced supervisory team.

As always, I want to thank all the doctoral graduates for writing such outstanding executive summaries of their theses and for submitting them timeously. A huge thank you goes out to everyone—including supervisors, friends, family, and churches—who has 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, who coordinated much of the Compendium project; Trudi Joynt, who proofread all the articles; and Christophe Godin, who copy-edited and typeset the Compendium. Thank you! Above all, I want to thank Jesus, who has walked alongside every student and their families during their doctoral journey.

Robert Falconer, PhD

Head of Research and Publishing

Pastoral Leadership Development within Multisite Churches among Association of Related Churches in Selected States in the USA

Dr David Murphy

Supervisor: Dr Nicolas Darko

Abstract

This study examines the processes and strategies of pastoral leadership development within multisite churches affiliated with the Association of Related Churches (ARC) in the United States. There has been a rapid growth of multisite churches and therefore the need to train pastoral staff that can meet the growing needs of multisite churches is the problem the study seeks to add knowledge towards. The research employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing structured interviews with lead pastors, campus pastors, and executive leadership teams members across a sample of ARC-affiliated multisite churches in certain States. Osmer's practical

theology methodology served as a valuable research framework with its four guiding questions: “What’s going on?”; “Why is it going on?”; “What ought to be going on?”; and “How might we respond?”, which offered a focused structure for interpreting ministry needs and shaping responses. The study identified key themes, including biblical and theological fidelity, relational apprenticeship, and incarnational presence through structured internal leadership pipelines. The basis for the pastoral leadership pipeline was taken from the early church practices and principles. The findings contributed to theoretical insight and practical recommendations for churches seeking to cultivate sustainable, scalable pastoral leadership within multisite churches.

1. Introduction and Background

Over the past 75 years, the philosophy of the church growth movement has followed that of American prosperity. Scott Thumma, a sociologist of religion, observes this phenomenon, “... since the 1950’s, hospitals, schools, stores, factories, and entertainment centers have all grown to mega proportions; therefore, why shouldn’t churches?” (Thumma 2007, 14). The churches that followed this philosophy of growth inevitably became what we know as ‘megachurches’ a term Thumma defines as “a congregation which has two thousand or more worship attenders in a week” (xviii). With the growth of megachurches came unique problems, particularly questions about how to disciple members and what role the pastor plays in such a large body of believers, how big should auditoriums be, how many services can be offered in one location and the growing desire in people to worship closer to home. Churches began to set up campuses or locations closer to where people could attend and still be part of a given church. Easum and Travis provide criteria to the composition of a multisite church, writing

that though a multisite church may meet in many locations, these satellite campuses possess “the same core values, mission, administration, budget, treasury, and staff as a single site church” (2003, 85). We often hear this expressed as “one church with many locations” (Easum and Travis 2003, 85). Over time Bird and Walters found in their research that “the number of multisite churches is growing faster than the number of megachurches” (2010, 2). Their observations led them to conclude that multisite expansions of megachurches could be a potential solution to the problem of space.

In 2006, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird provided a more comprehensive definition of the multisite church that combines both geography and vision. According to them, “a multisite church is one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multisite church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board” (2006, 18). The multisite model as a solution to the problem of space worked extraordinarily well. Having the extra space at advantageous locations enabled rapid growth to continue. In his research in 2011, Frye concludes that “while it is impossible to predict the future with absolute certainty, if current trends hold, the coming age of the multisite is imminent” (2011, 117). Fry was right as this research discovered 15 years later. Competent leadership must be found at every level for the multisite church to succeed. Over the years those in charge have faced the question of where to find these leaders and how to develop them.

In the year 2000, six pastors wanted to plant “lifegiving” churches. They established what would become The Association of Related Churches (ARC). Nearly 25 years later, ARC grew to more than 1000 churches worldwide. ARC’s mission statement is growth-centered: “We are an association of relational churches working with church planters and church

leaders to provide support, guidance, and resources to launch and grow life-giving churches” (arcchurches, 2020). The Association of Related Churches will serve as the focus of the study due to its emphasis on planting churches that have moved to multisite quickly. Their rapid growth over the last 20 years underscores the dire need for the development of competent pastoral leadership. It must be noted that ARC’s mission is to plant churches but as time has gone by, the bigger, more established churches are multisite and have become a reference point for the newer, younger churches to learn how to continue growing and developing.

The ARC Church Planting Model has proven effective for short-term growth. As church plants grow and mature over time, the tension to find, grow, and develop the next generation of pastors must be addressed by ecclesiological leaders. Rapid growth and expansion, both in population and locations, make it much more difficult for pastors to care for and protect their congregations. There is a current system of leadership development within the ARC network, but it is specific to their purpose: training lead pastors for church plants. However, there is also room for improvement. Some candidates undergo on-the-job training, albeit in a decentralized, off-the-cuff way. Theories found in the textbooks of bible schools and Christian colleges might not always translate well to real-life scenarios in multisite churches. The tension between tangible experience and intellectual knowledge has handicapped younger potential staff in larger multisite churches. The Association of Related Churches focus is on helping lead pastors’ plant and start churches, rather than on the long-term strategic development of pastoral staff. This research will propose a model of pastoral leadership within a biblical, theological, and historical context that considers longevity and the possibility of rapid growth. The focus will be on multisite churches that need pastoral leadership development. The goal is for the research and subsequent model to serve as a tool for multisite

churches to develop new pastors and leaders.

1.1 Problem Statement

This study develops theological, biblical, and historical approaches to pastoral training in multisite churches. Learning from other multisite experiences, the goal is to advance the Kingdom of God, see multisite churches develop and grow, and prepare pastoral leaders for long-term ministry. Therefore, the main question to be researched, that the researcher desires to be researchable, original, and contributory is: “How could the pastoral leadership development practices and challenges within multisite churches in the USA be addressed and improved?” To answer the main question, this study seeks to address critical responses to these subsidiary questions:

- i. What are the current pastoral leadership development practices and challenges within certain multisite churches in ARC in the USA?
- ii. What are the reasons for the existing pastoral leadership development practices within certain multisite churches in ARC in the USA?
- iii. What are the biblical principles and guidelines for pastoral leadership development?
- iv. How could the pastoral leadership development practices within certain multisite churches in ARC in the USA be improved from a biblical perspective?

The research consists of qualitative data gathered through phone calls, in-person conversations, and small group discussions. Creswell defines this approach: “Qualitative inquirers use theory in their studies in several ways. First, much like in quantitative research, it is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypothesis” (2009, 70).

1.2 The Study Population

The limitations of the suggested answers will be based on the author's 15 years of practical experience as a pastoral staff member in a multisite church between 2010–2025, along with many years of learning and reading from other pastoral leaders. This study has a narrower focus from 2019 to 2025. It is limited to the following states: Florida, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Tennessee, South Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Alabama and Oklahoma. There were 21 interviews with 18 multisite churches.

This study humbly acts as a steppingstone in aiding pastoral development in the multisite churches because, as Bird states, “Multisite is here to stay- and keep growing” (2014, 20) and as Edwards also notes that “The longevity of the multisite movement will ultimately be determined by the presence of healthy leadership structures that learn the tedious balance between control and freedom” (2016, 4).

1.3 Research Method

This study uses the Osmer Model due to its sheer focus. The Osmer model guides the research's structure to better serve its purpose and intended outcome, despite potential weaknesses within the model, as Smith (2010) points out. Smith's observed weaknesses on the Osmer model come from two sources: “First, Osmer approaches the tasks of practical theology from a liberal Protestant perspective, whereas I prefer a conservative evangelical approach. Second, he has written for congregational leaders, but I hope to appropriate his model for seminary-based research projects” (2010, III). Even though Osmer's Model is more geared toward congregational leaders managing change, it can be used for thesis research. Contemporary practical theology often uses the Osmer model for study since it offers a

framework for practical theological interpretation. Osmer's four questions guide the interpretation and response towards identifying needs and problems within ministry. These four questions are focused and relevant. The foundational structure is the four core tasks of practical theological interpretation: "What is going on?"; "Why is it going on?"; "What ought to be going on?"; and "How might we respond?" (2008, 5).

2. Practices: Current Practices of Pastoral Leadership Development in Multisite Churches in the Arc

Osmer says "Gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts" (2008, 4). Thus, the fundamental question is 'What is going on?' The question to answer, as shown in the subsidiary question, is: "What are the current pastoral leadership development practices and challenges within multisite churches?" To know what could be done to develop pastoral leaders one first has to know what is being done.

What was discovered is that most of the training by the churches interviewed is developed internally by a church leader or the lead pastor within the given church. This training included efficient hands-on training, along with some Bible and theology training. All the churches have a class, staff time, or a program that they have developed to train their current pastoral or potential pastoral staff. Eleven of the eighteen churches interviewed have a partnership with an accredited college that offers classes in their church buildings and provides training for their staff as a whole and for the pastoral staff specifically. The churches interviewed did indeed mention that more is needed and agree with Watson as he points out, "Church leaders are beginning to realize that it is not enough to put potential leaders through a series of courses and expect them to emerge

as mature and effective leaders” (2012, 20). All churches have some form of organic mentorship, where the individual seeks the guidance of an older, more established leader, or strategic mentorship, where the younger leader is placed under the care and guidance of a more seasoned leader to balance the theory with practice.

The Findings

The findings were placed into groupings as the research developed.

Practical Experience: Terms like “culture”, “DNA”, “values”, and “How we do things and why we do things around here” were repeated across all the churches by leaders at different levels interviewed. This is of high value and priority in discovering and training the potential pastoral staff as campus pastoral staff at a multisite church must be shepherds and culture carriers of the churches’ values, and how things are done.

Communication: There are two main and one growing format of weekend teaching/preaching at a campus level. The first is live teaching in person on campus, delivered by either a campus pastor or a member of the teaching team. Churches that use this model see themselves as seeking to develop preachers for the church’s platforms. The second model noted was the broadcast message, usually delivered by the lead pastor, a visiting speaker, or a member of the teaching team, sent over the internet and displayed on screens at each campus. This is by far the most common way multisite churches interviewed approach teaching and preaching in a Sunday service. The Hybrid Model where the campus pastor or another speaker, teaches live in person on an average of once or twice a month, and the lead pastor is also broadcasted in regularly, usually twice or three times a month. The campuses that use the hybrid model were the campuses that showed the most growth in attendance and involvement in church life.

Trust: All the churches interviewed mentioned a high level of trust across the board both in leadership and those being developed.

Care: Forrest and Lamport say that Paul's letters and emissaries appear to be "proxies for his own presence" (2013, 115). In multisite churches, the campus pastor serves as a proxy for the senior/lead pastor's presence.

Multisite churches are learning from one another all the time. All churches interviewed want to develop pastoral leaders, but classes alone don't build anyone. All churches recognize that developing pastoral leadership is more than gaining knowledge but necessitates a knowing of information, a practice of experience in the role, and character development. None of these can be rushed.

3. Reasons: What Are the Reasons for the Existing Pastoral Leadership Development Practices within Multisite Churches?

To understand *why* multisite churches are developing pastoral leaders the way they are, it is essential to examine what was happening in the world and in church history at the time. This will help understand *the why* behind the *what is being done*. When one studies the historical process on how the megachurch became a next step in the evaluation of church life and practice, you discover that multisite is also the natural next step or if not planting campuses, then planting churches. Examining the cultural, technological, and economic changes in society enabled the growth and spread of the multisite church. This chapter will then define what a pastoral role was historically and how it has changed in today's multisite church.

The term megachurch is defined as "a Protestant church with an average attendance of two thousand total attendees in their weekend service" (Thumma 2007, xviii). Fry (2011) provides a brief, compelling history of the multisite church in North America, evaluating what some churches

did as proto-multisite churches (2011, 32-62). “Though these churches and church constructs should not be considered multisite churches, they do serve as an appropriate entry point into the North American multisite church discussion. Methodist circuit riding, the mission Sunday School concept, influential churches like First Presbyterian Church of Seattle, Washington, and Key Church Strategy were given consideration” (2011, 32). He provides a good background and reasoning for why the multisite church evolved from the megachurch phenomenon. Fry writes, “Initiated at the end of World War II, three potent forces of economic advancement, accelerated mobility, and technological innovation began to reshape and to redefine many aspects of American culture” (2011, 64).

Although it seems like the explosion of the number of megachurches happened in the 1970s and 80s, “Megachurches are modern manifestations of eighteenth and nineteenth-century revivalism, early-twentieth century innovations in religious mass-media, mid-twentieth century church marketing techniques, and the rise of seeker-sensitive models in the late-twentieth century” (Hunt 2020, 23). The multisite church faces many dilemmas today, particularly in the areas of geography, technology, organizational culture, and theological fidelity. To address the pastoral development issues identified in previous chapters, multisite churches should develop a program that leverages their strengths. This pastoral and discipleship development program should be constructed according to historical principles and structures observed in the Early Church Fathers from the first to the third centuries and adapted to twenty-first-century contexts.

The goal of this research is to address the most significant need facing multisite churches today: how to identify, develop, train, and equip pastors to lead their churches effectively. This research will primarily accomplish

this goal by ultimately redefining the role of the pastor, transitioning the impetus and definition from the pastoral office to pastoral roles. A multi-tiered, or polycentric, leadership structure that emphasizes strengths instead of official responsibilities, partnered with a discipleship program that equips lay leaders to fulfill pastoral roles as well as daily duties of shepherding. This enabled multisite churches to ensure a healthy, cohesive culture that adheres to historical orthodoxy and promises to effectively accomplish the one task of the Church given by Christ: to proclaim the gospel for the forgiveness of sins, baptizing all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and equipping the saints throughout all of history to continue to do so.

4. Guidance: Biblical Guidance for Pastoral Leadership Development

Jesus's style and system of discipleship begin and ends in the gospels. Christ summarized the mission for all followers in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18–20 (NIV):

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

4.1 Jesus's Example

Christ's discipleship model helps us discover the principles, examples, and methods ideal for identifying, training, and equipping pastoral leaders.

Since this research aims to add to what has already been written, it seeks to provide tools grounded in biblical and historical lessons. Therefore, Christ's principles, examples, and methods serve as its framework. The Apostle Paul also provided guidance for a foundation of discipleship in the early Church through specific roles and responsibilities, so Paul's methods are researched. By examining the current literature studies and the historical accounts of Jesus and the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, then tying them to themes of discipleship and pastoral development has been the basis on the research. The life of Christ and writings of Paul can establish a "plum line," i.e., standard, for biblical discipleship and thus pastoral development, a sort of rubric we can use to measure the Scriptural fidelity of multisite churches in raising leaders. It all comes down to discipleship.

Evans defines discipleship as "the process by which we bring all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ" (2006, 110). But following Jesus comes at a significant cost, as Holloman writes that "the requirements for mature discipleship are particularly austere for people in cultures that value comfort, convenience, self-gratification and noncommitment" (2003, 1025). Discipleship of pastoral leadership is the process for the future leadership in multisite churches and beyond. The phenomenological component of the research is built around Christ's actions and teachings. Specific concepts and themes appearing throughout the gospels help define the Christian life lived according to Christ's commandments and example. These concepts and themes include; sacrifice, humility, perseverance, generosity, devotional practice, prayer, obedience, love of God and neighbor, and gospel proclamation. It is noted that in society, and church culture, makes discipleship hard because it takes time and commitment. What we feed grows. Discipleship is important but as church leaders admit there is room for growth. Rainer (2014, 71-77) diagnoses this general lack of pastoral

leadership development as a “lack of vision.” Pearcey (2004: 149) blames “cultural habits” within the church for its weak discipleship. “It’s not about money, time, methods, or knowledge,” writes Barna, “the true barriers to becoming dedicated followers of Christ lie within the heart” (2001, 166–167). Discipleship, according to Jesus himself, is more than knowledge and experience. Mark 6:51–52; 8:17–19, and Matthew 19:8 reveal that when the heart changes, everything changes with it. The issue resides in character and integrity, not internships and diplomas. Internships and diplomas help in character formation but are not exclusive, they must be placed in community and given time to grow. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), knowledge is at our fingertips, but wisdom in how to apply that pastoral leadership knowledge needs to be formed through relationships. That takes time and effort.

Jesus’s followers held a working knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures as suggested by historical context. They could read and write, as some would later write eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ. Jesus mentored them intentionally in groups of three, twelve, or even in large numbers through teaching settings. He made himself available to answer questions and grow relationships. Relational discipleship, through the mentor/mentee model, laid the foundation for the early church after Pentecost and in the following centuries. The apostles took the knowledge and life of their Savior and passed it on to others through relationships. Such a model should be the foundation for multisite pastoral development, emphasizing availability, purpose, and intentionality. Educational learning is essential, but theory often fails to translate into practice and thus apprenticeships help close the gap.

The pastoral disciple leads with the Incarnation in mind. Jesus sets the example through the four gospels: Jesus was reliable, consistent,

and credible (Mark 11:27–33). Jesus cared for others through healing, feeding, warning, and saving (Matt 14:13–21; Luke 4:40–41). Jesus created opportunities for his disciples to lead (Luke 9:1–6). Jesus encouraged and equipped his disciples with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1; John 16:7). Jesus revealed purpose for his disciples in the Kingdom of God (Matt 5–7). Jesus modeled servant-leadership (John 13) all done incarnationally.

Every aspect of Christ's life modeled essential values for discipleship: sacrifice, humility, perseverance, generosity, and obedience to the Father, among others. The pastor as shepherd comes from the Incarnational method established by Jesus, the Good Shepherd himself. Milton (2022, 74–76) explains the Shepherd motif of Jesus as “the shepherd of the cosmos and his creation on earth” (2022, 75), is a lofty way of equating him with care and love, not wrath and hate. Pastoral leaders do the same on a microcosmic level: humbly sacrificing and being available, intentional, and generous to their flock in the immediate community.

4.2 Paul's Example

A crucial figure in both the biblical narrative and early church history is the Apostle Paul. Richards (2004) says, “Aside from Christ himself, perhaps no one else has impacted the world like Paul” (2004, 9). Segal (1990) says, “Paul should be treated as a major source in the study of first-century Judaism” (1990, xi). Paul stands out as a passionate visionary who served as an inspirational leader and nurturer of individuals and communities. He was the ultimate transformational leader.

The image of the leader as servant, shepherd, and steward is evident in the life of Paul. The foundation of biblical knowledge from their early schooling days, with the practical example of Jesus's life, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, gave the disciples what they needed to carry the

message of Jesus to the world. Then, seeing the example of Paul and how he developed, wrote, taught, and guided the next generation of church leaders and planters gives the modern reader a standard to learn from and put into practice. Paul's knowledge of historical and theological discussions about God was fulfilled in Jesus, which gave Paul the authority, drive, and desire to develop others for the cause of Christ.

The way Jesus and Paul directed their lives provides the modern reader with a foundation for study, which will develop the next generation of pastoral leaders for multisite churches in the United States of America and beyond.

5. Framework: A Framework for Pastoral Development and Discipleship Programs Informed by Practices and Principles of the Early Church

5.1 Pastoral Roles

Over time, the role of pastor—its definition and responsibilities—has changed to fit the historical circumstances. The Early Church consisted mainly of the apostles and those they left in charge of local churches as they traveled. In the Middle Ages, monasteries transformed the clergy from a merely political power to one of spiritual formation. Scripture is clear about the expectations for a pastor's character, but their daily roles and responsibilities remain unclear. Kesumawati & Frinzy writes that “in the face of the digital era and shifting social paradigms, church leaders are not only required to have a strong theological understanding but also to be able to manage organizational dynamics and social relations within the church community,” which exists in present time under present circumstances. He continues that, “therefore, the church needs to adopt a more flexible

and inclusive approach to pastoral ministry, as well as provide room for innovation and active participation of the congregation” (Kesumawati & Frinzy 2022, 166). The assumption here is that the current definition of ‘pastor’ can and should be adapted for 21st-century multisite contexts.

The process of pastoral development in the Early Church began with and consisted of three phases: (1) catechesis or academic training to ensure theological fidelity; (2) apprenticeship with an experienced leader to learn how to apply their theological training to practical pastoral situations; followed by (3) ordination into their communities where they were expected to stay, participate, and live with their flock so that they could shepherd their souls. This is the framework for pastoral development in the twenty-first-century multisite informed by principles practiced by the Early Church. These principles are then *theological fidelity*, *apprenticeship*, and *incarnational presence*. Theological fidelity is the adherence of instruction to the teachings of the apostles. This could be done in any way desired by the student. Through the apprenticeship model, in which a more experienced pastor mentors a pastoral candidate for at least three years, whereby theological knowledge gained in prior academic training can be applied to practical ministry. The apprenticeship model was best practiced by Jesus himself with his apostles, and later by Paul with his numerous students. This is where theory and knowledge collide with actual practical ministerial and leadership life as the student moves from learning to watching to doing through incarnational presence.

Paired with this pastoral process, multisite churches should leverage their technological capabilities, cultural cohesiveness, geographic diversity, and theological vision to empower lay leadership to serve as an extension of the pastor in the spiritual and theological care of the people. Through multi-tiered leadership, clear lines of authority established through strategic

communication, and shared resources, multisite churches can implement a twenty-first-century catechetical program through blended learning and small-group opportunities where faith can effectively grow, and souls can be eternally saved. This framework proposes that, for multisite churches to effectively fulfill the mission of the pastoral office as defined by Christ in the Great Commission, the pastoral office should be redefined not as one man leading the church, but as a series of people or teams working together according to their gifts to care for the souls of the lost. Ephesians 4 describes the church as many different parts belonging to a single body, just as the multisite church is one church in many locations.

6. Conclusion

As the influence on planting churches and expanding multisite churches grows, so does the need to find, develop, help, and grow pastoral leaders who will shepherd these communities. This study humbly acts as a steppingstone in aiding pastoral development in the multisite churches. Never can there be too many pastors trained and ready to go and reach people for Jesus. Developing pastoral leadership is more than gaining knowledge; it requires knowing the information, practicing in the role, and developing character. None of these can be rushed.

The research humbly stands on the shoulders of others who have gone before to encourage all the pastoral leaders to “Walk in a manner worthy of the call for which you have been called” (NASB) as Ephesians 4:1 says. Colossians 1 and 1 Thessalonians 2 exhort the followers of Christ to walk in a manner worthy of the glory of God. 1 Peter 5 reminds leaders to be humble shepherds over the flock God entrusted to them, not to lord over those entrusted to them, but to be examples. The pastoral leader is defined by who they are first, not what they do.

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Schisms within The Church of Pentecost (CoP): Towards formulating a contextualized African Pentecostal Ecclesiology for The Church of Pentecost (CoP)

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Abstract

This study employs Smith's (2019, 52–54) synthesis of Osborne's (2010, 406–409) nine-steps of systematic theology in examining schisms in church history and in the Church of Pentecost (CoP). The main research question is: How might an evaluation of past schisms within the CoP contribute to the formulation of a contextualized African Pentecostal ecclesiology for the CoP? The CoP lacks a theological framework that can prevent schisms within it. In response to this, the study formulates a contextualized African Pentecostal ecclesiology for the CoP to prevent schisms within

it. It highlights the church's dual-purpose mandate, that is, the church as a people of God called out from the world to belong to God. The study recommends that apart from engaging the many contextual issues at its leadership level, the CoP must equip all its members and unleash them as agents of transformation in their spheres of endeavor and influence.

1. Introduction

Given the pervasive nature of schisms in Christian history, particularly in its Pentecostal expression in Africa, the study posed the main research question: How might past schisms within the Church of Pentecost (CoP) contribute to the formulation of a contextualised African Pentecostal ecclesiology for the Church of Pentecost? The study further sought to answer the following subsidiary questions: What do the New Testament and church theologians teach about ecclesiology and church schisms? What lessons can be learned from past church schisms both outside and within the Church of Pentecost? How might we formulate a contextualised African Pentecostal ecclesiology for the CoP? What are the implications of such an ecclesiology?

The study followed Smith's (2019, 52–54) approach to systematic theology. This approach synthesised Osborne's (2010, 406–409) nine-steps (consciously reconstruct your preunderstanding, gather all the passages which address the topic, exegete each relevant passage in its context, collate all the passages into a biblical theology, trace the contextualisation of the topic through Church history, study competing models of the doctrine, recontextualise the traditional model for your context, revise your theological systems, and work out the implications for churches and Christians) into four steps, namely, biblical teaching, church history,

theological formulation and practical implication. The chapters of this study were arranged based on Smith's synthesis of Osborne's approach to systematic theology.

2. Exegetical Studies of Relevant Biblical Texts

The study examined the biblical understanding of schisms with a particular focus on the early church. It revealed that divisions and tensions characterized the Jewish society, with the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, Herodians and Samaritans divided along sectarian, ethnic, and family lines. Despite those divisions, the early church committed itself to the pursuit of unity as it called on its members to live in harmony with others to glorify God. Influenced by its plural setting in the Graeco-Roman world, the early church was divided along ethnic lines. The issue of Gentile inclusion in the church fueled the tension that characterized the early church. The Jewish community adhered to the Torah and practiced circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions, which set them apart from the other nations. Christianity in this formative period was rooted in Jewish traditions and many of the believers, including the New Testament writers, were Jews who understood that Judaic traditions, laws, and scriptures were a framework for understanding their new movement. The Hellenized society also influenced Christian life and thought as many of the Jews in the diaspora employed the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. So Greek ways of thinking also influenced early Christianity. Against this background of division and unity in the early church, the study examined Acts 15:1–35; Ephesians 2:11–22; and 1 Corinthians 3:1–15 exegetically.

2.1 An Exegesis of Acts 15:1–35

The tension between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians deepened with time, and the Jerusalem Church Council resolved it. The exegesis of Acts 15 revealed that there were two feuding parties: One group was the circumcision party that required Gentile Christians to be circumcised according to the customs taught by Moses. The second group, spearheaded by Peter, Paul and Barnabas, on account of their experiences with Gentile Christians, held that Gentile inclusion was an act of God who accepts people regardless of their background. Therefore, it was not a person's ethnicity or adherence to traditions that guaranteed inclusion in the church. The Council's verdict, as illustrated in James' speech, which appealed to the authority of Scripture, acknowledged Gentile inclusion as advocated by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. Though the Gentiles were accepted into the church, for the sake of healthy social interaction with the Jews, they were restricted from eating food sacrificed to idols and further advised refraining from sexual immorality. The Council's position made clear that the early church was committed to the salvation of all Gentile believers and to the unity of all the believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

2.2 An Exegesis of Ephesians 2:11–22

The exegesis of Ephesians 2:11–22 further unveiled that the “uncircumcised” Gentiles, who were once alienated from God and the commonwealth of Israel on account of their sinful living before their encounter with Christ, had now unrestricted access to God through the reconciliatory ministry of Christ. In Paul's understanding, the church should be without walls and embrace all people because Christ has given us “our peace,” quelling all the hostilities and barriers that divided the people. Both Gentiles and Jews,

as members of the church, receive a new identity in Christ. Therefore, the church constituted a new community, and a new humanity incorporated into one body as a household of God where Christ is now its cornerstone, its strength and unity. Paul also presented the church as a living reality that grows into a holy Temple, and, as a Holy Temple, the church is set apart to represent God's presence and his glory in the world. It is this temple that Christ builds, using both Jewish and Gentile Christians as its building blocks.

2.3 An Exegesis of I Corinthians 3:1–15

The exegetical study of I Corinthians 3:1–15 also revealed that despite the rivalries, cliques, and schisms that characterised the Corinth church, Paul admonished and instructed them against such unhealthy behaviour and further charged them to live exemplary lifestyles worthy of their callings in Christ. Paul called for unity in the administration of the Lord's Supper and in the corporate worship of the church. Paul employed certain images to refer to the church. The church was presented as one family. Using the metaphor of people working on farm, Paul taught the Corinthian church not to categorise the apostolic ministries into factions because all apostles, and, by extension, other church workers, worked in the church as labourers on the divine farm of God, which is the church. Paul then advised against the creation of factions in the church. He described the church as a building in progress, where God himself gives out the contract and inspects it to see that it is correctly executed to specifications and disburses rewards and fines accordingly. Whereas some lay the foundation, others build on those foundations. Paul then encouraged people to build with care and with durable materials that would withstand God's judgement. Because God dwells in his church, Paul advised the Christian community in Corinth not

to destroy the church with their destructive factions. Instead, they should live in unity; only when they live together harmoniously do they reflect their calling as God's sacred temple.

2.4 Findings from the Exegetical Studies

It emerged from the exegetical discussions that though the early church had some positive qualities of power, confidence and vision, it was equally troubled with rivalries, hypocrisies and immoralities. The church today should learn from both those good and the bad qualities. Though with some difficulty, the early church strived to maintain unity between the Jewish and Gentile communities, and in the process, they learned more about the church as a new community created to mark God's presence in a world that was characterized by divisions and tensions.

3. Schisms in Church History and the Church of Pentecost

Stoop (2024, 7–27), Shelley (2021, ix–xii) and McGrath (2013, v–vi) have all based their division of church history on the chronology and content of events or a combination of both. Like Stoop (2024) and Shelley (2021), McGrath (2013) also classifies church history chronologically. McGrath (2013) classifies church history into four broader chronological headings: The Patristic Period, c.100–451, The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, c.500–1500, the Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods, 1500–1750 and the Modern Period, 1750 to the Present Day. McGrath's approach to the division of church history goes beyond the broader chronological arrangements. McGrath (2013) further combines chronology with content. For McGrath, the general overview of events within the defined chronological divisions is not enough. He then proposes the study of individual themes within each

chronological period. This suggestion is very helpful because it allows issues to be discussed in depth within the broader time framework. This is a good framework for this chapter because it helps organize, thematically and in-depth, the many issues of schism in church history in its broader defined chronological context. From McGrath's insight and for the purpose of comprehension, the chapter has been divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the perennial issues of schisms in church history under four broad headings. The first three divisions are schisms in the Patristic Period c.100–451; schisms in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, c.500–1500; schisms in the Reformation to date. The second section discusses the major schismatic events in the history of the Church of Pentecost in the twentieth century.

3.1 Schisms in Church History

Key among the root causes of schisms in church history were doctrinal differences, power struggles, racism, slavery, apartheid, nationalism, ethnocentric tendencies, personal interests or ambitions, as well as divisions along political lines. The study realized that the occurrence of these tendencies among Christians was a testament to the fact that there was an apparent lack of a biblical understanding of the Church. A person's understanding of church adversely impacts his or her ability to appreciate the sacred role of the church as a community of a holy people of God, walking in love and advancing into the world with the gospel of salvation. A study of the history of the various schisms in this research revealed that when events that lead to schisms are not attended to they may degenerate into other controversies that negatively impact the mission of the Church for many years, as was demonstrated in the case of the doctrinal debates

on the person of Jesus Christ that raged for centuries and contributed to dividing the Western and Eastern Churches in 1054 (Rollo-Koster 2022, 1).

3.2 Schisms within the Church of Pentecost

The study examined how the development of classical Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana was frustrated by several schisms, starting in the Peter Newman Anim era in 1939 through to the Bradford Apostolic Church era in 1953. The Church of Pentecost, itself a product of schism, had travelled a long way in its internal and external missions enterprise, but on the journey, the church has experienced several schisms as it reached other countries, particularly in Africa (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 25–26; Onyinah 2012, 133–137). The CoP experienced schisms in Togo, Benin and La Cote d’Ivoire. The church has also experienced several breakaways in its internal mission, as some of its charismatic members left the church to establish their own ministries. The causes included nationalism, administrative lapses, money issues, doctrinal differences, and other personal sentiments. The study further observed that many of the controversies that characterized the various divisions arose because the people involved generally lacked an understanding of why the church existed. Because of this, my study proposed the development of a contextualized African Pentecostal ecclesiology to guide the CoP, particularly in its mission in the African context and generally to the world, where the changing realities had impacted the Christian mission at large.

4. Lessons from Past Schisms within the Church of Pentecost (CoP)

Wittberg (2007, 223–234) has identified schisms as the major source of new religious denominations. He writes that given the theoretical and practical

significance of schisms, the phenomenon must be critically evaluated by scholars toward the derivation of key lessons for the church (Wittberg 2007, 223–234). This section attempts to tease out all the practical lessons from the schismatic events within Classical Pentecostalism in Ghana and the CoP. This serves as a guide for both the current and future leadership of the CoP in effectively handling potential schismatic events.-

4.1 The Desire to Experience the Genuine Supernatural Power of God

The evidence from this chapter clearly points out that Pentecostals have always been vulnerable to schisms because they are always looking for an experience of the supernatural power of God. Nevertheless, sometimes their experiences do not resonate with the acceptable teachings in the church. For instance, Peter Newman Anim, the father of Classical Pentecostalism in Ghana, was an ardent seeker of the supernatural power of God, but his “no medication” doctrine eventually led James Mckeown to break away. Not only Anim but also other people such as John Mensah, Brother Lawson and Owusu Tabiri were all preoccupied with their desire to experience the supernatural power of God, but they failed to recognize that the purpose of the church was bigger than their private pursuit of God’s supernatural power. Hence, they all broke away. The experiences of those gallant men of God hold lessons for the CoP today. Our individual pursuits of God should be in line with the doctrine of the church and the overarching mandate of the church, which is primarily the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ leading to societal transformation. The church does not solely exist for our personal gains; the very reason some people appear to pursue God for his supernatural power.

4.2 Leadership Struggles

Kipimo (2021, 42–59) has stated that considering the vulnerability of Pentecostalism to schisms and the multiplicity of the phenomenon among Pentecostals, one wonders if schisms have become a blessing or a curse to Pentecostal believers. After Peter Newman Anim split to establish the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), a total of eight leadership schisms followed between 1949 and 2003 (White 2019, 6). Anim himself was forced into premature retirement in 1957 by Rev. D.K Brifo and a section of the leadership of the church. Two years later, Anim was reinstated after a prophecy (White 2019, 6). This led to a schism in which Rev. D.K Brifo and his faction broke away to form the Christ Revival Church. One recurring problem is the management of prophecy in leadership selection among Pentecostals. The use of directive prophecies in tilting the balance of power has provided fertile ground for schisms to blossom. The CoP has attempted to fix this challenge. For instance, in May 2008, the CoP was nearly split in half when a directive prophecy in relation to the election of a new Chairman of the CoP failed to get the endorsement of a simple majority of the church's electoral college comprising all apostles and prophets. As a result, the Executive Council, in consultation with leadership, reviewed the issue of directive prophecy concerning nominations to the office of the Chairman, General Secretary, and the International Missions Director. This was done to prevent a situation where those with prophetic gifts compete among themselves as to who was the first to prophesy about a candidate. The Executive Council of the CoP observed that “it now appears that the candidate whose name is mentioned first in any directive prophecy during the General Council Meetings of the church gets immediate attention” (The CoP Ministers' Handbook 2014, 51). As a result, attempts were made

to counter such prophecies. Out of this, a constitutional provision (CoP Constitution 2016, 39–40) was adopted that reads, “All directive prophecies and revelations concerning candidates for the consideration for the position of Chairman shall be communicated verbally or in writing to the Executive Council through the Chairman of the church. The Executive Council, regulating its own proceedings, shall present a candidate to be voted upon by the Electoral College. The candidate so accepted by the Electoral College shall be presented to the General Council to be voted upon.

4.3 Racism and Nationalism

Racism and Nationalism have been recurring themes in the schisms that have troubled the CoP. In May 1952, James McKeown was dismissed by the Bradford Apostolic Church in the United Kingdom because he refused to assent to what he deemed to be a racially biased constitution of the church. This dismissal, according to Asem (2005, 94) caused his breakaway from the Gold Coast Apostolic Church in May 1953. The Apostolic Church, United Kingdom, the mother church to which McKeown’s “The Apostolic Church of Gold Coast” belonged, held its General Council/Quadrennial Conference in Bradford, United Kingdom, in May 1952 (Asem 2005, 94). As I wrote earlier, during the Council, the church sought to ratify its amended constitution. According to Leonard (1989, 138), the amended constitution, among other things, segregated white apostles from black apostles stating, “An African could be an apostle to blacks, but not an apostle of the whole church, but a white apostle was an apostle to the whole church.” The chairman of the council and president of the Apostolic Church, United Kingdom, Rev. Hugh Dawson, called on participants to re-affirm their faith and beliefs in the doctrines and practices of the church (Asem 2005, 95). McKeown had sought to amend what he believed were portions that racially

segregated apostles in the Church, but he was unsuccessful. When his turn came to speak, he stood up to say: “I cannot conscientiously accept this” (Asem 2005, 95). This bold stance led to his dismissal from the Apostolic Church (Asem 2005, 95).

Nationalistic tendencies and agendas also played out in the Côte d’Ivoire,² Benin and Togo schisms in 1981, 1985 and 1991 respectively. Indigenous leaders and members of the CoP in those nations sought to secede from the church because they did not want to be ecclesiastically “colonized” by Ghana. This clearly shows a lack of understanding of the Church as a people of God not limited to a geographical location, race or nationality but is spread across so that through them, all peoples everywhere might be saved. The church has a sacred duty to guard against racial and nationalistic tendencies and prevent future schisms events in the CoP.

4.4 The Abuse of the Gifts of the Spirit

The gifts of the Spirit are earnestly desired as the Bible admonishes (1 Cor 12:31) in the CoP for the edification of the church and its teeming membership. The pursuit of spiritual gifts in the church is based on God’s assurance in his covenant with the church that “He would pour abundant spiritual gifts on both men and women, but these gifts must be controlled so that Satan would not take advantage of them” (Ofori-Yeboah 2019, 111). The CoP’s attempt to “control” these gifts, as stipulated in the covenant, has been met with some resistance leading to schisms. Over the years, the church has plunged into situations where some spiritually gifted members of the CoP have had clashes with the leadership of the church. Such members, especially those operating prayer centers abuse their gifts, and they refuse to submit to leadership authority. The church, through its leadership, has

come up with some measures to deal with the matter, including a periodic review of the activities of the prayer centers to ensure that their programs do not contradict the doctrinal position and practices of the church. It has also instituted a moratorium on the opening of new prayer centers as well as blacklisting prayer centers that do not comply with our guidelines (Noble-Atsu 2019, 68-69; Wood 2019, 251-252 and Ntummy 2019, 298–300). Generally, people pray for the gifts, but they lack the understanding that the gifts are meant for the common good of the church to drive its eternal purpose of evangelization of the nations (1 Cor 12: 7).

Notwithstanding those challenges, the CoP should encourage its unleashed members to pursue spiritual gifts because they are essential in the dual-purpose mandate of the church to which they belong. As a gifted community with a mindset to influence the nations, the manifestations of the gifts authenticate that God is among his people. The power for service or ministry is vested in the Holy Spirit who empowers the Christians. The unleashed member needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit because “they (the gifts) are meant to complement the work of ministry among his people and not to serve the personal whims and caprices of those who bear them” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2017, 114). As an unleashed community with a dual mandate mentality, the CoP needs men and women endued with gifts of administration, leading, ministry, giving, helps, mercy and exhortation, as all these graces are needed for service and outreach.

4.5 The Lack of Theological Training of Leaders

Another area the church needs to reexamine is its training of church leaders to ensure a firm grasp of the Pentecostal ethos and the understanding of church. One of the major schisms that hit The Church of Pentecost was the Evangelist Owusu Tabiri schism in 1995. He was once the Regional

Deacon (an elected elder in charge of financial administration at the regional level of the CoP) for Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region. Although he began his prayer and deliverance ministry in 1988 with an initial group of seven, his prayer camp was officially inaugurated on 7th July 1990. He was officially called to the office of evangelist in the year 1993. Considering the rather short duration between his calling into the office of an evangelist in 1993 and cessation in 1995, it is evident that he did not fully understand the meaning and purpose of the church. This manifested in his teaching of strange doctrines and adopting unorthodox practices, as well as his refusal to accept corrections from the leadership of the CoP.

4.6 Administrative Lapses

According to Apostle Rigwell Ato Addison,³ the CoP concedes that there were some administrative errors on its part in the Togo schism. First, the church appointed two national deacons, which, according to him, does not happen, even in Ghana, where the church originated. In Ghana, only one regional or area deacon is appointed at a time. Second, in Togo, the national deacons served in that capacity for a period of 25 years, way beyond the normal limits. This calls for a need to clearly define our administrative structures and constitutional provisions in our external branches to avoid similar occurrences. In the Ivory Coast, one of the causes of the schism was the lack of administrative and financial manuals as well as a constitution for the administration of the church. These limitations also call for a robust ecclesiology to help mitigate schismatic occurrences in the CoP. The CoP has responded to some of these lapses with the restructuring of the international missions of the church, which includes the establishment of

³ In an interview with Apostle Rigwell Ato Addison on 16 March 2023 at his private residence.

the mission's board, the office of the International Missions Director, and more recently, the appointment of regional mission coordinators in an effort to decentralize the administration of the mission work of the church. All these measures have been put in place to ensure that leadership is constantly in touch with the grassroots to forestall future schism in the mission enterprise of the CoP.

5. Formulating a Contextualized African Pentecostal Ecclesiology for the CoP

Kärkkäinen (2002, 7–8) attributes the growing interest in ecclesiology to some key developments in recent Christian history, notably the ecumenical movement and the growth of Christianity outside the West. For Bediako (2008, 112), the development of Christianity into a distinctively non-Western religion presents an opportunity for doing theology afresh. Commenting directly on Kärkkäinen's (2002, 7–8) observation, Schoeman (2020, 95) echoes Bediako's (2008, 112) concern by noting that the two historical developments and its attendant challenges placed on Africans, both within the broader sub-Saharan and South African context, to develop and rethink ecclesiology from an ecumenical and contextual perspective. In line with these scholarly contributions, this section attempts to contribute to the discussion by developing a contextualized African ecclesiology for the CoP. This would also help us understand and evaluate the CoP as an indigenous African Pentecostal Church that has successfully planted churches in 170 countries in the world, and it is still counting.

Since many of the reasons for the various schisms were people seeking their personal interests and not that of the community of God's holy people. The study therefore sought to formulate a contextualized African Pentecostal ecclesiology for the CoP. The contextualized ecclesiology

challenged the notion of the existence of the church for personal, national, political, or ethnic interests. The study then sought to understand the purpose of the church's existence in the world as a preamble to the contextualized ecclesiology envisioned for the CoP. It emerged from the study that the church exists for a mission and mandate that is far greater than those personal and ethnic squabbles that have characterized the church's mission. The church exists to fulfil the Great Commission mandate, which requires the church to carry out a holistic mission in the world, a mission modelled after Christ's incarnational mission to the world during His first advent. The contextualized ecclesiology underscored that the church has a dual purpose: it exists as a called-out community redeemed by Christ to worship God. Then, as a redeemed community, it is equipped with kingdom values and principles and sent back into the world to transform it. The researcher reckoned that the CoP stands to benefit from this contextualized ecclesiology because, with a common understanding of the church's dual-purpose mandate, it can promote unity and love among its members because every member of the church is unleashed to transform their world and spheres of influence. As members commit themselves to this task of propagating the gospel and transforming society, they will have limited time to focus on petty issues and engage in personal and ethnic concerns in the church. The church and its diverse members will operate with the understanding that the church is a new entity with a mandate to share the gospel and transform the world, a world God loves so much that he gave his only begotten son to serve and save (John 3:16).

6. Recommendations

The experience of the early church as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, has revealed that the church makes theological decisions based

on experience and Scripture. In resolving the crises that characterized its mission in the Graeco-Roman world, the early church relied on its experience and Scripture to resolve the crisis of Gentile inclusion in the church, which nearly split the church. The orderly way the Council was conducted as well, as Luke's insertion of quotations and speeches and letters which gave the key actors the opportunity to share their experiences on the issue being debated, was instructive. The experience of the church and that of key persons, as well as the church's traditions, were validated by Scripture before a decision was communicated to the church at large. This establishes that though the problem of Gentile inclusion in the church arose from the mission context of the early church, it took the same church to deliberate on the issue by employing available resources of the church to examine its lived and scriptural experiences before a theological decision was reached. The council's decision served the church in carrying out its mission in the world, particularly in Antioch where the problem came to a head. In the light of the early church's experience, I recommend that the CoP should, from time to time, deliberately reflect on its corporate experience, particularly issues that have the potential of threatening the unity of the church by emulating the example of the early church.

The experience of the early church has taught us that despite the tensions, threats of schisms, the increasing diversity of the CoP's membership, and differences in our lived experiences, the unity of the church can always be maintained. The CoP should, therefore, always strive to preserve unity even if it forces us to sacrifice certain dearly held cultural values.

The gifts of the Spirit are for the common good of the church (1 Cor 12:7), it is therefore recommended that leadership of the CoP at all levels must endeavor to intentionally teach members of the church to appreciate

this truth about the church to minimize, if not eliminate, the tendency of spiritually gifted individual members of the church breaking away for personal reasons.

The church should be interested in the theological education of its pastors and members. The theological education envisaged here should be in the service of the church insofar as it helps the church address its present challenges and envision a future for the church. Such education should take cognizance of the church's rich diversity, embrace inclusion, and harness other theological resources toward the building of the CoP without walls, a CoP that embraces people from all spheres of life. The training of ministers and lay leaders or church workers in the CoP should also come with an ecclesiological focus to ground ministers and leaders of the church with biblically sound instruction about the nature and purpose of the church. This will help ensure that such people's lack of understanding of the church does not lead to future divisions in the CoP as seen in the case of Evangelist Owusu Tabiri and the others.

It is further recommended that the CoP should, from time to time, rethink its inherited traditions and ecclesiology in the light of the changing realities the church may encounter. Such an exercise should always be guided by Scripture. The dual purpose-mandate of the church will enable it to execute its primary responsibility of spreading the word of God to a world that urgently needs transformation and reforms, which are achievable through the application of kingdom values and principles.

The realities of corruption, increasing health and economic challenges, environmental degradation, inequalities in the world systems and many other problems suggest that the world urgently needs healing. For the CoP to be relevant in such a world, it must mobilize its resources toward confronting these ills in the societies where it exists. Apart from

engaging the many issues at its corporate level, the church should equip all its members and unleash them as agents of transformation in their fields of endeavor and influence.

7. Conclusion

Schisms are recurring motifs in church history, and the CoP is not immune from them. The study principally focused on investigating the various schismatic events that the CoP suffered in its missionary enterprise in Africa. Schisms have contributed quite significantly to the spread of churches across the African continent. As people seceded from their parent churches to establish their own churches, the number of churches also increased in Africa correspondingly. Though the number of churches in Africa keeps soaring, the deplorable living conditions of the people suggest that the church's presence in Africa is yet to produce the desired effect on African societies. This is because people often succeeded in establishing their churches for reasons such as national, ethnic, doctrinal and economic reasons but not for the pursuance of the gospel and the transformation of society. This indicates a general lack of understanding of the dual purpose of the church. It has emerged from this study that the general lack of an understanding of the dual purpose of the church has contributed significantly to schisms in the CoP.

It has also been demonstrated in this study that many of the players involved in schisms within the CoP, sought their personal interests and not the communal interest of the church as a community of believers. This research has therefore proposed a contextualized ecclesiology as a way of considerably reducing, if not eliminating, the recurrence of schisms within the CoP. The contextualized ecclesiology proposed in this study challenges the notion that the church exists for personal, national, or ethnic benefits. It

presents the church as a new entity that exists to fulfil the Great Commission mandate, which requires the church to carry out a holistic mission in the world, a mission modelled after Christ's incarnational mission. The church is therefore a community of people called together from among nations to constitute a new entity despite their differences. As an inclusive community, the CoP should see itself as a people called together to constitute a new entity (the church) with a common purpose of pursuing a dual mandate of sharing the gospel and transforming the world. As a new community, the CoP exists to advance the kingdom of God on earth and to partner God to deliver his will on earth as it is in heaven.

As CoP understands and pursues the dual mandate of the church, people's conception about doing church will be challenged. The dual mandate of the church calls for a rethinking and expansion of established ministries within the CoP and the creation of new ministry interventions towards the spread of the gospel and the transformation of society. With the CoP understanding that the church is called together for a common purpose, its members will be equally preoccupied with pursuing a common goal through its established ministries and new ministry interventions. When this happens, their proclivities for tendencies that have led to schisms in the in CoP in the past, will be minimized if not eliminated.

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By the African Fireside: Towards Designing a Contextualized Discipleship, Spiritual Formation, and Servant-Leadership for Visual Oral Learners using the Traditional Hakyoto of the Batooro Tribe of Western Uganda

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Abstract

Churches and Christian organizations in post-colonial Uganda and across the African continent often rely on reading and writing skills, which exclude visual-oral learners from Bible and leadership training. However, there is potential for change by incorporating traditional fireside teaching and methods.

This thesis explores the prospect of adapting the Hakyoto, the fireside teaching and Indigenous Knowledge System of the Batooro tribe, for discipleship, spiritual formation, and the development of servant-leadership among these learners.

The research identifies essential genres, teaching methods, and what gives the Hakyoto life, suggesting the creation of an oral Bible school. It emphasizes the role of grandmothers in training and proposes a “Granny center” featuring multi-media and orality pilgrimages. It recommends four Hakyoto programs and five outreach models: Hakyoto (1) dinner church, (2) in schools, (3) village outreach, (4) in scouting, and (5) oral Bible school. Hakyoto opens doors to Bible and servant-leader training for visual-oral learners.

1. Introduction

Through Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 18–45), this study aims to inspire believers in Uganda by capturing sparks from the Batooro fireside to ignite a new, practical approach for Where He Leads (WHL) to reimagine its leadership training programs in discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant-leadership for visual-oral learners.

2. Background

Throughout history, numerous Christian missionaries have heeded “the call” to leave their homes and travel to distant lands to share the good news of Jesus (Terry and Gallagher 2017, 6, 243, 256, and 271–273). Many mission schools, ministries, and churches are influenced by how the missionaries learn best and by how they convey essential information within their own cultures. The way a person learns affects how they teach (Development

Associates International [DAI] 2003, 10–16).

While many missionaries tend to teach in ways they learned best in their home culture, this may not be the most effective approach in other cultures. Instead, they could seek to understand how those in the host cultures, to which the church has sent them, teach and learn best.

For centuries, the Batooro tribe of Western Uganda has utilized a traditional system of knowledge, teaching methods, and genres, encapsulated in what they call the Hakyoto. It involves a familial or communal gathering around the fire where participants learn from one another.

The researcher identified a problem within the Where He Leads (WHL) programs for developing Christian servant-leaders. The three overlapping programs of discipleship, spiritual formation, and twelve courses in servant leadership rely heavily on reading and writing. This reliance leaves a significant, untapped gap in the discipleship and training of visual-oral learners and communicators.

In comparing textual and oral learners, mission leaders reported that only 20 percent of the world's population prefer textual learning, while eighty percent prefer oral learning (Lovejoy 2012, 18). The Batooro Hakyoto may hold the key to addressing the issue, as it was traditionally based on orality rather than textual teaching. How might WHL adapt the Hakyoto approach for discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant-leader development of visual-oral learners and communicators?

3. Key Terms

Appreciative inquiry seminars are “interactive workshops” (Stratton-Berkessel 2010), a form of appreciative inquiry engagement called “Whole-system 4-D Dialogue” (Ludema et al. 2003, loc. 249), where all of the members or

stakeholders of an organization participate in the 4-D process (Cooperrider and Whitney 2008, 103–106) but not necessarily at the same time or location. The researchers in this study used appreciative inquiry seminars as preparation and a prerequisite for the appreciative inquiry summits.

Appreciative inquiry summit: “is a method for accelerating change by involving a broad range of internal and external stakeholders in the change process” and where they come together and participate for three to five days in the AI 4-D process James D. Ludema et al., *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioner’s Guide for Leading Large-Group Change* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Kindle edition, 2003), loc. 249. of discovery, dream, design, and destiny David L. Cooperrider and Diana D. Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Nook edition, 2005), 23–24.. At the AI summits, each ministry associated with WHL collaborates to develop specific Hakyoto programs.

Hakyoto: means “the place of fire” where the Batooro gather in the evenings for teaching and storytelling (Rwagweri 2003, 1–74). It encapsulates the Indigenous knowledge system, traditional teaching methods, and genres of the Batooro tribe. It is where the history and stories of the people taught them who they are, their culture, and their behaviors (Rubongoya 2002, 1–74). At the Hakyoto, they also learned about the Tooro kingdom, its leaders, clans, taboos, and who their brothers are (Atwooki 2018). The fireside served as the traditional classroom (Jönsson and Olsson 2007, 30). The Hakyoto was a place for conflict resolution, leadership development, leadership selection, discovery, and much more. The Hakyoto was where they taught and learned about important religious and spiritual matters, such as Ruhanga, the Batooro creator god. It is where they laugh, entertain, and challenge each other’s intellect with riddles, poems, and proverbs. Celebrations at the Hakyoto included drumming, music, singing, and

dancing.

Oral learners: are people who learn from oral means rather than written forms. Oral learners who do not read think in relational terms. When shown a triangle, square, and circle, they will not simply identify them as such but will see how they might relate in their everyday lives. They will tend to define the shape together based on their experiences, like a picture of a mountain, house, and sun Paul Konstanski, “Digital Orality: How to Connect Your Digital Footprint to the World’s Five Billion Oral Learners,” *Orality Journal* 6(2), no. 2 (2017): 15–16..

4. Problem, Main Question, and Subsidiary Questions

The researcher identified a significant issue in the teaching and training methods of WHL and foreign missionaries in Tooro. They rely heavily on reading-based instruction using books, handouts, and written curricula in classroom and seminar format. Most of the written materials for Bible and leadership training are in English. They use written exams to evaluate the students. This is particularly problematic for those who cannot read and write.

Recognizing the challenge of teaching and training those who cannot read and write has illuminated the need to research and wrestle with the following problem: Could the Indigenous Knowledge System, the Hakyoto of the Batooro tribe of Western Uganda, be modified first by WHL and then by others for discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant-leadership development of the visual-oral learners and communicators?

The following four subsidiary questions address the primary question:

- i. How does the Hakyoto of the Batooro tribe of Western Uganda

facilitate teaching, training, and cultural leadership?

ii. How might WHL adopt a modified form of Hakyoto for discipleship, Christian spiritual formation, and servant leadership development?

iii. What will it look like when WHL employs the Batooro tribe's traditional teaching method, Hakyoto, in the process of discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant leadership training with its partnering churches and ministries?

iv. How could WHL implement a strategy for the Hakyoto in the process of discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant leadership development in multiple tribes and cultures?

5. The Batooro Tribe's Use of Hakyoto

This study employed the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) 4-D model of Discovery: What gives life? Dream: What could be? Design: What should be? and Destiny: What will we do?

In the model of "Discovery: What gives life?" phase of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) 4-D model (Whitney, Cooperrider, and Stavros 2008, 106), it addressed how the Batooro Hakyoto facilitates teaching, training, and leadership culture of visual-oral learners and communicators through questionnaires, AI seminars, and summits.

5.1 Most Effective Teaching Method

Most of the 1435 respondents chose storytelling from the questionnaire options (poems, songs, stories, proverbs, or "other") as the most effective teaching method at a Batooro Hakyoto.

Every male and female age group over ten years explicitly indicated

storytelling as the top teaching method. Boys aged ten and under preferred songs, while girls of the same age favored poems; all other age groups selected storytelling.

Each religious affiliation group also ranked storytelling as the primary or tied for primary teaching method, with the Fort Portal Church of Christ having the highest percentage among all groups.

5.2 Favorite Storytellers

Respondents chose grandparents as their favorite storytellers while growing up, surpassing parents, teachers, preachers, and others. They also preferred older women over older men, younger men, or younger women. The AI participants confirmed that grandmothers were their top choice and the best storytellers.

5.3 Best Time for Storytelling

When they selected the time of day that they considered best for storytelling in Tooro, males younger than nineteen chose the “evening before dark;” all other age groups indicated “after dark.” When selecting their ideal setting for storytelling, all age groups, except girls 10 and under, chose “around a fire at home.” The religious affiliation groups also preferred a home fire as the ideal setting for storytelling.

Respondents shared that not all families in Tooro regularly attend their traditional Hakyoto gatherings. The older respondents reported participating in more Hakyoto gatherings as children than young people today. They are also involved in fewer of these days than in the past.

The results show that participants see storytelling as the most

effective Batooro teaching method at the Hakyoto. They believe older women, especially grandmothers, are the best and preferred storytellers. Their ideal setting for storytelling is after dark, at home, around a fire. Batooro leadership development started at home during the *Hakyoto omu kairizi*. The Hakyoto played a key role in teaching and training Batooro youth and was vital in developing leaders within their families, clans, tribe, and kingdom.

5.4 *What Gives Life to the Hakyoto?*

5.4.1 The Setting

The research indicated that the best Hakyoto education occurs at home, around the fire, and after dark, which gives life to the Hakyoto and enhances its likability and effectiveness.

5.4.2 The Methods

The research indicated that storytelling brings the Hakyoto to life and is the most effective Hakyoto teaching tool. The Batooro also creatively utilizes poems, proverbs, singing, dancing, drumming, and other musical instruments.

Leadership training and moral development can begin at any age. Productive teaching and training of oral learners should consider and utilize the most effective settings, leaders, and methods. It can benefit from being multigenerational and training learners of different ages together. There should be trust and respect between the Hakyoto instructors and the learners. The use of grandparents, especially grandmothers, was important in the past and, if used today, could reap significant benefits.

5.4.3 The Leaders

The research showed older women, especially grandmothers, give life to the Hakyoto and are the favorite, most effective, and influential storytellers in Tooro, followed by older men. The grandmothers are the most personal, invest the most time, and work to build strong relationships. They share food and draw on firsthand experiences as they masterfully employ advanced teaching techniques.

6. AI Seminars, Summits, and Hakyoto

Under the researcher's guidance, the research team organized AI seminars and summits that brought together various WHL ministries across the Tooro kingdom. These ministries included God's Grace Infant School, Kyenjojo Village Churches, Town Church, Scouts, and the School of Bible and Ministry. After the ministries completed the four-part AI seminars, the researcher, along with the research team, brought all the ministries together six times in Fort Portal for the two-part AI summit (Ludema et al. 2003, loc. 480–528), three follow-ups, and the final summit peak.

6.1 *God's Grace Infant School*

Two breakout groups summarized the importance of the *Hakyoto omu kairi*, the place of fire in the evening, as the center of education. In summary, the groups concluded that the Hakyoto instills self-esteem and develops leaders. It utilizes storytelling, promotes cultural awareness, and inspires dancing. The Hakyoto fosters a sense of identity through creative communication. It encourages reflection on the past and supports religious teaching. Notably, the Hakyoto nurtures love, supports moral development, provides life

skills, and prepares for marriage, offering a practical, holistic approach to education and to becoming a well-rounded person.

6.2 AI seminars and Summits

The Batooro Hakyoto educates, entertains, and serves as a tool to build the whole person. It builds self-esteem as the participants learned that they are valuable to those around them. The Hakyoto promotes culture and unity, fostering a sense of identity and belonging through dancing together and listening to elders' instructions on appropriate dress, behavior, and ways of living in Tooro. It also promotes religion, aids in moral development, teaches life skills, develops leaders, nurtures love, engages the senses, and much more.

The researcher noticed a loving, relational nature in the multi-generational teaching of the Hakyoto. This tender teaching was demonstrated by a 100-year-old grandmother to her grandchild at the AI seminar in Kyenjojo.

The Hakyoto played a crucial role in teaching, training, and developing leaders among the Batooro people. Leadership development began at home and was an essential aspect of the traditional Hakyoto in Tooro. They used the Hakyoto to impart leadership skills as it was integral in leadership development.

Long before foreigners introduced the written text, such as the Bible, as the primary source of knowledge, religion, and education, the Batooro had already developed successful orality techniques and methods that safeguarded essential knowledge, instilled religious beliefs, and educated the people. These forebearers were primary visual-oral learners who mastered and passed down their practical, holistic, effective, nonformal

means of teaching and training, the Hakyoto.

The study identified and examined eight specific folklore genres that bring the Hakyoto to life. Hakyoto leaders creatively educated the learners through advanced techniques and interactive performances of stories, dramas, songs, poems, proverbs, riddles, dances, and drumming. All eight are integral in the Batooro tribe's teaching, training, and leadership culture. Each genre engages learners interactively.

Today, modern church leaders, educators, and missionaries in Uganda could significantly enhance their success by thoughtfully integrating Hakyoto teaching methods into their leadership training programs, churches, Christian organizations, and schools.

7. Using Hakyoto

The Appreciative Inquiry “Dream: what could be?” phase (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom and Cooperrider 2010, 31–34) answers the question: How might WHL adopt a modified form of Hakyoto for discipleship, Christian spiritual formation, and servant leadership development? How might a church or Christian organization like WHL use a modified form of the Batooro Hakyoto for discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant-leader development?

7.1 Discipleship

WHL should utilize mature Christians with knowledge of traditional Hakyoto ways of teaching to go into the villages and gather people around evening fires. They should employ the Batooro conventional teaching methods to share stories, songs, poems, and proverbs about Jesus and his teachings. WHL should organize a network of discipleship groups and

church plants, specifically targeting those who cannot read or write. They should have themed Hakyoto gatherings in the communities, schools, churches, and even hospitals.

They could mobilize the people by organizing traditional-style competitions that highlight both cultural and Christian singing, storytelling, poetry, drumming, and dancing, with the best rewarded with recognition and prizes. They could also present Christian dramas and videos at these Hakyoto events to emphasize Jesus and aid in discipleship.

7.2 Spiritual Formation

WHL should organize Hakyoto prayer groups and fireside gatherings, encouraging Christians to confess their sins and ask God and those they have wronged for forgiveness. The Hakyoto was traditionally a forum for bringing people together, helping them unite, and for those with grievances to find forgiveness and reconciliation. The Hakyoto creates a safe environment where people, especially Christians, can learn to forgive one another. It would be an ideal setting for seeking forgiveness from God and each other. The participants emphasized forgiveness as an essential key in the Spiritual formation process of Batooro disciples of Christ.

7.3 Servant Leadership Development

the Hakyoto is a natural place to identify, train, and select Christian leaders. Each of the WHL ministries worked together to identify how best to use the Hakyoto for servant leadership development,

The Bible school envisioned Hakyoto evangelism events, an oral Bible school using older believers, a Jesus leadership program, and storytellers participating in Hakyoto events in Israel. The Boy Scouts imagined special campfires with good food, singing, fun, and storytelling

based on Bible stories and the Scout law.

WHL imagined creating a Hakyoto oral discipleship program and a servant-leader training program focused on oral learners. They proposed archiving fireside training sessions and making these resources available through an online, interactive portal that features picture, touch, and voice recognition interfaces built on the latest technologies. Since grandmothers are their favorite Hakyoto leaders, they envision archived recordings of their best performances as essential tools for continuous learning and teaching, even after they are gone.

The village churches dreamed of cell groups and significant outreach events rooted in traditional Hakyoto methods. The Fort Portal Church of Christ identified the Hakyoto dinner church and special-themed Hakyoto events, such as “keep the fire alive,” as their preferred ways to adapt the traditional Hakyoto.

8. Benefits and Implications of the Hakyoto

The Appreciative Inquiry “Design: what should be?” phase (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom and Cooperrider 2010, 31–34) answers the question: What will it look like when WHL employs the Batooro tribe’s traditional teaching method, Hakyoto, in the process of discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant leadership training with its partnering churches and ministries?

8.1 Language

The data shows that 44.16 percent believed that Rutooro would be the most effective single language, whereas only 7.78 percent chose English. Additionally, 47.84 percent of the responses indicated that a translation of English to Rutooro or Rutooro to English would be more effective.

WHL representatives agreed with the results that WHL, including Rutooro, is wise. However, to achieve maximum effectiveness in an oral drama of Jesus in Tooro, they unanimously proposed a translation combination in both Rutooro and English.

8.2 Reading Books

The survey reveals that only 2.20 percent of respondents read more than twelve books in the past year, indicating limited extensive reading. Most respondents read fewer books: 40.53 percent read one to three, and 20.09 percent did not read at all. These figures highlight reading habits in Tooro.

8.3 Reading purpose

Both male and female groups aged 60 and younger reported that most of their reading was “to learn and pass exams in school.” However, the oldest generation (61 and older) had their highest percentage of reading not for school but rather “to follow the news and current events.”

8.4 Reading for Fun

Of all participants, only 50.29 percent agree or agree strongly with the statement, “I like to read for fun.” 13.46 percent are uncertain, and 37.30 percent disagree or disagree strongly with the statement. The WHL representatives concur that the majority of reading most people in Tooro have done is limited primarily to what they have read in school. “To cram for exams” is how they described this type of reading.

8.5 Learning Preferences

Of the 1344 respondents in Tooro to this question, 66.82 percent preferred oral learning, and 33.18 percent preferred literacy learning. Others (6.34 percent) did not answer this question about learning preferences.

All males combined had 78.27 percent, and all females had 74.78 percent. The total number of participants who strongly/agreed with the statement “Most people in Tooro prefer to see and hear a story performed rather than read the story in a book” was 76.40 percent.

The data showed that most respondents are visual-oral (multi-sensory) learners who prefer this approach to reading. Most Hakyoto learners in Tooro fall into the visual-oral (multi-sensory) category.

8.6 Hakyoto and Morals

The research found that 48.10 percent of participants did not grow up in a home with both their mother and father, underscoring the influence of diverse family backgrounds and cultural shifts on moral perspectives and traditions.

Of those who did not grow up with both parents, 26.07 percent grew up primarily with their mother, 11.66 percent with their father, and 10.01 percent with “other relatives.”

There has been a breakdown in traditional family values over the past few generations. In the past, families stayed together; now, single women are left to raise children without a husband.

Among all age groups, the most influential figures for moral development were A. Mother at 53.07 percent and B. Father at 20.76 percent, emphasizing the critical role of parents, especially mothers, in shaping

morals and cultural values.

Most participants, regardless of religious affiliation, do not believe that the Hakyoto is inherently evil, which can encourage a more accepting perspective among the audience.

Every male and female group, from one to ten to those sixty-one years and older, had a larger majority who agreed strongly or agreed with the statement “The traditional hakyoto is disappearing in Batooro families” than those who disagreed. The women aged 61 years and older had 100 percent on the agree strongly or agree side, highlighting concern across all age groups, and a shared concern about cultural shifts.

8.7 Hakyoto Today

When asked about the statement: “It is better for children to watch TV rather than listen to oral stories,” 41.41 percent of all the participants agree strongly or agree, 6.32 percent are uncertain, and 52 percent disagree or disagree strongly.

Many parents have also begun using television and the internet as “babysitters,” merely keeping the children occupied while they are busy. This can have negative impacts on children, as many children watch whatever is available, whether it is wholesome, age-appropriate, or not. Some children even seem addicted to their screens.

Every age group, from males 1 to 10 up to females 61 years and above, agrees or agrees strongly with the statement “In the past, the hakyoto was important to the development of healthy families.” The group with the lowest are the girls 1 to 10, with 66.67 percent. As the age of the female groups increases, the percentage of women who agree or agree strongly increases, reaching 100 percent among women 61 years and older.

Every age group registered a majority who agree strongly/agree that “The hakyoto system of teaching is still useful today.” The lowest was the women 61 and older, with 56.00%. The highest were the males of the same age group, with 76.47 percent; all other groups fell between these two.

While most value the Hakyoto and its teaching methods, the rise of modern communication and entertainment, such as television, movies, and the internet, has exposed Batooro young people to many outside influences. There is a fear that these influences could entice the young people to abandon the values, behaviors, and morals their parents taught them at home.

9. Applying Hakyoto

The Appreciative Inquiry “Destiny: What will we do?” phase of the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D model (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom and Cooperrider 2010, 185261) answers the question: How could WHL implement a strategy for the Hakyoto in the process of discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant leadership development in multiple tribes and cultures?

Summit Peak: Footprint Exercise

Who?

The most effective leaders of the Hakyoto are the older women, especially the grandmothers.

What?

What should grannies teach? They should use traditional Hakyoto methods and teach through the Bible, especially highlighting moral-based stories. They should incorporate exciting stories from the

past, proverbs, parables, traditional songs, and praise and worship, and emphasize biblical values in the traditional Batooro cultural norms, fostering pride in cultural heritage and trust in traditional approaches.

When?

When should the Hakyoto training and practice take place? After WHL representatives identify mature older Christian women who would participate, they should meet regularly for Hakyoto gatherings in the late evenings and continue after dark. WHL could take the grandmothers to Israel after they had begun learning the Bible stories in partnership with their proposed oral Bible school.

Where?

The older women and an interactive audience of family and friends gather around a Hakyoto fireplace at one of the older women's homes for training and practice.

WHL should build a "Granny village" using traditional huts. This village could be a new Christian Hakyoto school for grandparents or a "Granny center" of the newly envisioned oral Bible school.

WHL should take grannies to Israel to "walk where Jesus walked." This kind of storytelling pilgrimage to the Holy Lands would be faith-building, inspire spiritual growth, and deepen the grannies' ability "to make the Bible come alive."

Why?

Grannies are the "true servant leaders in Tooro." They are known to be loving, generous, kind, honest, humble, and trustworthy. The people of Tooro respect grannies and listen closely to what they have to say. Grandmothers are among the best storytellers, gifted at keeping people's attention around the fire.

How?

WHL should establish:

- An oral Bible school and ministry with a servant-leadership track.
- A “Granny center” with Hakyoto
- Pilgrimages to Israel to make the Bible come alive.
- A digital repository and multimedia presence for digital reference, teaching, and as an archive.
- Online oral Bible.
- Hakyoto outreach.

9.2 Applying the Hakyoto

WHL develops an oral Bible school and “Granny center” built around a permanent Hakyoto and takes oral Bible students, grannies, and the multimedia team on annual Hakyoto orality pilgrimages to Israel and the Holy Lands to help visual-oral learners and communicators “make the Bible come to life.” Their personal experiences and first-hand knowledge of the Holy Land’s geography, topography, weather, distances, and vegetation will help them speak with authority and teach more accurately. This immersive approach could breathe new life into the way they teach the Bible and bring a fresh perspective to the audience.

WHL creates a multimedia team that collaborates with other organizations to record, store, and share Christian Hakyoto-related content, fostering a sense of shared purpose and community. This content aims to build trust and demonstrate the power of partnership in expanding Christian outreach. The content has two primary goals. First to train the grannies, oral Bible students, Hakyoto leaders, and other interested

believers. Second, to reach a wider audience through radio, television, film, websites, and social media.

9.3 Hakyoto Outreach Models

First, churches follow the Fort Portal Church of Christ, “hakyoto dinner church” model. Second, schools throughout Uganda incorporate the Hakyoto teaching methods and Christian Hakyoto events into their programs. Third, Hakyoto village outreach through cooperation between village churches and Hakyoto teams trained by WHL. These teams partner with multiple congregations to carry out large-scale Christian Hakyoto events. Fourth, for the Hakyoto outreach of Boy Scouts and youth, Christian Hakyoto-centered camping events like Faith Quest Uganda and scout camp. WHL helps expand Christian Hakyoto ideas among youth and within the Ugandan Scout system. Fifth, the WHL School of Bible and Ministry adopts the contextualized Hakyoto orality model and creates the Oral Bible School. Finally, WHL and the multimedia team create props, memory aids, seminars, and training demonstrations targeting visual-oral and visual-oral preference learners.

10. Summary and Conclusion

The Hakyoto was central to education in Batooro families, highlighting its significance in shaping identity and fostering community bonds. It provided a platform for education, self-esteem building, the transmission of wisdom, conflict resolution, and the instillation of cultural, linguistic, religious, and moral values. The Hakyoto played a crucial role in developing successful Batooro leaders and nurturing healthy families, as elders emphasized the principles of discipline, harmony, and ubuntu. This illustrates the

effectiveness of traditional Batooro leadership practices and supports the recommendation to incorporate them into servant leadership training.

This study found that although most people in Tooro can read, but they do not enjoy it. They lack a strong reading culture, as 60.16 percent reported having read three or fewer books in the previous twelve months. Many participants are visual-oral (multi-sensory) learners and communicators. Batooro orality methods could serve as practical tools for transferring knowledge, values, and morals.

This study uncovered what gives life to the Hakyoto and the importance of its most effective medium, oral storytelling. It was discovered that older women, especially Christian grandmothers, are the favorites and generally the best at sharing the eight main folklore genres of Batooro stories, songs, poems, proverbs, riddles, dances, and drumming.

This study contributes to a way of thinking about discipleship, spiritual formation, and servant leadership development among visual-oral learners and communicators that appreciates, values, and seeks to utilize African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, traditional methods, storytellers, and the ways of teaching, training, and communicating of the learner's culture. It sought to understand Batooro culture, Hakyoto orality communication, and how they developed leaders. Led by the researcher, Christian representatives collaboratively engaged in an appreciative inquiry process and created the "Hakyoto Training Model" and "Hakyoto Outreach Recommendations" for WHL. The Hakyoto model includes an oral Bible school, a "Granny center", a multimedia ministry, a Hakyoto leadership training program, orality pilgrimages, a Hakyoto dinner church, and other creative ministry-specific outreach strategies.

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Towards a Providence-Informed Stewardship Model for Funding Residential Education of Vulnerable Students at Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA

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Abstract

Opening doors for low-income families to escape the trap of substandard education is a challenge for tuition-dependent Christian schools. Most Christian schools have continued to raise tuition levels without regard for families with meager financial means. This study seeks to help one school—Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA (hereafter PCA)—to apply the EDNA Model of research toward a providence-informed model of residential education of vulnerable students. Utilizing the Exploratory-Descriptive-Normative-Action Model (hereafter EDNA Model) (Woodbridge 2014), and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider 2021),

the research design provides qualitative, historical, and evaluative research of foundational, archival documents, with a collaborative Appreciative Inquiry process followed by a focus group discussion for more specific findings regarding PCA's immediate context.

Because PCA shares Charles Spurgeon's Reformed Baptist theological convictions and faces a similar mission to seek funds for shelter and education of vulnerable children as was present in Spurgeon's Stockwell Orphanage, the first elements of the research relied primarily on historical analysis of primary and secondary data sources concerning Spurgeon's relevant life and benevolent work for orphaned and vulnerable children. Emerging from the literature is a God-centered theoretical framework that forms a conceptual foundation for both scholarly investigation and practical recommendations for funding the mission of PCA.

At its core, Spurgeon's thought life, was governed by the Bible, by the biblical and theological conclusions drawn from God's Word. Flowing outward from this God-centered theoretical framework are four other major categories forming a view concerning the funding of education and care for the orphaned and vulnerable: (1) Family and Community; (2) Pastoral and Congregational; (3) Institutional and Historical; and (4) Stewardship and Funding. This theoretical framework, along with results of each phase of the EDNA model, generated results then applied to form a Providence-informed stewardship model for funding residential education of vulnerable students at PCA.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

As public and government funded schooling in the USA has disintegrating into moral chaos from its early promising common school founding in the 1840s, Christian education has become a necessity rather than one option among many (Pue 2021, 35). Home schooling is not always possible, particularly for one-income families without a father's income.

Complicating the matter of funding for Christian schools is the tuition-dependent funding model, rendering private school sustainability impossible for a financially poor parent base (Pue 2012). Transactional fundraising practices—product sales or other manipulative fundraising tactics—create unrealistic demands upon vulnerable students from poor families and fail to teach God's people to be generous stewards of his providence.

Charles Spurgeon, a nineteenth century Reformed Baptist pastor, faced a similar dilemma in providing shelter and schooling for orphaned and vulnerable children from the poor class in London, England. His approach in funding such schooling relied upon a reformed understanding of God's providence in both guidance in operations and in provisions for daily care and schooling (Nettles 2013).

Providence Christian Academy (hereafter PCA), shares Spurgeon's Reformed Baptist theological convictions and faces a similar mission to seek funds for shelter and education of vulnerable children.

During an early morning meeting on Saturday, July 9, 2013, the elders of Grace Baptist Church of Chambersburg, PA, USA (hereafter GBC) began to discuss the idea of a Christian boarding school for vulnerable

students in the Franklin County, Pennsylvania area of United States (GBC 2013, 8). The closing of Scotland School for Veterans' Children had left the former boarding school campus of 170 acres as a possible location for a new school just five minutes from GBC. After months of discussion and prayer, the elders announced the ministry proposal and answered initial questions at the annual business meeting for the church on January 11, 2014. A few weeks later, on January 28, the owner of Scotland Campus, Winebrenner Theological Seminary, welcomed the PCA feasibility study group to campus by way of a forward-looking lease that included initial office space, anticipated classroom space, and a reservation of two cottages on campus for future residential students.

Given the initial favorable response, the elders formed a feasibility study group, beginning a year-long process that culminated in the incorporation of PCA on October 6, 2014. The school's present mission statement, though revised in 2016 and 2018, maintains the school's desire to reach groups usually excluded from Christian schooling due to tuition costs.

The mission statement now reads, "In dependence upon Almighty God, for His glory alone, and together with family and church, the mission of Providence Christian Academy is to provide exemplary education for the vulnerable in the light of God's Word for time and eternity" (PCA 2018b, 1).

From its inaugural academic year, beginning August of 2015, the school has demonstrated its burden to minister to those with little means. In some emergency cases the school has provided education tuition free until families can begin to contribute according to their means. The school's next daunting hurdle is designing a funding model for the addition of a residential component to provide help to the most vulnerable students. In attempting to estimate residential cost-to-educate on the

Scotland Campus, the cottage lease rates proved fatal to an on-campus ministry to families with limited means. The school's only option became a mentor family fostering model that has not been fully developed or formalized. A mentor family component would ensure that not all families at the school would be in turmoil. Among viable options, PCA is considering a host family type model used for students as a possible lower cost option to dormitory-style housing.

The residential challenge demands research to harness the biblical and theoretical constructs in the financial stewardship family of authors who desire that ministry glorify God by adopting biblical development practices based upon God's Word—transformational practices seeking to invite God's people to "excel in this act of grace" in material giving (2 Cor 8:7; ESV).

1.2 Main Research Question

What is a providence-informed, stewardship model for funding residential education of vulnerable students at Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA?

1.3 Subsidiary Questions

- i. What major factors have influenced and informed the funding of Christian residential education of vulnerable students, with special reference to the Spurgeon's Stockwell Orphanage and school?
- ii. What is the current practice for funding residential education of vulnerable students at Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA?
- iii. What implications flow from a biblical study of the providence of

God with respect to funding residential education of vulnerable children?

- iv. What providence-informed, stewardship model can assist Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA in funding residential education of vulnerable students?

1.4 Key Terms and Definitions

1.4.1 Providence

Theologian Louis Berkhof defined providence as “that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world and directs all things to their appointed end” (1996, 166). This definition is consistent with the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, the doctrinal statement adopted by PCA at its founding (RBP 2010 and PCA 2018a). Although including three aspects of providence—preservation, concurrence or cooperation, and government—Berkhof acknowledges that Calvin, Dabney, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, Dick, Shedd, and Mcpherson include the concepts of concurrence or God’s use of means within the two elements of preservation and government (1996, 166–67). Other works concerning providence were cited in this study (Helm 1993; Plumer 1997; Sedgwick 2007; Matthews 2009; Calvin 2010; Carson 2012; Waldron 2016; Charnock 2022).

1.4.2 Stewardship

The steward is one who manages resources that belong to others (Wilson 2016, 28). This concept recognizes that leaders of Christian churches and

ministries do so for God, the ultimate owner of all (Pue 2021, 51–66). Neither the parent, church, school, or the government owns children. Stewardship in a Christian school acknowledges the need for shepherding in family and church, and it does not seek to usurp such needed collaboration with the school community (Pue 2021, 57–66).

1.4.3 Residential

A residential student is one who lives in a boarding arrangement in a group dormitory or in a particular foster-like family supported either through tuition paid by the student's family or through charitable contributions paid by donors to the school.

1.4.4 Vulnerable Students

According to the latest revision of the PCA Mission statement, vulnerable students are “educationally marginalized children without one or both parents, or children in families struggling with divorce, pre-adoption adjustment, post-adoption adjustment, homelessness, poverty, or other family troubles” (PCA 2018b, 1). For this study's purposes, the term vulnerable will include orphaned children.

1.5 *Research Design*

Utilizing the EDNA Model (Woodbridge 2014), and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider 2021), the research design will provide qualitative, historical, and evaluative research of foundational and archival documents, with a collaborative Appreciative Inquiry process using best practices in qualitative and theological research (Barber and Krauss 2000; Anderson 2001; Elliston 2011; Shaw 2012; SBL 2014; Booth et al. 2016; Swinton and

Mowat 2016; Galvan and Galvan 2017; Ward 2017; Creswell and Creswell 2018; Gilbert et al. 2018; Turabian 2018; Roberts and Hyatt 2019; Vyhmeister and Robertson 2020).

The EDNA model proposed by Woodbridge is an adaptation of Osmer's Model (2008), a reaction to Osmer's liberal theological position. The EDNA Model seeks to develop an evangelical and biblical approach to research, one that is "grounded in evangelical theology" and places emphasis on the normative role of Scripture (Woodbridge 2014, 91-93). Furthermore, the EDNA Model, based upon the "Five Solas" of the Reformation (2014, 93), aligns well with research in the Reformed tradition.

The qualitative research will include extensive literature reviews of historical sources concerning the Stockwell Orphanage and Spurgeon's view of the role of God's providence with respect to the funding of the benevolent work. Regarding PCA, a similar literature review of founding and historical documents will be accompanied by analysis, whenever necessary, of compiled or audited financials, 990 Form analysis, public information from affiliations (ECFA), website review, and clarifying interview questionnaire analysis. Analysis will include sources of revenue, auxiliaries, businesses, rental income, fundraising events, stated development philosophy, published works concerning the ministry.

To clarify themes, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) analysis with participating PCA Board of Directors, faculty, and key stakeholders will seek to identify a hopeful model for funding a residential component to the school. Appreciative Inquiry is a prospective theory conceived by David L. Cooperrider in his early to mid-1980s doctoral dissertation recently republished under the title, "Prospective Theory: Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organizational Innovation" (Cooperrider 2021). Cooperrider's describes AI as "a theory-

building method for the collaborative construction of a better future” (2021, 8). Cooperrider posits, “The process of good theory construction is portrayed as the discovery of theory from data in the real world of life (the grounded experience in human systems), resulting in the co-construction meaning, vision, strengthened relationships via co-inquiry, and knowledge of consequence” (2021, 19–20).

1.6 Research Method

The theological research method utilized in this research will be the EDNA Model (Woodbridge 2014, 102–113). The method is organized as follows:

- i. Exploratory research: Here the EDNA Model seeks to answer the question “What has led to the present situation?”
- ii. Descriptive research: Here the EDNA Model seeks to answer the question “What is happening now?”
- iii. Normative research: Here the EDNA Model seeks to answer the question “What should be happening?”
- iv. Action research: Here the EDNA Model seeks to answer the question “How should we respond?”

2. Exploratory Research – Literature Review Spurgeon and Funding Stockwell Orphanage

2.1 Research Question

This chapter will be dedicated to the exploratory research component of the EDNA model. Here the study would answer the EDNA model exploratory research general question, “What has led to the present situation?”

(Woodbridge 2014, 102). The exploratory research results will answer the specific subsidiary research question, “What are some major factors that have influenced and informed the funding of Christian residential education of vulnerable students, with special reference to the Spurgeon’s Stockwell Orphanage and school?”.

The chapter will include a foundational and thorough literature review, gleaned general historical and theoretical analysis with special reference to the Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s views concerning providence and its application to ministry to the vulnerable, particularly at Stockwell Orphanage and school. This literature review will begin with a tracing of primary and secondary scholarship regarding Spurgeon from his own era to the present state of scholarship. Before moving to more contemporary scholarship, this study references some very early biographical sketches (Gough 1881; Conwell 1892; Northrop 1892; Fullerton 1920; Burley 1933; Day 1934).

Emerging from this literature review will be Spurgeon’s own God-centered theoretical framework for the funding of education and care for orphaned and vulnerable children. Spurgeon’s theoretical framework will include demonstrable categories of study used in this and subsequent chapters to shape this research: (1) Biblical and Theological; (2) Family and Community; (3) Pastoral & Congregational; (4) Institutional and Historical, and (5) Stewardship and Funding.

In each major category, primary research from sermons, articles, Spurgeon’s Autobiography, and Spurgeon’s writings in *The Sword and the Trowel* (S&T) will aid in an understanding of his views and practices. This review will also be informed by critical interaction with insightful, secondary and contemporary scholarly works from Patricia Kruppa (1982), Arnold Dallimore (1985), Lewis Drummond (1992), Mark Hopkins (2006),

Tom Nettles (2013; 2021), Peter Morden (2013), Thomas Breimaier (2020), Geoffrey Chang (2022a; 2022b; 2024), Alex DiPrima (2023; 2024), Rhea (2023), and others.

2.2 Spurgeon's God-Centered Theoretical Framework

Emerging from a thorough study of primary and secondary Spurgeon literature is a God-centered theoretical framework that forms a conceptual foundation for both scholarly investigation and practical recommendations for funding the mission of PCA (See Figure 1). This framework could make a significant contribution to the corresponding challenges of funding the education and care of the vulnerable. Accordingly, no known significant empirical research has addressed and applied this framework for contemporary application.

Spurgeon's God-Centered Theoretical Framework

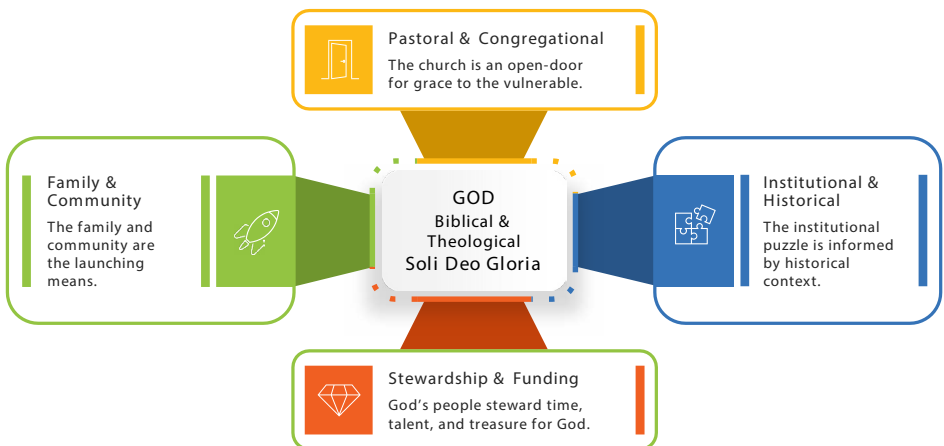


Figure 1. *Spurgeon's God-Centered Theoretical Framework*

At its core, Spurgeon's thought life, was governed by the Bible, by the biblical and theological conclusions drawn from God's Word. Flowing outward from this God-centered theoretical framework are four other major categories forming a view concerning the funding of education and care for the orphaned and vulnerable. The following sections of this study will detail each category flowing from God himself, his creation, and his providence.

2.3 ACSI Sustainability Future Ready Existing Model Research Study

ACSI, in partnership with Cardus, in a two-year research study "to identify and examine innovative financial and structural models that contribute to Christian school sustainability while expanding educational access for underserved students, families, and communities" (2022, 10). Results of the study were published in *Future Ready: Innovative Missions and Models in Christian Education* (Swaner et al. 2022).

ACSI explains that the study "builds on work from the United Kingdom and Canada conducted in the Christian school sector" (2022, 10). This ACSI research also utilized a case study approach with appreciative inquiry (AI) (2022, 10). ACSI selected and gained consent from ten schools and another "network of schools" using purposive sampling based on various criteria: 1) serving grades anywhere between kindergarten and twelfth grades and located in the United States; 2) innovative models in one or more categories: mergers, voucher or school choice programs, property ownership and leasing, online or hybrid courses, microbusiness hubs, or closely related categories; 3) model must be in operation and existing for no less than two years at the time of the study, and; 4) model must have a goal to include underserved students, families, or communities (2022, 11). The participants were described as follows:

Overall, 553 respondents completed the survey representing the twelve schools in our sample, including 75 administrators, 318 teachers, 77 support staff, 14 board members, and 55 other members of the school community. Respondents indicating some other responsibility with the school included those working in admissions, athletics, counselling, and other responsibilities (2022, 145).

2.4 Filling a Contemporary Gap in Scholarship

This study attempts to close a gap in scholarship for the school, churches, families, and the wider community.

2.4.1 Biblical and Theological

God-honoring efforts to minister to orphaned and vulnerable children demand foundational theological orthodoxy that leads to biblical orthopraxy. This study will aid PCA as it seeks to order collaborative practice with local families, churches, and other ministries, while maintaining fidelity to doctrinal convictions, thereby facilitating better alignment between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

2.4.2 Family and Community

In communities that seek to prevent costly, often traumatic, government-funded out-of-home placements, boarding schools could help strengthen families and provide shelter for children while parents work toward a more permanent and stable home environment.

2.4.3 Pastoral and Congregational

Pastors and congregations need clarity in the biblical role of in the relief of the needs of orphans within their own families and communities. One key contribution of this research could be the clarification of the proper interface between the church members, its families, and the local institutions that care for the vulnerable, particularly the efforts of PCA to shelter and educate the vulnerable in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, USA and surrounding geography.

2.4.4 Institutional and Historical

Practical administrative and forward-looking financial models and practices can have widespread impact, serving as models for replication of service-delivery to communities wishing to minister to vulnerable student populations. PCA can, therefore, serve as a model school with a nimble and sustainable model of care and funding in the face of the financial limitations of families experiencing poverty.

Little scholarly attention has been given to the Stockwell Orphanage and its theological implications for present-day care and education of vulnerable students. The most recent scholarly attention has been devoted to the life, preaching, and pastoral ministry of Charles Spurgeon, with limited, though helpful, attention to the social outreach of Metropolitan Tabernacle under Spurgeon (Bacon 1967; Phillips 1978; Bebbington 1989; Hayden 1992; Murray 1992; Curnow et al. 1993; Bebbington 2005; Morden 2013; Wyncoll 2016; Crosby 2018; Kruppa 2018; Breimaier 2020). The influences of the charity school movement during this same historical period can shed light on options to the now overburdened and theological incompatible

public school system in the Franklin County, USA community served by Providence Christian Academy (Candler 1880; Rice 1917; Mair 2019).

2.4.5 Stewardship and Funding

While a search of present scholarship finds results in stewardship and steward leadership in the business and non-profit worlds, any detailed attempt at forming a coherent localized orthopraxy for funding residential education of vulnerable children is lacking.

2.4.6 Summary: Filling a Gap in Stewardship and Funding Literature

Peter Brinckerhoff's seminal work *Nonprofit Stewardship: A Better Way to Lead Your Mission-Based Organization* (2004) acknowledges the need for "financial empowerment" of the organizational mission but is now dated and lacks a theological perspective regarding God's providence (2004). R. Scott Rodin's more recent work *The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations and Communities* (2010) provides a biblical and theological view of leadership and stewardship, without a practical component concerning funding benevolent work. In fairness to Rodin, his purpose was to develop the theoretical construct of steward leadership, and in that respect, his work can aid foundationally in this study. Kent R. Wilson's *Steward Leadership in the Nonprofit Organization* (2016) applies the insights of the scholarship concerning stewardship to the nonprofit sector, while acknowledging his debt to Rodin's foundational work.

None of these studies attempts to harness or apply the biblical doctrine of God's providence to better inform stewardship of the funding

and sustainability of Christian school—particularly in the Reformed Baptist confessional setting.

This gap begs for a theological foundation upon which to ground a sustainable funding schooling model for the vulnerable, for those who wish to be stewards of God’s providence. To date, no research in the Reformed Baptist theological sector seeks to tie fundraising practices (orthopraxy) to orthodox doctrine, particularly the relation of God’s providence to funding schooling and care for vulnerable children.

Further, no recent research has clarified reformed ecclesiology with mercy ministry limits. How can a church and boarding school for vulnerable students form collaborative ties without over-reliance upon one church budget? What can a school expect in tuition from a family, especially when multiple children are enrolled? These and other funding related questions require theological grounding. A more thorough examination of Spurgeon’s conception of the relationship between God’s providence and the funding of Stockwell Orphanage and school will shed light upon the contemporary efforts of Providence Christian Academy to fund residential education to the vulnerable children in its community.

3. Descriptive Research – Funding for Vulnerable Students at PCA

3.1 Research Question

This chapter will be dedicated to the Descriptive research component of the EDNA model. Here the study would answer the EDNA model Descriptive research general question, “What is happening now?” (Woodbridge 2014, 105). This chapter will answer the specific subsidiary research question,

“What is the current practice for funding residential education of vulnerable students at Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA?”

3.2 *Research Methodology*

This chapter will provide an empirical description of the context of Providence Christian Academy—its geographical, sociological, and historical background, past and present funding practices, and mission, including strategic aims, mission accomplishments, strengths, and challenges. The chapter will explore empirical institutional funding tuition and tuition assistance comparison data from two other local Christian schools in the Association of Christian Schools International (Osmer 2008, 31–78; Smith 2013, 100).

During the Descriptive phase, the research involves participation from the PCA Board of Directors (seven total directors), Faculty (five to eight participants), and other key stakeholders (five key participants) in the appreciative inquiry process. During the Descriptive phase, PCA participants will provide data regarding the school at its “best in all life’s fullest and best future possibilities” (Cooperrider 2021, 20).

3.3 *Data Analysis and Interpretation*

The interview data will be collected via a questionnaire, with audio recording and transcription of any direct questioning. Any surfacing themes will be collated via coding and classification, utilizing data analysis and interpretation software where needed.

4. Normative Research (Providence and Funding)

4.1 Research Question

This chapter will be dedicated to the Normative research component of the EDNA model. Here the study would answer the EDNA model Normative research general question, “What should be happening?” (Woodbridge 2014, 109). This chapter will answer the specific subsidiary research question, “What implications flow from a biblical study of the providence of God with respect to funding residential education of vulnerable children?”

4.2 Old Testament Diachronic Study

The Old Testament diachronic study will consider Exodus 25:1–9, Deuteronomy 14:28–29, and 1 Chronicles 29:10–20, along with comparison passages with respect to God’s providence and biblical principles for funding residential education of vulnerable students.

4.3 Summary of Old Testament Principles for Providence and Funding

As the chosen people of the blessed God, though impoverished and in bondage, God’s people were set free to serve him. While departing, God’s people were instructed to plunder the Egyptians, and these riches formed the freely donated material in response to God’s call to build a place among them for his holy presence and worship. In generously giving his people these material gifts, God afforded both rich and poor the opportunity to joyfully give back what he originally gave by his generous providence (Maxwell 1987; Merrill 1994; Motyer 2005; Stuart 2006; Cole 2008; Merida 2014).

God called some gifted and skilled leaders, filled with his Spirit, and he harnessed the collective community to complete his work. His people were engaged in worship by giving their absolute best to him from the heart with gratitude for his holy work and for his glory alone.

God exercises a special providence for the vulnerable, the orphan, widow, and stranger. God calls himself “helper of the orphan” (Ps 10). When father and mother abandon, the Psalmist expresses confidence that “the LORD will take me up” (Ps 27:10). The prophets repeatedly warn God’s people to care for orphans and to seek to oppose mistreatment of the vulnerable. God’s worship was to include the vulnerable, and gleaning, and the third-year tithe were to be practical ways God’s people ensured provision for the needy in their midst.

God’s provision for his temple in 1 Chronicles shows the desire God’s people should demonstrate for his glory displayed in excellent and generous giving by his people. David’s planning and forethought for the building by his son Solomon highlights the importance of wise preparation and stewardship of gifts and graces (Allen 1987; Thompson 1994).

God’s divine providence as explained in 2 Chronicles 16:9 by the Puritan Stephen Charnock is a great encouragement to his people. God’s providence is immediate, as his eyes are watchful and constant. They are God’s own eyes and not another’s, but God also uses means. God’s providence is “quick” as his eyes “run” and are not sleepy or slumbering eyes. His providence is “diligent, persistent, and rigorous” as his eyes “run to and fro.” His providence is over all the earth from the least items to the greatest. Finally, the end of God’s providence is to show himself strong for his people (Charnock 2022).

4.4 *New Testament Diachronic Study*

The New Testament diachronic study will consider Luke 12:13–34, 2 Corinthians 8–9, Philippians 4:10–20, and James 1:26–27, along with comparison passages with respect to God’s providence and biblical principles for funding residential education of vulnerable students.

4.5 *Summary of New Testament Principles for Providence and Funding*

In the account from Luke 12:13–34, Jesus had been commending the trust in God’s fatherly providence in both spiritual and material respects. When interrupted by someone requesting aid in a domestic dispute concerning inheritance, Jesus rejected the role of mere social or economic reformer, a judge over domestic dealings. Sensing the covetous heart behind the request, Jesus gave a vivid picture of the folly of greed in the parable of the rich fool. Jesus thereby condemns selfish hoarding and urges believers to be “rich toward God” (12:21) (Hendriksen 1978; Kistemaker 1980; Hughes 1998).

The passage of Matthew 25:31–46 shows that on the final day of judgment, Jesus will separate those who lived a life for self and those who loved fellow believers in tangible ways: (1) feeding the hungry; (2) giving drink to the thirsty; (3) welcoming the stranger; (4) clothing the needy; (5) caring for the sick, and; (6) visiting the prisoner (Hendriksen 1973; Blomberg 1992; Ryle 1993; Weber 2000; Boice 2001; Doriani 2008).

The passage from 2 Corinthians 8–9 illustrates a vital funding priority of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul commends the church at Corinthian’s desire to give generously and reminds them that they are asked to give from what they have rather than delay the collection.

As a steward of God's grace, Paul utilized accountability measures, with multiple tested men, to ensure no appearance of mishandling of the funds. God loves cheerful giving from the heart for the vulnerable (Martin 1986; Kistemaker 1997).

The Macedonian churches were examples, though poor, in giving generously. Paul himself set an example of generous giving, thereby inspiring others to likewise give generously. Paul points to the ground of joy for all fellow believers, the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for his people—an indescribable gift (2 Cor 9:5).

God hears the prayers of his people and promises timely provision according to his will. The result of generous giving is an overflowing thanksgiving to God whose providence is abundant, sure, timely, and faithful. God calls his people to faithful and persistent prayer with the assurance that if earthly fathers know how to give gifts to their children, surely God will generously give his Holy Spirit to all who ask.

To the Philippians, Paul showed contentment in his extreme poverty and imprisonment (Phil 4:10–20). Paul provides a theology of generosity by teaching that all comes from “my God” who gives “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (4:19). This supply is comprehensive “every need” met by God's riches. The end of God's generosity to his people and their giving back to him is glory to the God who supplies so richly for his work through his needy people. Paul is brought to praise, “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen” (4:20; Boice 2000; Silva 2005; Tomlin 2013).

Before summarizing Paul's argument in Philippians 1:26–27, James reminds recipients of his letter that the source of all good in their lives in the unchanging God and his steady providence. Wanting to comfort the oppressed and yet confront unfaithful practices and ill-treatment of the poor by those with wealth, James seeks to better define how a faith in

Christ defines a believer's priorities of compassion and fellowship. James calls believers to an all-encompassing care of the vulnerable to include the needs of both body and soul. In doing so, believers imitate their heavenly Father, who himself demonstrates a special providence for the orphan and widow (Motyer 1985; Hughes 1991; Richardson 1997; Moo 2000; Doriani 2007; Kistemaker 2007; Blomberg and Kamell 2008; Varner 2010).

5. Action Research (Providence-Informed Stewardship Model)

5.1 Research Question

This chapter will be dedicated to the Action research component of the EDNA model. Here the study would answer the EDNA model Action research general question, "How should we respond?" (Woodbridge 2014, 113). The Action research results will answer the specific subsidiary research question, "What providence-informed, stewardship model can assist Providence Christian Academy, Pennsylvania, USA in funding residential education of vulnerable students?"

5.2 Biblical and Theological Component: Action Research Emergent Themes

Emerging from the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative research with respect to the biblical and theological component of Spurgeon's God-centered theoretical framework is the Providence Action research theme and the Reformation Action research theme. In a later section these themes will inform the specific strategic contemporary obligations in the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model.

5.3 Family and Community Component: Action Research Emergent Themes

Emerging from the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative research with respect to the Family and Community component of Spurgeon's God-centered theoretical framework is the Orphaned and Vulnerable Action research theme and the Valuable Partnerships Action research theme. In a later section these themes will inform the specific strategic contemporary obligations in the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model.

5.4 Pastoral and Congregational Component: Emergent Action Research Themes

Emerging from the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative research with respect to the Pastoral and Congregational component of Spurgeon's God-centered theoretical framework is the Involvement in Local Church Action research theme and the Delivery Model Action research theme. In a later section these themes will inform the specific strategic contemporary obligations in the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model.

5.5 Institutional and Historical Component: Emergent Action Research Themes

Emerging from the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative research with respect to the Institutional and Historical component of Spurgeon's God-centered theoretical framework is the Exemplary Education Action research theme and the Need-Based Assistance Action research theme. In a later section these themes will inform the specific strategic contemporary obligations in the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model.

5.6 Stewardship and Funding Component: Emergent Action Research Themes

Emerging from the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative research with respect to the Stewardship and Funding component of Spurgeon's God-centered theoretical framework is the Communication Action research theme and the Enrollment and Development Strategic Funding Plan Action research theme. In a later section these themes will inform the specific strategic contemporary obligations in the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model.

5.7 Providence-Informed Stewardship Model: Overview

Flowing from the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative research with respect to Spurgeon's God-centered theoretical framework for ministry are the major components of the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model. The overall outline of the model spells the acronym PROVIDENCE.

5.8 Biblical and Theological Component

Providence Action Theme: Since all things are “from him, through him, and to him” (Romans 11:33–36), the PCA motto appropriately aims at the glory of God alone—*Soli Deo Gloria*. This theme points to the need for “dependence upon Almighty God, for His glory alone” as a stated conviction of the PCA mission statement (2018b).

Reformation Action Theme: PCA looks beyond the mere transference of information to the aim of reformation according to the Bible—*Sola Scriptura*. The mission aims at reformation of the heart, character, doctrine, and practice of the staff, students, Board of Directors, and stakeholders. PCA has demonstrated a refusal to permit doctrinal drift

from its founding biblical commitment to Reformed theological convictions as summarized in the Second London Confession of Faith of 1689.

5.9 *Family and Community Component*

Orphaned and Vulnerable Action Theme: PCA's mission demands an admissions focus upon orphaned and vulnerable children, shifting the funding focus from a tuition-based strategy to a broad-based strategy for funding the mission with funds primarily from church and private donors. The school's strategic funding plan must resist the temptation to grow beyond its means to provide comprehensive support for each vulnerable student.

Valuable Partnerships Action Theme: The biblical stewardship of relationships and resources extends to partnerships with families, churches, and like-minded community organizations to foster sustainability for the mission to vulnerable students. This theme points to the mission language of "together with family and church" as stated conviction of the PCA mission statement (2018b).

5.10 *Pastoral and Congregational Component*

Involvement in Church Action Theme: The school's aim is to connect and involve the children it serves in the work and fellowship of the local and worldwide church. While students sometimes come from families unattached to a local church support system, the school strives to forge connections for eternal good with pastors, churches, and families who might benefit from elder-led, Deacon administered benevolence. This theme points to the mission language of "together with family and church" as stated conviction of the PCA mission statement (2018b).

Delivery Model Action Theme: PCA's mission must be nimble in its delivery model regarding the use of innovation to leverage technology. Its current online and hybrid options serve homeless and transient students well. Any funding plan must consider continued flexibility in the school's model of delivering comprehensive services, exploring delivery arrangements that would likely include pastoral and congregational support for families in crisis. This theme points to the mission language of "exemplary education for the vulnerable in the light of God's Word for time and eternity" (PCA 2018b).

5.11 Institutional and Historical Component

Exemplary Education Action Theme: PCA's mission commits to "exemplary education for the vulnerable in the light of God's Word for time and eternity" (PCA 2018b) and as such requires ample funding for administrator and teacher salaries, academic resources, and all curricular activities involved. The school must count the cost of education to ensure that the education for each student is, in fact, exemplary.

Need-Based Assistance Action Theme: PCA's mission specifically focuses upon the vulnerable, necessitating tuition assistance for the impoverished families served. Its funding model cannot be tuition-based, although stewardship requires families with ample means to support their children's education.

5.12 Stewardship and Funding Component

Communication Action Theme: For the glory of God and good for the families served, the PCA mission requires engagement in an ongoing communication plan that conveys needs of the ministry and thanksgiving for God's ongoing provision.

Enrollment and Development Strategic Funding Plan Action Theme: Funding the mission of the school requires planning. God's providence does not eliminate the need for stewardship and planning in the budgetary process for each academic year, with an additional focus on long term sustainability. The strategic funding plan must balance enrollment, bringing tuition revenue, and development, seeking grants and contributions from funding partners.

Each component will provide scaffolding for the Action research contemporary obligations, developed utilizing the findings of the Exploratory, Descriptive, and Normative data.

6. Conclusion

At its core, Spurgeon's thought life, was governed by the Bible, by the biblical and theological conclusions drawn from God's Word. Flowing outward from this God-centered theoretical framework are four other major categories forming a view concerning the funding of education and care for the orphaned and vulnerable: (1) Family and Community; (2) Pastoral and Congregational; (3) Institutional and Historical; and (4) Stewardship and Funding. This theoretical framework, along with results of each phase of the EDNA model, generated results then applied to form a providence-informed stewardship model for funding residential education of vulnerable students at PCA.

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- Wyncoll, Hannah, ed. 2016. *Wonders of Grace: Original Testimonies of Converts During Spurgeon's Early Years*. London: The Wakeman Trust. themes will inform the specific strategic contemporary obligations in the Providence-Informed Stewardship Model.

A Historical Comparison of Chaferian Bibliology Proper with Select Pre-Thought Paradigms and its Implications for Approaching Scripture

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Supervisor Dr George Coon

Abstract

This study examines the philosophical-theological pre-thought foundational to Lewis Sperry Chafer's doctrine of Bibliology Proper. To reorient the modern Church with neglected elements from her past (Buschart and Eilers 2015, 9–10), the project addresses, "In what ways might a historical analysis of Chafer's Bibliology Proper, compared with pre-thought paradigms, retrieve the primitive approach to Scripture?" It utilizes the retrieval and reappropriation method for historical research (Bradley and Muller 2016, 1). As a controlled historical method, retrieval and reappropriation balance studies in church history and systematic theology (Coon 2025, 2), focusing on (1) a consideration of historical pre-thought paradigms as the precursor to the Chaferian conception of

Bibliology Proper, (2) an evaluation of three contra-Chaferian paradigms dialectically associated with Chafer, (3) a retrieval of Chafer's Bibliology Proper and philosophical pre-thought, and 4) an exegetical case study of opposing systems.

Focusing on Bibliology Proper as opposed to bibliology, and seminal pre-thought rather than secondary presuppositions, the study is delimited to be foundational, philosophical, and ontological in its approach to Chafer. By selectively analyzing the granular features of Chafer's Bibliology Proper pre-thought, the Chaferian paradigm reconnects the modern Church with her primitive approach to Scripture. In doing so, the study shows that Chafer's paradigm of supernatural biblicism correlates best with the Christocentric concept contained in and communicated through the New Testament.

1. Introduction

A comparative study of Chafer's Bibliology Proper is necessary because Chaferian scholarship has generally addressed matters of pneumatology, eschatology, and dispensationalism. These studies treat Chafer's bibliology without addressing his Bibliology Proper. Little research has covered Chafer's pre-thought of Scripture and his subsequent Bibliology Proper, from his primary writings.¹ Seminal studies of Chaferian conceptions on Bibliology Proper are almost nonexistent. The following study fills this lacuna by examining how Chafer viewed Scripture before ever visiting the

¹ The following contemporary theological anthologies, which cover influential evangelical systems, fail to treat Chafer and do not even reference him: Hans Frei (1992), *Types of Christian Theology*, Yale University Press; David Ford, ed. (1997), *The Modern Theologians*, Blackwell; Stanley E. Porter and Steven M. Studebaker, eds. (2018), *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views*, InterVarsity.

scriptural text, and how this influenced his exegesis in a manner leading to his retrieval of the primitive position. The elements of the study also demonstrate that parallel paradigms held a far different attitude, leading to a far different approach to the sacred record, proving less compatible with the primitive conception.

2. Retrieving Terms and Times behind Chaferian Bibliology Proper

This study investigates the historical milieu contextualizing Chafer's conception by (1) drafting a careful distinction between key terms, (2) describing three stages of history during which pre-thought paradigms emerged along the theological spectrum, and (3) discerning the historical attitudes and approaches to sacred writ at the height of the third historical stage known as the Battle for the Bible (1919 to 1929).

2.1 Distinguishing Key Terms

2.1.1 Pre-thought

This term refers to a seminal philosophical sense of conscious or unconscious dispositional force preceding and yet leading to preunderstanding. Pre-thought denotes a vital mindset by which one develops a preunderstanding required to formulate a presupposition, which can then produce

propositions, what most people consider to be actual thoughts.² Such propositional thoughts produce practice, “Then having thought, a person can bring forth actions into the external world and thus influence it” (Schaffer 1976, 19). Thought logically and necessarily precludes disposition and deed. The most theological notation of pre-thought could be the ancient words attributed to Augustine:³ “A man must believe something before he can know something” (Nash 1992, 21). Concerning Bibliology Proper, pre-thought represents a person’s “word-view,” how one views the Bible before visiting the Bible. Pre-thought forms a reflective model that organizes and arranges truth claims into linguistic patterns through words.

2.1.2 Preunderstanding

As the philosophical production flows from seminal pre-thought, preunderstanding is the product of pre-thought. Some authors refer to preunderstanding as a presupposition. Shaeffer (1968, 179) calls it “a prior postulate.” Mental perceptions and propositions spawn from preunderstanding. Preunderstandings can have far-reaching cognitive effects. Once a person embraces a preunderstanding, his “direction and destination are determined” (Nash 1992, 23). Preunderstanding extends to one’s presuppositions of the Bible, which is defined here as Bibliology Proper.

² Comparative conceptions are set forth in Moreland’s (2006, 309) “noetic involvement” and Groothuis’s (2000, 273) “propositional attitude.” Moreland (2006, 309–21) discusses and defends his view based upon “simple seeing” or “awareness,” noting that while pre-thought can be influenced by constructivism and epistemic closure, nevertheless it remains viable and open to adjustment by conceptual or propositional judgments because of “attendant influence.”

³ This ancient quote is widely ascribed to Augustine by scholars, including Nash and others.

2.1.3 Bibliology

As a subcategory within systematic theology, bibliology is the formal doctrine or study of the Bible (Shedd 2003, 85). For this research project, this branch of theology must be distinguished from the primary category of Bibliology Proper.

2.1.4 Bibliology Proper

Bibliology Proper is best understood by juxtaposing it with bibliology. While bibliology is the systematic study of the precepts of the Bible, Bibliology Proper is the seminal study of pre-thoughts about the Bible. While bibliology represents a singular yet broad doctrine of theology, Bibliology Proper represents a basic discipline of thought essential to foundational postulates. Bibliology Proper is the more germinal pre-thought out of which the more general positions of bibliology issue. While bibliology concerns itself with what the Bible says and how it should be read, Bibliology Proper concerns itself with what the Bible is and how it should be revered before its reading. Bibliology Proper might best be understood as a study in “pre-hermeneutics,” “pre-exegesis,” and “pre-bibliology.” It is compared with Montgomery’s (1981) “Bibliographical Induction,” in which certain assumptions are fixed before approaching the text itself, and Thomas’s (2004, 176) “Biblical Logic.” According to Thomas (2004, 176–77), the latter represents a foundational logic enabled by regeneration impacting how one approaches the text.

Bibliology Proper treats Scripture as an ontologically oriented text. For example, 2 Peter 1:20–21 addresses pre-thought about Bibliology Proper.⁴

⁴ That this text is chiefly concerned with the origin and *ontos* of the Scripture is signaled by the function of the postpositive explanatory conjunction followed by the negative and positive defense set forth in verse 21. Kistemaker (1987, 271–72) gives a sound defense of this position.

Contextually, the apostle's chief concern is *τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες*, “knowing this first”—a proto or prior knowledge about the Bible. A *prima facie* knowledge rooted in pre-thought as it relates to the source or origin of Scripture. Respecting the text, John Calvin (1855b, 162) prioritizes pre-thought, observing that “our minds are to be prepared, if we really wish to make progress in scriptural knowledge.” Here is the biblical and logical connection between pre-thought and Bibliology Proper as historically expressed.

2.2 Describing Three Stages of Historical Pre-thought

2.2.1 The Primitive Period of Pre-thought and Bibliology Proper

The ancient Christian conception of Scripture “originated in the career of Jesus of Nazareth” (Barrett 1970, 389). Jesus conveyed his conative view of the Old and New Testaments and inaugurated a new Christocentric apprehension and authority to the sacred writings of his day (Dockery 1992, 24–25). His conceptual approach to both testaments became the early Church’s foundation for the nature and authority of sacred writ. Christ thus provides the foundation for all Christian philosophy concerning approaching God’s Word. He became the ancient answer to the question, “Who is the authority behind the authority of the text?” Therefore, the person of Christ must be allowed to set the context for subsequent conceptions. This is true because Jesus’s pre-thought perspective did not end with his ascension. It transitioned to govern the early Church’s Bibliology Proper. Jesus became the authority authorizing the authority of Scripture (Dockery 1998, 100).

The apostles viewed the Old and New Testaments through the lens of Christ himself. This apostolic Christocentricity implies not only

that Jesus's person is the primary feature of biblical interpretation but also that Christ's pre-thought personifies the foundational biblical interpreter governing how all subsequent interpreters are to approach the text. As such, Christ himself becomes the hermeneutical control for how others should first approach Scripture from a philosophical perspective to apprehend Scripture from a pragmatic perspective (Dockery 1998, 101). Consistent with the Christological conception, the early Church fathers perceived "that God is the author of Scripture in all its breadth and depth and that it is, therefore, authoritative and errorless" (Craig 1999, 50). The incarnate Christ, rather than the institutional Church, constituted the authority defining the authority of Scripture. This primitive conception transitioned from the early Church to the great sages of premodernity.

2.2.2 The Pre-modern Period of Pre-thought and Bibliology Proper

The preeminent figures of the pre-modern period were Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. All three sages adopted the pre-thought of Christ and the Christocentric conception of New Testament Bibliology Proper. Augustine conveys his own conative conception of the Bible in a letter to Jerome, "I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error." He then adds that he accepts biblical accuracy and authority *prima facie*, "without questioning the trustworthiness of its statements" (1886, 351). He does so because he operates from a philosophical perspective of faith pre-thought consistent with Christ. Commenting on the seminal proto-knowledge text of 2 Peter 1:21, Luther (1972b, 275) affirms his faith-pre-thought: "We attribute to the Holy Spirit all of Holy Scripture." Luther approaches the Bible without reservation of its absolute inspiration,

infallibility, and authority because, as Eugene Klug (1971, 23–24) reflects, Luther’s pre-thought constitutes “child-like trust” in which he feels no need to investigate the text rationally but simply “to bow down” reverentially to the sacred record. For Luther, faith in divine revelation precludes human rationalism.

Calvin’s faith pre-thought concurs with and conveys that of his predecessors. Through an *a priori* conception before approaching the sacred text, one must affirm the existence of God and the essence of Scripture as divine revelation from God. In other words, before one can know the Bible as the Word of God, he must believe the Bible to be the Word of God. This is not mysticism but inner knowledge, which leads to greater intimate knowledge self-authenticated by the being and becoming of Scripture.⁵ True pre-thought faith is therefore never the product of “the thralldom of superstition” but of the “undoubted power of his majesty” which exists only in the sacred writ (Calvin 1960a, 80). Through faith pre-thought, the self-evidence of both God and God’s Word is acknowledged *prima facie*, and both are equally revered. For, as Calvin explains, “the first clause that we owe to the Scripture is the same reverence which we owe to God” (Calvin 1856, 249). Scripture demands the selfsame reverence as that reserved for God because the latter is the sole source and authority of the former (Calvin 1856, 249). Any other approach is unprofitable and unlawful (Calvin 1856, 249).

In his systematic conception, Calvin (1960a, 80) provides what may be the most succinct and sublime description of faith pre-thought relative to Bibliology Proper within historical theology: “We believe neither by our

⁵ “Being” speaks to the ontological essence of what Scripture is. “Becoming” speaks to the ongoing experience of what Scripture is by means of the pious persuasion of the inner testimony of the Spirit.

own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment, we affirm with utter certainty that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men." As if to clarify any confusion as to the essence of his creed, he adds, "We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork" (Calvin 1960a, 80). From Calvin's verbiage, pre-thought faith is a special faith that God alone renders "unambiguous forever" by his Word and stands as "a faith that should be superior to all opinion" of men (Calvin 1960a, 71). This inner conviction of self-evident certitude constitutes a higher heavenly wisdom that transcends human reason or senses because of the "revelation of the Spirit" who stands as the true expositor of his own Word (Calvin 1844, 354).

The confessional statements of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin form the pre-thought of Bibliology Proper in the pre-modern period. Their faith pre-thought of Scripture retrieved and reappropriated the primitive conception of Christ and his apostles. By viewing Scripture through the Christocentric lens, they perceive the Bible as a supernatural book rather than a natural book. Being a supernatural book, the Bible deserves to be approached with the same reverence as should be afforded its divine author. Working from this noetic notion of Bibliology Proper, all elements of bibliology demand that the true student of Scripture must read and theologize the sacred text from above rather than from below, that is, from the perspective of divine revelation rather than human reason. But this premodern view would soon be challenged.

2.2.3 The Modern Period of Pre-thought and Bibliology Proper

From premodernity to modernity, a major shift occurred in how individuals approached the Bible. This philosophical-theological change erupted into a conflict that one historian called “The Battle for the Bible” (Lindsell 1976). This controversy over what the Bible is and how the Bible should be approached was fought between two polarizing camps—liberalism and fundamentalism. Both camps reacted to the rise of German rationalism.⁶ While historians generally fix the period of modernity from 1870 through the 1970s, this study restricts its focus to the decade of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy: 1919–1929 (Marsden 1975, 122). Amidst this controversy, in 1924, Chafer founded what became Dallas Theological Seminary. Less than ten years after this period, Chafer began working on his eight-volume *Systematic Theology*, first printed in 1947.⁷

During modernity, theological liberalism received German rationalism with its higher-critical approach to the Bible as a natural book.⁸ Fundamentalists rejected German rationalism and sought to retrieve and reappropriate the premodern perspective of the Bible as a supernatural book. The former adopted a Bibliology Proper from below in which the

6 Identifying the primary role of German rationalism as the philosophical backdrop for what would become the Battle for the Bible does not insinuate that it was the exclusive feature of the Enlightenment. Romanticism played a significant role in Enlightenment thought and in various forms of liberal theology.

7 Thus, the modern literature of that decade and the sources immediately leading to it provide a sufficient sample of all subsequent modern compositions and specifically occasions the historical *Sitz im Leben* for the discussion of Chafer and his contemporaries.

8 Higher criticism has been understood as a naturalistic epistemological approach to Scripture logically derived from the philosophical presumptions of rationalism. It is the belief that man, via the disciplines of science, “can approach the facts of the universe, including the Bible, with a neutral mind, and pronounce a just judgment upon them” (Young 1949, 6).

Bible was approached through human reason. The latter adopted a Bibliology Proper from above in which the Bible was approached through divine revelation. Thus, the Battle for the Bible was a conflict waged over two philosophical-theological perspectives of the Bible and how the Scriptures should be approached. Liberals rejected the ancient and premodern perspectives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Fundamentalists received the ancient and premodern perspectives of the three great sages. Chafer would align himself with the latter camp, especially with a specific group known as the Princetonians. The Princetonians were Biblicists governed by the philosophical persuasion known as Princetonian or Scottish Realism. Conversely, Chafer's opponents would take sides with the former camp. Chaferian Bibliology Proper was therefore a Christocentric conception rooted in the faith pre-thought of supernatural revelation. Conversely, contra-Chaferian Bibliology Proper was an anthropocentric conception rooted in the faith pre-thought of naturalistic reason. This philosophical polarity forged a chasm on the hermeneutical spectrum between historical-grammatical exegesis and historical-critical exegesis. While Chafer embraced the former, his counterparts seized upon the latter.

3. Three Contra-Chaferian Pre-thought Paradigms and Bibliology Proper

The historical creedal aphorism concerning Bibliology Proper, *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*, remained foundational from Jesus to the apostles and from the primitive church to the premodern Reformers (Dockery 1992, 24–25). It was a *prima facie* assumption that the Bible is the word of God in truth. As such, the Bible's authority resides in the actual words of the text

itself. This view was the dominant conviction of Christianity for the first 1700 years of the Church (Preus 1980, 357). Thus, despite a waning of this conviction during the Middle Ages, Luther and his fellow Reformers revived the concept of *sola Scriptura* without considering themselves revolutionaries (Craig 1999, 50). Ancient Bibliology Proper presupposed an epistemological approach to sacred writ in which theologizing was exercised “from above” within a theistic framework as opposed to “from below” within a naturalistic perspective. Accordingly, bibliology was Christocentric, and the Bible was itself a supernatural revelation of its divine author.

But with the post-Reformation rise of Enlightenment pre-thought, the ancient rule of the Christocentric approach to Bibliology Proper was rivaled by a new critical rationalism spawned by the new philosophy of naturalistic humanism with its guiding principle of *homo mensura*. Rationalistic pre-thought marginalized God, humanized the Bible, and magnified man’s reason in the exegetical endeavor. Theocentric theology was replaced with a purely anthropocentric epistemology. Man became the measure in this new attitude toward and approach to the Bible. As such, divine writ was subjugated to the mind of man, with man’s reason and experience assuming hermeneutical control (Moreland 1999, 97–101). From the modern soil of a new Bibliology Proper pre-thought, three anti-primitive views grew into the critical approaches of three modern theologians.

3.1 Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher’s pre-thought postulates a novel paradigm in which revelation is defined in terms of the expression of religious feeling and a sense of absolute dependence upon God (Ford 1997, 8). Schleiermacher’s naturalistic pre-thought fostered a philosophical preunderstanding defined

as mystical-historicism (Cains 1981, 101). Working from a neo-mystical pre-thought, Schleiermacher postulates an existential mysticism that is the vehicle through which a person comes to know truth and experience God. He affirms his mystical pre-thought in his cardinal confession, “Christian doctrines are accounts of Christian religious affections set forth in speech” (1976, 76). Adding that theology is not formed by revelatory truth but by “every determinate mode of faith” or faith expression (Schleiermacher 1963, 91), this pre-thought of religion and revelation is so mystical in orientation as to require a special hermeneutic called “art-doctrine” (Schleiermacher 1963, 142). The nature of the Bible presupposes this mystical “art-doctrine” because, according to Schleiermacher’s mysticism, real doctrine is perceived as *Glubenssatz* (a sentence of belief awareness) as opposed to *Glaubenssache* (a matter or statement of faith opinion). The latter is a mere opinion presented in proposition. Such propositional truth lacks authority because it is not authentic revelation. The former is a real sense of pious awareness realized in religious experience. Pious feeling becomes the home of all truth, the locus of revelation itself, as Schleiermacher perceives revelation concerning Bibliology Proper. Thus, his mystical pre-thought of Scripture determines his hermeneutical practice in Scripture, with both representing a departure from the primitive and pre-modern Christocentric pre-thought.

3.2 Barth

In reaction to Schleiermacherian mysticism, Enlightenment rationalism, and German liberalism, Barth forged a pre-thought paradigm described as a “rethinking and restating” of Reformational principles (Torrance 1968, 8). As such, Barth’s system represents an early effort in retrieval and reappropriation (Sarisky 2017, 1). Barth sought to reorient his audience with a pre-modern, word-centered paradigm (Stahl 1980, 125). In this philosophical

context, Barth postulates a naturalistic pre-thought that morphs into a preunderstanding of Bibliology Proper that may be classified as revelational or eschatological existentialism within the framework of his *triplex verbum*. Barth (1975, 213) reflects the faith pre-thought of his system when he says, “The reality of the Word of God in all its three forms is based only upon itself.” From this basis, Stahl (1980, 125) describes the philosophical essence of Barth’s faith pre-thought by stating that his bibliological paradigm was assumed “strictly by faith” to the extent that “he offers no defense and little explanation for its validity.” To this extent, Barth’s perspectival pre-thought reflects premodern pre-thought, being “word-centered,” and yet packaged in a naturalistic critical hermeneutic (Congdon 2019, 2).

3.3 Pannenberg

Highly influenced by Gerhard von Rad, Pannenberg devises a unique historio-centric pre-thought for Bibliology Proper that preconceives Scripture through a natural lens in which revelation is pure history (Pannenberg 1991, 21). He labels his revelational system *Heilsgeschichte* (1970, 56). From this pre-thought perspective, Pannenberg’s bibliology constitutes a “from below” pre-thought paradigm that apprehends and approaches the biblical writings through a historical-critical lens as “fallible interpreted divine actions” (Sanders 2014, 2–3). According to Henry (1979, 300), this marginalizes the actual words of Scripture as outside the scope of revelation. True history and true revelation fall into the “doxological” sphere rather than space-time (Pannenberg 1977, 395–98). By entirely emptying revelation into proleptic “historical event,” Pannenberg posits a hermeneutical methodology operative “from below” rather than “from above.” As such, his system rejects “direct self-revelation” in favor of “indirect revelation” as “historical event.” Pannenberg’s (1991, 241) pre-thought postulates a

Bibliology Proper that not only rejects “Word of God” paradigms but also the actual words within the Word of God because they convey “the magical or Gnostic view.” In Pannenberg’s (1968b, 13) words, “Instead of a direct self-revelation of God, the facts at this point indicate a conception of indirect self-revelation as a reflex of his activity in history.” This reflexive notion means that truth is not discovered by direct proposition or proclamation but through the indirect means of historical inquiry into the “events” of the past and present, with this inquiry being reserved in anticipation of the ultimate “eschaton event” as history. In rejecting propositional Word of God conceptions as magical notions, in favor of realized proleptic historicism, Pannenberg’s pre-thought historicism and critical practice represent a naturalistic departure from the primitive and premodern paradigms which Chafer strove to retrieve and reappropriate in his day.

4. Chaferian Pre-thought and Bibliology Proper

In sharp contrast to the foregoing paradigms, Chafer preconceived a Bibliology Proper which he viewed as reformed biblicism (1976, 21). Biblicism constitutes the philosophical foundation upon which he erects his entire Bibliology Proper and his subsequent bibliology. For Chafer, biblicism is rudimentary, primary, and essential for a proper perspective and attitude of the Bible. Only the biblicist can make “any approach” to the knowledge of Scripture (Chafer 1976, 21). According to Chafer, the biblicist adheres to a philosophical attitude and approach that first and foremost firmly believes in the divine character of the entire text of the Bible (Chafer 1976, 21). He explains that the biblicist is “the one who not only regards the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice, but as the only dependable source of information in realms wherein divine revelation speaks” (Chafer 1976, 7). Chafer’s Bibliology Proper depends upon the logical assumption

of “the essential character of divine revelation.” Philosophical biblicism presupposes that the discipline of Bibliology Proper must “proceed upon the certitude that the Scriptures are the Oracles of God” (Chafer 1976, 7).

Chafer’s conception of biblicism is so essential that those who reject the foundational premises of biblicism are unfit to approach the Bible (Chafer 1976, 21). As Chafer sees it, the non-biblicist who entertains arguments or evidence contrary to the Bible as “divinely inspired” is engaging from the start in an unscientific process of “extrabiblical criticism” that departs from the Bible as the Bible (Chafer 1976, 21). Thus, from the start, the firm philosophy of biblicism is necessary even to begin the theologizing of Scripture (Chafer 1976, 21). Biblicism is therefore the only proper disposition of the “devout mind” before ever reading the Bible to properly apprehend the Bible. It is imperative to approach the text as a philosophical biblicist based upon the Bible’s “own worthy claims” (Chafer 1976, 21).⁹

From Chafer’s perspective, this approach is valid because biblicism alone accepts *prima facie* the self-evident testimony (πασα γραφή θεόπνευστος) as a doctrinal dictum that stands beyond question in the mind of the

⁹ While this may appear to be circular reasoning on Chafer’s part, one must remember that circular reasoning does not relate to self-evident or *prima facie* truth. Chafer’s willingness to accept the Bible’s “own worthy claims” is, for him, an *a priori* proposition of divine revelation. Consistent with Calvin and Warfield, his reasoning is rooted in the self-evident attestation of Scripture. To be sure, Barth shares a similar noetic notion: “The reality of the Word of God in all its three forms is based only upon itself. So, too, knowledge of it by men can consist only in acknowledgement of it, and this acknowledgement can only become real through the word itself ...” (1955, 213).

biblicist (Chafer 1976, 21).¹⁰ Accordingly, from the perspective of Bibliology Proper, the disposition of biblicism constitutes the philosophical premise driving the purpose of bibliology to clarify the pre-thought of Bibliology Proper (Chafer 1976, 21).

As in the case of Schleiermacher, Barth, and Pannenberg, Chafer's specific pre-thought of Bibliology Proper determined his theological practice of bibliology. His philosophical biblicism influenced his hermeneutic and rejected all forms of historical-critical methodology in favor of a literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic reverencing the actual words of the sacred text. Contrasted with his counterparts, Chafer's philosophical biblicism proposes a true retrieval and reappropriation of the ancient systems, reorienting the Church with the primitive and premodern paradigm. The contrasting pre-thought paradigms of Bibliology Proper are reflected in the interpretive approaches each system takes to 2 Timothy 3:16.

5. Comparing Exegetical Approaches to 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16 represents the true *sedes doctrinae* of sacred writ. Mounce (2000, 565) centralizes its historical priority, "Through the centuries this verse has played a central role in the church's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture." Thus, the weight of 2 Timothy 3:16 warrants critical analysis at this juncture. The structure of this evaluation will not give a comprehensive

¹⁰ Objections based upon similar claims by adherents of other religions commit the fallacy of false analogy by failing to recognize that similar claims are not synonymous claims (Virkler, 1993, 207). While those of other faiths make claims similar in statement, they are by no means synonymous in subject or substance. Since Scripture is God's sole revelation, attested by Christ, there cannot be analogous authorities. But since such a question is more in line with apologetics than historical retrieval, it falls into a different discipline.

interpretation of the text but will measure the historical interpretation of the selected theologians, deducing which best retrieves the primitive paradigm. A concluding “Measurement Matrix” closes the section.

Smith (2010, 95–96) notes that 2 Timothy 3:16–17 contains several difficulties that have made it the subject of much scholarly debate. While various lists of these difficulties have been given for decades (Robertson 1931; Hendricksen 1957; Guthrie 1967; Lea 1992; Smith 2010), this writer chooses to treat eight of them, all of which fall within the first five words of verse 16. They are listed as follows: (1) The meaning of θεόπνευστος; (2) The modal force of θεόπνευστος; (3) The modifying force of θεόπνευστος; (4) The sense of the irregular adjective Πᾶσα; (5) The contextual identity of γραφή; (6) The syntactical location of the copulative ἐστιν; (7) The grammatical force of καὶ; and (8) The grammatical association of the adjective ὠφέλιμος. The following chart reflects how each specimen’s philosophical pre-thought and subsequent exegetical practice bears on their approach to the major issues within the words below:

Πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος (2 Timothy 3:16a)

MEASURING MATRIX

8 Interpretive Difficulties

2 Timothy 3:16

	Chafer	Schleiermacher		Pannenberg
D1	Plain	Mystical		Indirect
D2	Passive	Abstract	Both	Historical

D3	Predicate	Abstract		Process
D4	Plural	Universal		Singular
D5	Inclusive	Exclusive		Exclusive
D6	Before	After	N/A	N/A
D7	Conjunctive	N/A	N/A	N/A
D8	Undetermined	Undetermined		Undetermined

6. Conclusion

Through a comparison of Chafer's historical-philosophical pre-thought with three select contra-Chaferian perspectives, followed by an exegetical critique of each interlocutor's exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16, this study summarizes which paradigm best retrieves and reappropriates the primitive and premodern paradigm of Bibliology Proper. Operating from the pre-thought of supernatural theism, the philosophical-theological thesis of Chafer proposes that the primitive and premodern paradigm was grounded in philosophical biblicism and can be governed only by continuing in the historical tradition of philosophical biblicism by means of a "from above" approach to and apprehension of Scripture. Conversely, operating from the pre-thought of rationalistic naturalism, Chafer's opponents postulate that even though the primitive and premodern paradigm was grounded in ancient biblicism, Bibliology Proper can now be reconstructed and refocused through anti-biblicism proposals such as mysticism, neo-revelationism, or proleptic historicism employing a "from below" approach and apprehension of Scripture.

By philosophical-theological differentiation, the comparative analysis demonstrates that Chafer's return to and restating of ancient biblicism during the historical Battle for the Bible reorients the Church with a "from above" exegesis, retrieving and reappropriating the Church's primitive and premodern heritage of Christocentric Bibliology Proper. Holding to primitive and premodern conceptions, Chafer's paradigm demands a rejection of the pluralistic pre-thought of modern naturalism by recognizing the philosophical, exegetical, and theological departures of modernism leading to the progressive pluralism of postmodernism. His paradigm invites the Church to retrieve and reappropriate the primitive and premodern pre-thought of supernatural theism through the exegetical practice of Reformed biblicism exercised through the literal historical-grammatical method. Chafer's solution provides the Church with a systematic philosophical-theological pre-thought paradigm of Bibliology Proper in which she can rediscover her primitive and premodern attitude and approach of reverencing, reading, and responding to the Bible through faith pre-thought. By such reorientation, Chafer helps put the Battle for the Bible to rest by retrieving and reappropriating the ancient axioms of *sola Scriptura* and *Sacra Scriptura est verbum Dei*.

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Strategies Towards Conflict Transformation Within Local Congregations Associated with Aberdare Baptist Convention Congregations in Central Kenya

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Abstract

Conflict transformation is essential for the growth and Christian testimony of a local church. This study examines strategies to promote harmony within congregations affiliated with the Aberdare Baptist Convention (ABC) in central Kenya. Although the ABC operates mainly in the Kikuyu region, its proximity to Nairobi gives it a diverse, cosmopolitan atmosphere. Internal conflicts—often caused by misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Baptist beliefs—have led to the split of many congregations.

Guided by the research question, “What strategies might contribute to conflict transformation in congregations within the ABC?”, the study used Grounded Theory to gather and analyze data from 24 congregational leaders with leadership experience. Participants identified leadership

disputes, organizational tensions, denominational disagreements, and ethnocentrism as common types of conflict that threaten congregational unity. Root causes included spiritual immaturity, lack of church discipline, and insufficient understanding of church polity.

Findings emphasize the theological importance of Baptist church polity, including local church autonomy and the priesthood of all believers, as core to resolving conflicts. These principles encourage respectful treatment of everyone, peer mediation, restorative church discipline, and, when needed, pastoral or denominational intervention through ecclesial leadership.

The research offers a contextually based “Seven-Step Conflict Transformation Circle,” which includes: identifying the conflict, recognizing key players, selecting a mediator, developing a mediation process, redefining relationships, planning follow-up, and acknowledging the cyclical nature of congregational conflict. This model combines theological beliefs with practical mediation steps, providing a repeatable framework for strengthening unity and witness within ABC congregations and potentially in similar church settings.

1. Introduction

This thesis examines conflict transformation within local congregations associated with Aberdare Baptist Convention (ABC) in Central Kenya. ABC comprises autonomous local congregations. Baptist polity’s emphasis on the autonomy of the local church creates an antinomy, such as a paradox between pastoral leadership and congregational decision-making (Reni 2021, 21). Autonomous local congregations within associations differ in

their emphases: some seek independence from any other body, while others emphasize cooperation with other congregations.

The research focuses on congregational conflict in relation to polity and develops strategies to foster unity within the local congregation and within its association within ABC. It seeks to answer the question “What strategies might contribute to conflict transformation in congregations within ABC?”

The motivation for the research arose from the challenges that I encountered as a local church pastor, a leader within the Kiambu Baptist Association, and as the Moderator of the ABC. With these leadership roles, I encountered conflicts that were either destructive or helped in strengthening relationships of the parties involved.

The value of this study comes from the understanding that Christian communities are not free from conflict. The conflict arises due to differences in backgrounds, personalities, and ideas within any human group. Conflict transformation within a congregation promotes peaceful coexistence among church members as they solidify their identity and set boundaries for how they relate to one another (Koroma 2021, 98–100).

The study used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect data. The choice of FGDs was informed by the understanding that FGDs help derive insights into participants’ collective views, present a clear understanding of their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions, and identify and share their opinions on the subject (Shabina et al. 2024, 303).

To achieve the purpose, Osmer’s (2008) model of theological research was applied. This model offers four tasks. The first task is descriptive, which seeks to answer the question “What is going on?” The second task is interpretive, aiming to answer the question “Why is it going on?” The third task is the normative task that helps in answering the question “Why

is it going on?” The fourth task is the strategic task that seeks to answer the question “What needs to be going on? (2008, Loc. 93–3256).

The choice of this mode is that it is helpful in practical theology research that handles questions shaped by both secular and religious practices. It also helps in understanding and reflecting on religious practices while utilizing social science theories (Tucker 2004, 230; Ward 2017, loc. 92–189).

Grounded theory (GT) was applied in data correction and analysis. GT focuses on comparing data with data, data with concepts, and concepts with concepts (Howitt and Cramer, 2011, 333–334). During FGD meetings, the contributions of the interviewees were recorded to ensure that the group atmosphere was not disrupted and to assess the accuracy of members’ contributions (Dilshad and Latif 2013, 195–196). Data collected from the interviews were transcribed shortly after each interview. This was followed by coding the data and creating categories (Howitt and Cramer 2005, 348–351).

2. Analysis of the Causes and Nature of Conflict within Churches

The collection and analysis of the data were guided by Osmer’s (2008, Loc. 92–95) first task in the study of practical theology. This task is descriptive, seeking to understand what is happening within local congregations. The task helped identify the state of conflict within churches and bridge the gap between faith and the lived realities in the world (Magezi 2019, 119).

To achieve the purpose of description, leaders from four of the fourteen associations were interviewed. Two of these associations had several congregations facing conflicts that hindered their witness, while two associations had relative harmony within the local congregations

and within the association. The researcher invited the participants based on their experiences and positions within the congregations and the associations. Leaders' involvement made them more open to presenting information (Tausch and Menold 2016, 4).

The following questions were used during FDGs in collecting the data. Each question was designed to address the research inquiries effectively. The aim of asking the questions was to address the main research question by narrowing it to specific details (Creswell and Creswell, 2020, 155). Each question was treated independently and analyzed to present the findings comprehensively.

- i. What are the major conflicts that you have observed within congregations in your association?
- ii. What do you believe are the root causes of such conflicts?
- iii. What are the challenges that you anticipate in handling conflicts within congregations in your association?
- iv. What do you think should be done to overcome such challenges?
- v. How can local congregations within your association be empowered to handle the conflicts that arise among their members?
- vi. What role does denominational leadership play in conflict transformation within ABC?
- vii. How might leaders within ABC be trained or supported to handle conflicts effectively?

The use of GT helped avoid the absorption of information that was not perceived as relevant to the research. It also helped the research in paying attention to what was said, expressed and what was not (Fisher 2011, 50). The examples some participants presented were not presented in the final draft.

The data were analyzed using open and axial coding. The open coding included labeling of concepts, defining them, and developing categories. This coding assisted in identifying, organizing, and building theories. It also facilitated the interpretation and creation of meaning (Mohajan and Mohajan 2022, 51).

Open coding led to axial coding, which provided the data with more precise explanations (Copellos and Tonelli 2020, 54). The following themes emerged from each of the seven research questions presented to the participants.

Conflicts observed	Root Causes
Leadership – 5 Codes Church organizations – 6 codes Denominational leadership structures – 4 codes Spiritual immaturity – 6 Codes Ethnocentric – 2 Codes	Spiritual immaturity – 7 Codes 2. Lack of church discipline – 5 Codes 3. Misunderstanding of church polity – 5 Codes ,
Challenges in handling congregational conflicts	Ways to Overcome Challenges

Fear of losing members – 6 Codes Lack of skills in conflict transformation – 7 Codes Lack of clear leadership structures – 4 Codes Financial implications – 2 Codes	Intentional discipleship Enhancing denominational polity - 3 Codes Developing strong denominational leadership structures – 5 Codes Empowering leaders on conflict transformational strategies – 6 Codes
Ways of empowering church leaders to participate in the Conflict transformation process	Roles of denomination leadership in conflict transformation
Discipleship programs – 5 Codes Strengthening of pastors' fellowship – 2 Codes Empowering leaders on conflict transformation – 7 Codes	Mediation through presence – 4 Codes Mediation through denominational polity – 3 Codes Mediation through leadership training – 4 Codes

Ways of empowering Congregational leaders on conflict transformation	
Forming a conflict transformation team – 2 Codes Developing intentional conflict transformation training programs - 2 Codes	

3. Historical Factors that Influence Conflict Transformation in ABC

The historical factors are informed by Osmer’s second task, which is descriptive in its approach to practical theological research. It seeks to answer the question “What is going on? This leads to a description of the historical factors that have influenced leaders in handling conflicts in local churches associated with ABC.

One factor that has influenced conflict transformation is the application of congregationalism. The concept of the autonomy of the local congregations is based on the understanding that all believers are priests, and so the church consists of the priesthood of believers. This then leads to the knowledge that decision-making within a congregation should involve all believers. Autonomy is therefore not democracy but “Christocracy,” which means that the rule of Christ guides all functions and relationships

within a congregation and in members' private lives. This authority, however, has been delegated to pastors and deacons (Norman 2005, 56; Weaver 2014, 79).

The concept of the autonomy of the local church faces challenges, including a lack of accountability among members, unclear boundaries in the execution of church tasks, and a lack of cooperation among leaders (Afolaranmi 2022, 12).

A lack of understanding of the local church's autonomy distracts the church from exalting Christ and carrying out its mission to the world. Some people may feel that no one, within or outside the congregation, can question their shortcomings (Pendleton 2018, Loc 1612–1616). Some think that congregationalism means that one can believe whatever they wish, regardless of what the guidance of Baptist bodies such as associations or conventions (Shotwell 1997, 245).

A second challenge is applying the concept of the priesthood of believers to conflict. The priesthood of believers means that each believer relates directly to God through prayers, worship, meditation, trust, and obedience. This, however, comes with a responsibility to serve others. The concept of the priesthood of believers stems from the understanding of the offices of the priest and the prophet in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Christ became the Chief Priest and functions as a prophet.

This leads believers to understand that they are to be Christlike in their personal and corporate lives. Spiritual maturity among members can strengthen the concept of the priesthood of believers, in which each person recognizes that they can receive messages from God through Christ on matters of faith and relationships, as described in the diagram below.

The priesthood of believers has caused challenges in times of congregational conflicts. This has been due to misconceptions, such as

viewing pastors as employees of the church who minister to the members (employers) rather than as ministers called by God. This misconception creates a gap between pastors and members. Congregational conflicts are affected by the belief in the priesthood of believers when members are viewed as customers rather than disciples, leading the church to put a lot of energy into pleasing them rather than helping them grow in their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ (McNally 2018, 48–52).

The third factor influencing congregational conflict is the leadership model within Baptist churches. Priesthood of believers does not mean that members are at liberty to govern themselves in fashion (Norman 2005, 85).

The fourth factor is the administration of church discipline. Church discipline has been omitted in modern Baptist life. The neglect of church discipline hampers constructive conflict resolution. It has often been seen as punitive rather than restorative. This has been due to a lack of proper models for leaders to follow, a shortage of genuine fellowship among believers, misunderstandings about the roles of pastors and elders, a lack of conviction that discipline is helpful, and the overinfluence of a permissive culture (Norman 2004, 64).

Church discipline helps in protecting God's children from harm. The protection of church members should be the responsibility of the pastor, who will be accountable to God. To administer church discipline, pastors need to do so in love to protect the fellowship. This is to be done with empathy toward the person who is in the wrong. It should also leave space for embracing the person in the wrong.

4. Leaders' Perception of the Need for Unity Through Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is also affected by leaders' perception of the need for unity. This perception is based on Osmer's interpretive task. It is derived from the question "What processes have been historically used in ABC to seek conflict resolution and transformation?" The following are some of the leaders' perceptions.

Believers' unity is a gift and a task from God. It is a gift given by Christ to believers. It is a task that God expects his children to pursue (Ryan 2015,12). It is also a precious blessing. Divisions in the church could cause it to sink, where some members become Satan's devise against the church (Burgess 2019, 12). Christian unity is the lifeblood of a congregation. It leads the church to good organization, direction, and coordination as members communicate effectively (Reidhead 2021, 268).

Believers' unity can be enhanced through praying for it, members' empathizing with one another, members' commitment to the well-being of the church, and members continued building of existing unity (Burgess 2019, 22–25).

Another area of leaders' perception is conflicts involving the leaders. Disputes related to leadership stem from leaders' attitudes and skills, which negatively affect them. Leaders may feel isolated and utterly empty when engaged in a conflict (Howard and Fenimore 2024, 17).

When entangled in a conflict, leaders must apply biblical principles such as humility, avoiding defensiveness, not shifting blame, forgiveness, and bearing with others. They should understand that sin involves a sinful person misperceiving, misjudging, misunderstanding, and miscommunicating (Priolo 2016, 19–22). As much as one cannot change

others, leaders should understand that they are responsible for their own actions, attitudes, and behavior.

Challenges in propagating church unity are another problem that leaders face when dealing with conflict. Some of the challenges that pastors and other church leaders encounter when dealing with conflict include frustration when the results of their labor are delayed for a significant period or are absent altogether. It can also occur when people become hostile towards the leader.

Another challenge is hopelessness, in which the leader feels that people may be presenting their cases to a larger audience, both within and outside the congregation, rather than to the leader. Hopelessness, at times, makes the leader seek sympathy even from unbelievers (Bass 2005, 20).

When leaders become frustrated and hopeless, they tend to get to a state of resignation. This type of resignation may not mean leaving the church but staying without attempting to handle any serious issues affecting the members. When encountering resignation, leaders need to understand that God's ultimate purpose is to help them become more like his Son, our Savior! He uses pressure to reveal areas where we are not like our Lord and to teach us to be more dependent on him (Baker 2015, 36).

Confronting challenges with unity has also affected how leaders approach conflict. These challenges emerge as believers seek to practice autonomy and interdependence. To the European Baptists in the seventeenth-century, the autonomy of the local church did not mean isolation but interdependence. The London Confession of Faith and the American Philadelphia Confession of 1742 emphasized the need for local congregations to work together (Jones 2012, Ch. 1).

This challenge can be addressed by empowering leaders through theological education with a concentration on conflict transformation training. Leaders need to understand that their empowerment also comes

from their calling. Understanding one's call to ministry can deepen one's devotion and enhance one's ability to foster unity within a local church and with the universal body of Christ.

Leaders' perception of the need for believers' unity can be improved by following a few steps, including confronting the conflict. Conflict ministry is a crucial role for leaders (Gal 5:1–2). Leaders should therefore not avoid conflicts (Hare 2019, 33). They should correct each other in love (Sande 2004, 79–80). Leaders should not overlook minor offenses. They should handle the offences without harboring anger and avoid allowing it to create walls between them and the offenders. Leaders should also consider the costs of unresolved conflict, such as damaged relationships and the consumption of people's time, energy, and money, which can lead to emotional and spiritual exhaustion. Each leader involved in a conflict should also learn to give up their rights. They should do so by remembering that Jesus justifies us, not for the good we have done.

5. Biblical and Christian Theology Teachings About Unity and Conflict Transformation

Osmer's third task is the normative task. It seeks to answer the question "What should be going on?" The Bible and Christian theology can help in understanding how congregations should transform conflict among their members. Baptist communities have historically upheld the Bible as their foundational guide for beliefs and practices. Consequently, applying Scripture is indispensable in determining the appropriate course of action. This section outlines how various theological disciplines can be used to conflict transformation and presents biblical passages that can guide a congregation in handling conflict.

Practical theology is an organization of scripture emphasizing the personal application of the doctrine's truth in the lives of the church and individual Christians (MacArthur and Mayhue 2017, 36). It is a study of the complex relationship between Christian beliefs and actions (Erwich 2020, 25). It critiques and informs church practices in the light of Scripture and Christian dogma (Pritchard 2006, 12). It also helps in interpreting possibilities and issues that Christians face in their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ (Ward 2017, 9–10).

Within the discipline of practical theology, conflict transformation should guide the church into becoming a caring community (McSwain and Treadwell 1981, 9). The scripture is about God's revelation through human history. The Bible records conflicts that arose among God's people from Genesis to Revelation. Practical theology then focuses on the scripture and uses empirical study to improve Christian practices, such as conflict transformation.

Biblical studies offer Christian ways to approach conflicts. As with any other human relationship, the Bible indicates that conflicts will arise among Christians. An example is Paul's address to the Corinthians' church (1 Cor 11:19). Scripture also calls believers to be actively involved in handling conflict (Gal 6:1–2, Heb 10:25, James 5:16).

The following principles in handling conflict can be derived from the New Testament. (1) Peace within Christian communities must be worked for, as indicated in Ephesians 4:1–3. For believers to achieve peace, they should work toward unity with humility and patience, and bear with one another (Talbert 2007, 107–108). (2) The duty to handle conflict within Christian fellowships is a duty of all believers (Rom 12:17–21). While leaders have the most significant responsibility for handling conflict, their main task is to strengthen internal relationships within the fellowship (Ruggerio 2023,

14). (3) Conflict should be handled with urgency. In Galatians 2:11–14, Paul confronted Peter right at the point where he segregated the Gentiles to please some Jews. This he did without haste. Paul's silence at this event would precipitate a rupture that could have lasting consequences for his relationship with some other Jewish Christians (Gaventa and Wanamaker 2021, 5). (4) Christians should not avoid conflict but should follow a process that Jesus prescribed in Matthew 18:15–17. Francis, Jones, and Hebden (2019, 2) highlight the process as having four steps. Handling the conflict should first involve the two parties directly. If not settled, the offended person will take two witnesses who should carefully listen to the explanation of what happened to determine whether the parties are earnestly attempting to reconcile or are determined to obstruct the path to harmony. If the conflict is not resolved at this point, the whole church should be involved. If the conflict is not resolved at this stage, the offender is treated like a Gentile or a tax collector, meaning they are entirely isolated. The church, on the other hand, should continue caring for the offender just as it cares for the poor and the needy.

In the book of Philemon, Paul took courage to plead with Philemon to reconcile with Onesimus, a runaway slave. Paul wrote to Philemon to unconditionally forgive Onesimus (Akin and Pace 2021, 148). Believers should learn from Paul to take courage to intervene in times of conflict.

Another theological discipline that can be applied to conflict transformation is systematic theology. The following are themes in systematic theology that can help with conflict transformation.

One theme is the doctrine of creation. This doctrine presents God as the Creator of heaven and earth, and God's later acts of creation to win the already existing world order. The harmony that is found in creation is

to glorify God. Conflict transformation should be informed by the order of creation, leading to the understanding that Christians should strive to live in harmony with one another.

The doctrine of the Trinity, which describes God as one in three persons (Matt 28:19–20; 1 Cor 12:4–6; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Jn 5:7; 1 Pet 1:1–2), also helps in understanding the need for unity among believers. The image of the Body of Christ should draw believers to live in the unity found in the Trinity.

The doctrine of prophecy leads to the understanding of God calling believers to return to Him. It also gives hope amid suffering and desperation among God's people. God called prophets to bring God's truth to his people for a particular situation (Twongyeirwe 2021, 96). In carrying out their ministry, prophets were reconciling people to God. Prophets demonstrated God's remarkable capacity for forgiveness through repentance and renewal of the hearts of his wayward people. The church needs to learn from the prophets that it must not condone sin that destroys people's fellowship with one another and with God.

Another Christian doctrine that informs the transformation of congregational conflict is salvation. From the beginning, God sought Adam and Eve after the fall, regardless of what they had done against Him. The Bible describes God as doing all that he had to do to reconcile human beings to himself. The death of Jesus on the cross brought eternal life to believers, who would have a standing of righteousness before God (Morton 2021, 5).

Through salvation, believers become regenerated beings, meaning they are made new creatures in Christ (Morton 2012, 7). They are also adopted into God's family, where they become heirs with Christ and have access to all privileges (2021, 10). Believers are also justified in that they do not get the full force of the law for the sin committed. God pronounces

them not guilty because Jesus paid the penalty for their sin through his death on the cross. They are also sanctified, meaning that God continues working in them to make them holy.

Ecclesiology is another doctrine from which conflict transformation can be approached. The church has established a framework essential to cultivating effective relationships among members. God granted leadership to the church, which evolved as the church was established. Conflict affects each level of church leadership.

In conflicts involving pastors, members should handle them with grace, knowing that pastors, too, are human, fallible, and susceptible to internal challenges. Accusations against a pastor should point to sin that warrants public rebuke. The charges should not be vague and should be supported by two or three witnesses. Those who accuse the pastor should be people with the right motive and integrity. Their credibility should be checked. The accusation should not be second-hand information. The process prescribed by Jesus in Matthew 18:15 should be followed and restorative (Shoemaker 2014).

Other conflicts should be handled under the leadership of the pastor, who is accountable to Christ and to the community of faith. The pastor should be careful how he handles parties in conflict. He should demonstrate pastoral authority as he demonstrates God's love to those in conflict. A pastor needs to handle conflict with a conviction that a call to be a pastor is a call to deal with conflict (Baker 2015, 19).

A pastor works with other church officials, such as deacons, whose roles are stipulated in Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Timothy 3:9–13. Deacons are to assist a pastor in addressing people's needs. One of the primary responsibilities in meeting people's needs is intervening in times of conflict.

Within the discipline of church history, conflict can be approached with the understanding that we live under the influence of past decisions

(Gonzalez 1996, 11). The early church faced such conflicts, such as the pretense of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They sold their land and pretended that they had submitted all the money to the Apostles. Their action led to their death, which led to a shock wave of fear that rippled through the church and community (Dwyer and Picirili 2019, 90). Acts 6-7 presents a conflict over ethnicity in the distribution of food among Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking widows. The Christian community developed a program to assist widows, which created tension between the two communities. There were conflicts of organization that led to the first ecumenical council in Acts 15:1–35. This helps in understanding how leaders can approach congregational conflicts.

In church history, conflicts have led to its division. Some of the major conflicts are the Great Schism of the eleventh century. The marriage between the church and the state brought this about. The schism had several causes, including political ones, in which each Eastern Empire had its own bishop. At the same time, Western Europe recognized the bishop of Rome as the church's prominent leader (Charles Rivers, Editors n.d. 27–29). There were also some theological causes, such as Western Europe's teaching on the clergy's celibacy, the nature of the Holy Spirit, and the Eastern Church's teaching that the Holy Spirit came from the Father. At the same time, Western Europe introduced the notion that the Spirit was given by the Father and the Son (the filioque), and, together with the filioque, the doctrine of the Eucharist further divided the Church, with the Roman Church emphasizing the use of unleavened bread. In contrast, the Orthodox Church used leavened bread (Charles River Editors n.d. 32).

Social conflicts also caused division during this time. The Roman Imperial System used Greek as its official language of communication, while Western Europe adopted Latin. Intellectually, the West was dominated by

illiteracy, making it easy for the clergy to control the laity. Teaching Dogmas involved repeating the scripts, which would not be questioned. The East was characterized by a high level of literacy, enabling the laity to interpret complex religious teachings (Charles River Editors n.d. 33).

During the Reformation Period, several conflicts arose between the Roman Church and the reformers as well as among the reformers themselves. The radical reformers believed that Martin Luther sought to reform the Roman Church from within. Still, the radical reformers (Anabaptists) emphasized believers' baptism which led to a separation from the Roman church (Loewen 2006, 23–24).

Baptists have a long history of division. In the seventeenth-century, the Baptists were divided into two groups, the Puritans and Separatists. These groups also split over theological issues, leading to the formation of the General and Particular Baptists. The General Baptists emphasized general atonement while the Particular Baptists emphasized particular atonement (Hudson 2024, Origins section).

6. Application of Church Polity in Conflict Transformation

This section focuses on strategies that can be developed and applied in conflict transformation within a congregation. It is based on Osmer's strategic task. It presents different approaches to transforming congregational conflict, including denominational polity, congregational polity, leadership structures, denominational intervention, and discipleship.

Christian traditions adhere to different denominational polity. Church policies are essential to the church's existence. Baptists have been deeply suspicious of monolithic systems and even of the leadership that has gathered or led them (Taylor 2004, 42). Each polity determines a church's

approach to conflict due to who can help in determining the direction of the conflict.

The three major church polities are Episcopal, where the ultimate decision-making authority resides with a single bishop. The flow of authority moves down to local churches with different levels of authority in between (Norman 2025, 86; Price 2012, 14).

The other polity is Presbyterian, where members of a congregation who seem to have wisdom and leadership gifts are called to govern the local church (Grudem 2012, C. Forms of church government section)—the local congregation vests authority in the elders.

The third mode of church government is the congregational mode. Congregationalism is not democracy but “Chistorcracy,” in which each person submits to the lordship of Christ (Norman 2005, 56; Weaver 2014, 79).

In applying congregationalism to conflict transformation, each member should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they work to enhance relationships. This understanding has affected how effectively Baptists handle congregational conflicts.

Conflict transformation within the Baptist congregations has been affected by their heritage as two independent registered entities, the Baptist Mission of Kenya and the Baptist Convention of Kenya. The properties of the congregations and the institutions have been affected by the relationship between the two organizations. There have also been leadership effects. The lack of interrelatedness among congregations has been a challenge in times of conflict (Shotwell 1977, 244).

Approaching conflict through leadership structures is a key issue in dealing with conflict within local congregations. Understanding different forms of leadership is necessary for conflict transformation leaders.

One form of leadership is relational, where leadership is shared (Obiora 2022, 212). It operates in a way that empowers and involves other group members in decision-making. Under the assumption that leadership is determined by those who are led (Wright 2000, 35-36), conflict transformation occurs when those entangled in the conflict are involved in deciding its direction. This takes place where the values of those involved are understood (Poirier 2011, 188). The leader, therefore, acts as a guide.

Differentiation leadership also enhances conflict transformation by defining how people interact with one another. The leaders are clear about their expectations and so set boundaries accordingly. Each person can tell what is their own and what belongs to others (Cloud and Townsend 1992, 31).

Spiritual leadership comes from the abilities God bestows on church leaders to edify church members. It calls on leaders to trust that the Holy Spirit will empower them to deal with conflict. This form of leadership calls for leaders to raise disciples by leading with authority without necessarily being autocratic. Spiritual leadership helps the leaders handle conflict from a faith perspective.

Denominational intervention has been another way that conflict has been approached within congregations associated with ABC. The intervention of the denomination is sought when members are not talking to each other but are talking at each other. At this point, leaders are frustrated and underperforming. There is suspicion and mistrust among the members, which leads to gossip. This also creates presumed problems that do not really exist among the members (Hare 2019, 57-60).

When denominational leaders are involved in conflict transformation, an explicit agreement should be reached before the intervention commences (Kraybill and Brubaker 2000, 215). The leaders

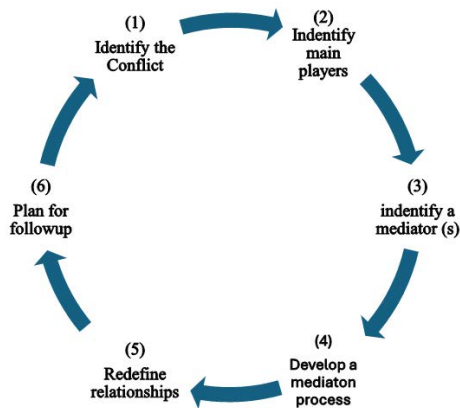
involved should ensure they are qualified to help address the problem. They should demonstrate their sense of security, given that insecure leaders can cause tremendous pain and destruction in a congregation (Juster 2015, 87).

Conflict has also been approached through discipleship, where relationships are enhanced as believers grow in their walk with Christ. For discipleship to be effective in conflict transformation, the church should have intentional leadership, a productive process, and a warm place where challenges can be discussed in the light of the gospel (Putman 2014, 60).

7. Strategies for Conflict Transformation within Local Congregations Associated with ABC

This section, as the preceding section, addresses Osmer’s fourth task. It seeks to answer the question “how might we respond?” It proposes a six-step cycle strategy that congregations can apply in conflict transformation.

As shown in the figure below, the first step is to identify the conflict being represented. Church conflicts can be categorized into three broad categories.



The first category is conflicts of indifference. These types of conflict are rooted in human identity and perspective on the world. Some principles for handling conflict in indifference include remembering that God created each person with a unique personality for his own purpose. Therefore, believers can be different without isolating one another (Joelsson 2023, 144). Secondly, believers should be careful about being legalistic by raising non-sin issues to the level of sin. Such attitudes can lead to self-justification, creating moral distance between people (Peters 2016, 360–363). Thirdly, each believer should focus more on the interests of others than on their own interests. Believers are called believers not to do anything out of selfish or empty conceit (Phil 2:3–4). Fourthly, each person should be reasonable by not thinking that his or her way is better than that of another person (Jas 3:17). Each person should be safe to speak openly about what they think, believe, value, and feel while still connected to others (Shrock-Shenk 2000, 238).

The second category is the sin, which arises when parties hold different views about what to believe. In dealing with the conflict of sin, the following principles should be applied: Sin must be rebuked, the Matthew 18:15–17 process must be followed, and each person should search his or her life for any sin that they have committed. Believers should seek to restore the person caught in sin.

The third category is conflict of righteousness. In dealing with the conflict of righteousness, each person should confess and seek forgiveness for any sinful word, action, or attitude that may have exacerbated conflict. There should be mutual agreement on biblical solutions to the issue at hand. The focus should be more on the issues agreed upon as the causes of the conflict (Priolo 2016, 120).

The second step is identifying the main player. The parties in a congregational conflict can be grouped into three categories. The first

category is the offender. Offenders are people who do all they can to promote conflict and divisions among the believers (Sande 2004, 50). The offender may have acted with either good or evil intentions. Offenders can be identified by paying attention to the accusations, looking for those who are disorderly, and observing those who attack others verbally, through actions, or through attitudes. They are usually confrontational (Tucho 2016, 5--6).

The second group is the offended. These are people who express their thoughts, opinions, or ideas in opposition to what the offender has done. The offended express their pain using feeling words. Their feelings fall into several categories, with the basic ones being anger, sadness, fear, surprise, and disgust. The second category is fleeting feelings such as frustration, relief, peace, and relaxation (Hunsinger and Latini 2013, 40--44). They voice their ideas in opposition to those considered to be offensive.

The supporters are people who take sides with either the offenders or the offended. Issues do not necessarily drive them to act; rather, it is the relationship they would want to betray or support. They are, at times, recruits of the conflicting parties (Hare 2019, 81).

The third step is identifying the mediator. Mediators can be categorized into four groups. The first group is peer mediators who emerge from relationships within a congregation as members care for one another and their relationships (Hansberry and Hansberry 2017, 14). It succeeds where believers realize that they are brothers' keepers.

Pastoral mediation occurs as pastors provide pastoral care within their congregations. God calls them to shepherd his flock. Priolo (2016, 188) calls them busy boys washing dirty dishes out of our hatreds, anger, lust, deceits, malice, and filthy words, leading to the purifying streams of the blood of Christ Jesus.

Congregations also get mediators through direct contact. When the pastor or other leaders are entangled in a conflict, the members or some leaders may decide to call a skilled peacemaker to intervene through mediation. Sande (2004, 187) describes the qualities of a direct mediator as someone who does not take sides, is sympathetic, demonstrates sincere love, and is a good listener.

The fourth type of mediator comes through referrals. This is the most common type of mediator. Referral mediators intervene after the conflict escalates to a point where members are no longer listening to each other or hurting each other through words and deeds. They are appointed mainly by denominational leaders and, in some cases, by government authorities. However, referral mediation raises some ethical concerns about safety, reluctant agreements, and pressure to reveal information and feelings. Regardless of the category of a mediator, people who serve as mediators should possess qualities such as being optimistic, interconnected with all parties, kinship with others, the ability to acknowledge contributions of each person, and creating crises as a means of peace (Bretherton and Bornstein 2019, 38–45).

Mediators and the conflicting parties should move into developing a mediation program. The mediation program should have agreements on how conflicts will be handled (Schrock-Shenk 2000, 215). It should stipulate the meeting place as safe, accessible, and free of distractions. It should also stipulate the issues to be addressed and how they will be tackled, such as through transactional negotiation. The mediation process should also have objectives or goals to be achieved, as well as rules for engagement.

The fifth step is designing new ways for people to relate. After people have gone through a conflict, their ways of interacting are affected. The mediator should help the parties involved in redefining their relationships.

This can be done through creating healthy boundaries. Such boundaries are set as people forgive each other and redefine a healthy future. Forgiveness, however, does not mean that people will not take responsibility for the wrong committed.

The sixth step is to develop a follow-up program. The end of a church conflict is never the end of conflicts (Bethel and Eding 2012, 14). In planning for follow-up, the mediator should coach the leading players. This would include overopinionated people and church leaders who are consulted mainly by others in times of conflict. The leading players should also be counseled regarding the pain they may have experienced during the conflict transformation process (Hare 2004, 29–30). In planning for the follow-up, the mediator should be careful not to create a dependence syndrome but allow the church to continue operating in his or her absence.

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Psycho-Spiritual Understandings of Visions and Dreams: An Integrative Implication for Psycho-Spiritual Therapists at the Psycho-Spiritual Institute, Marist International University College, Kenya

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Abstract

Vision and dream experiences are significant issues that clients may present in psycho-spiritual therapy, as they can signify psychological disorders or serve as divine communication with cultural implications. This thesis investigates how psycho-spiritual therapists can differentiate between spiritual experiences and psychosis in clients' visions and dreams, aiming to establish an integrative framework for holistic intervention. The study adopted Appreciative Inquiry to examine visions and dreams as revelational

and psychological phenomena. Employing qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups with 25 trained psycho-spiritual therapists in Kenya, findings reveal that visions and dreams commonly arise in psycho-spiritual therapy, imbued with psychological, theological, and cultural meanings. However, the therapists lacked formal training in interpreting and discerning the spiritual and psychological nature of visions and dreams. Consequently, the study proposed an integrative model that offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and discerning visions and dreams, suggesting that these elements should be included in the training of psycho-spiritual therapists.

1. Introduction

Seeing or experiencing visions is a cross-cultural phenomenon and a foundational element of many religious traditions (Brown 2019). Often manifested in awake states or dreams, these experiences are frequently viewed as direct access to the supernatural or ancestral spirits (Turner 1969). In a socio-theological sense, while visions and dreams are distinct phenomena, they are inextricably linked as forms of revelation.

Historical anthropology shows that visions and dreams carried immense significance. From the San religion of Southern Africa, which views visions as sources of healing (Lewis-Lane 1989), to various African societies where they facilitate communication with the spirit world (Horton 1993), these experiences shape spiritual and personal development.

In the Christian tradition, the Bible establishes visions and dreams as primary means of divine revelation (Jusu 2023). Biblical history, from the dreams of Jacob and Joseph to the visions of the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John, illustrates that God uses these states to foretell events,

provide guidance, or explain current affairs (Rogerson 2019; Wright 2020). Importantly, Scripture suggests these experiences are not reserved for prophets alone but are promised to “all people” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

1.1 Spiritual Understanding of Vision and Dreams

Christian understanding of visions and dreams can be found in the Bible and the magisterium. These serve as the foundation for understanding and interpreting spiritual visions and dreams.

1.1.1 Biblical Understanding of Visions and Dreams

In the Old Testament, visions and dreams are vital communication channels from God, categorized into several types: (1) Prophetic Visions and Dreams convey divine messages to prophets using symbols, as seen in Isaiah’s vision and Joseph’s dreams (Gen 37:5–10); (2) Apocalyptic Visions, like Daniel’s depiction of four beasts, center on divine judgment and end times exemplified by the Book of Daniel’s depiction of four beasts representing world empires (Dan 7:1–14); (3) Symbolic Visions express God’s relationship with humanity, exemplified by Zechariah’s flying scroll (Zech 5:1–4); (4) Heavenly Visions reveal God’s sovereignty, such as Micaiah’s vision before King Ahab (1 Kings 22:19–23); (5) Warning Visions, like Abimelech’s dream (Gen 20:3), guide human actions; (6) Confirmatory Visions provide comfort and guidance, illustrated by Solomon’s dream (1 Kings 3:5–15); (7) Personal Reflection Visions depict individual experiences, exemplified by Job’s lament (Job 7:13–14); (8) The “Dreaming Prophet”, Ezekiel’s vivid visions articulate God’s future restoration of Israel, as seen in his valley of dry bones vision (Ezek 37:1–14). Overall, these experiences

underscore God's covenantal relationship with his people, often occurring during wakeful hours or deep sleep, as Job notes in his description of divine communication.

In the New Testament, the nature of divine communication evolves, beginning with angelic messages to Zacharia and Mary in visions and Joseph's revelatory dreams. Peter emphasizes on the Day of Pentecost that visions is accessible to all believers (Acts 2:16–17). The early Church is guided by dreams and visions, serving five significant functions: (1) Prophetic Dreams protect Jesus' early life, guiding the Holy Family from Herod (Matt 2:13–15); (2) Visions offer hope amidst persecution, as John sees the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1–4); (3) Guidance is provided through Peter's trance, declaring inclusivity in the gospel message (Acts 10:9–16); (4) Encouragement comes to Paul in a night vision, offering support amidst his ministry hardships (Acts 18:9–10); (5) The narrative is punctuated by angelic messages, signaling divine interventions that shape the New Covenant's unfolding story (Luke 1:11–20; 26–38). This shift signifies an intimate and widespread divine engagement with humanity.

Through these various means, the New Testament reinforces the belief that God is not a distant architect but an active participant in the lives of believers. Whether through a warning in the night or a glorious vista of the end of time, these visions and dreams served to guide, protect, and unite the early Church under the singular power of the Holy Spirit. However, both the Old and New Testaments recognize the possibility of false visions and dreams. There are several warnings against misleading messages from false prophets, detailing the dangers posed by dreams that do not originate from God. For instance, Moses warns the Israelites about false prophets and dreamers who may lead them astray (Deut 13:3). Jeremiah condemns false visions, stating that "The prophets are prophesying lies

in my name” (Jer 14:14; NIV), highlighting the risks of trusting misleading spiritual claims. Similarly, Ezekiel criticizes those claiming divine messages while fabricating visions, noting they speak from imagination rather than true revelation (Eze 13:6–7). In the New Testament, Jesus warns in Matthew 24:24 about deceivers performing signs and wonders to mislead even the elect. St. Peter echoes this concern, stating that “false teachers will secretly introduce destructive heresies” (2 Pet 2:1; NIV), indicating the persistent threat of falsehood in the faith community.

The Book of Sirach, also known as Ecclesiasticus, a biblical deuterocanonical book, offers a psycho-spiritual perspective and cautions about trusting in dreams. Sirach 34:1–7 (NRSV) stated,

The senseless have vain and false hopes,
and dreams give wings to fools.
As one who catches at a shadow and pursues the wind,
so is anyone who believes in dreams.
What is seen in dreams is but a reflection,
the likeness of a face looking at itself.
From an unclean thing what can be clean?
And from something false what can be true?
Divinations and omens and dreams are unreal,
and like a woman in labor, the mind has fantasies.
Unless they are sent by intervention from the Most High,
pay no attention to them.
For dreams have deceived many,
and those who put their hope in them have perished.

Hence, the need for discernment when interpreting dreams. It emphasizes that some dreams can be deceptive or meaningless, encouraging readers to be cautious about dreams that may lead them astray.

1.1.2 Theological Discourse on Visions and Dreams Among Church Fathers and Theologians

Visions and dreams have been interpreted by major Christian thinkers across history, emphasizing both their spiritual significance and the need for discernment. The early Church Fathers, such as St. Augustine of Hippo (1991, 168–169), distinguished between dreams that arise from God and those stemming from earthly desires, arguing that true divine visions lead to moral clarity and spiritual awakening. St. Gregory of Nyssa saw visions as mystical experiences that could illuminate the soul's understanding of God but warned that not all visions are genuine and require careful interpretation (Gregory of Nyssa 2004, 103–105). St. John Chrysostom linked dreams to one's moral state, teaching that virtuous living could lead to meaningful dreams or visions (Chrysostom 2001, 118). St. Jerome, while acknowledging the potential for divine messages in dreams, insisted that scriptural authority must take precedence over subjective experiences (Jerome 2010, 62–63). St. Ambrose viewed visions as gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially during prayer and worship, and encouraged openness to divine communication through spiritual disciplines (Ambrose 1963, 204–205). Collectively, these fathers advocated for discernment and alignment with Scripture when interpreting visions and dreams.

According to Pazhayampallil (1995, 821), a dream is a natural phenomenon that “presents itself to one in sleep as happening,” yet they can be influenced by the devil. He calls for discernment in this case. To him, dreams must meet the following criteria to be seen as divine revelation (822–823):

- The dreamer is a holy person;
- The content of the dream urges the practice of virtue;
- The person himself after dream is serene, ready to do good work; and

one is ready and seeks and follows the counsel of his confessor or spiritual director.

1.2 Psychological Visions and Dreams

Modern psychology offers a different lens, often focusing on the internal mental processes. Sigmund Freud viewed dreams as the “royal road” to the unconscious, often seeing visions as hallucinations arising from repressed desires (Freud 1900). Carl Jung viewed visions as expressions of the “collective unconscious,” filled with archetypal imagery (gods, selves, etc.) that assist an individual in achieving wholeness (Jung 1932; 1976). Cognitive-behavioral models often interpret dreams as memory consolidation or a mechanism for “fear extinction” (Zhang & Guo 2018). In psychiatric settings, seeing things others do not see is often categorized as a “visual hallucination,” a primary diagnostic criterion for disorders such as schizophrenia (APA 2022).

In psychopathology, visual hallucinations are significant indicators of mental health disorders, notably schizophrenia and severe anxiety, as explored by Barlow (2002, 155). He notes that these hallucinations arise from cognitive disruptions, leading individuals to misinterpret sensory inputs. For those with schizophrenia, the inability to process stimuli accurately can result in vivid experiences that distort their reality. Barlow asserts that such hallucinations reflect underlying cognitive dysfunctions, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing internal thoughts from external stimuli. This perspective is consistent with cognitive-behavioral models, highlighting the necessity for thorough assessment and treatment of affected individuals.

The diagnostic manuals, especially the DSM-D and ICD-10, provide diagnostic criteria for hallucination. DSM-5 considers hallucination as a part of the wider diagnostic criteria for psychotic disorders such as

schizoaffective disorders and schizophrenia. These criteria, according to DSM-5 (APA 2013, 87–90), include: visual or auditory experience without external stimuli distinct from illusion subjectively believing that what was perceived is real ICD-10 (1992, 192) added that, the perceptual experience must cause a distress or impairment in the person's occupational, social, or personal functioning the perceptual experience should not be due to substance use or abuse, withdrawal, medication side-effect, or other medical and neurological conditions.

However, Thomas S. Szasz holds that vision experiences often deemed pathological signify personal struggles rather than inherent disorders. He emphasizes assisting individuals in addressing their challenges over treating them as “mental patients” (Szasz 1960, 35).

Additionally, dream disorders or nightmare disorders, involve distressing dreams that begin in childhood and peak in late adolescence, with prevalence decreasing with age (American Academy of Sleep Medicine 2014, 1037; Eiser 2007, 317–324). Diagnosed under DSM-5 criteria, nightmares can stem from various factors, including stress, trauma, medication side effects, and mental health disorders. Treatment options include cognitive-behavioral therapies like imagery rehearsal therapy and psychodynamic therapies targeting the psychological roots of nightmares. Cultural perceptions of nightmares can also influence their significance and the willingness to disclose related issues (APA 2013, 402).

1.3 Cultural Visions and Dreams

Visions and dreams are integral to human experience across cultures, serving various roles such as guidance, prophecy, and personal insight. This comparative analysis examines Western, Eastern, and African perspectives. In Western contexts, influenced by psychoanalysis, dreams are seen as

reflections of personal experiences and psychological states, with Freud (1900, 119) and Jung (1964, 112) emphasizing their individual and collective meanings, respectively. Contemporary Western psychologists also explore spiritual dimensions in dream interpretation (Coakley 2013, 140). Eastern perspectives, particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism, view dreams as divine messages or reflections of karmic influences, with practices like Tibetan dream yoga enhancing spiritual insights (Kakar 1991, 67; Mills 2004, 81; Miller 2009, 145). In many African cultures, dreams are vital for communal wisdom, often interpreted by elders as channels for ancestral communication and spiritual guidance, reinforcing communal identity and interconnectedness (Fiawoo 2012, 50; Mbiti 1990, 79).

In Eastern Africa, vision and dream understanding and interpretation vary among cultures, countries, and ethnic groups, yet common themes such as spiritual communication, ancestral presence, and community guidance are prevalent. Many Ugandans see dreams as vital messages from the spiritual realm, where ancestors offer guidance, warnings, or insights regarding personal and communal issues, highlighting the role of traditional healers in this interpretive process (Kanyesigye 2018, 77). Similarly, the Maasai and Kikuyu cultures in Kenya and Tanzania hold rich traditions in dream interpretation derived from their cosmologies. Kikuyu dreams often involve encounters with God (Ngai) or ancestral spirits, serving as tools for discernment and moral guidance (Ogot 2008, 90). For the Maasai, dreams provide communication with deities and ancestors, offering insights into livestock health, environmental changes, and resource management, which can significantly influence community decisions (Kipkoech 2014, 56). Overall, dreams act as a bridge between the living and the spiritual, facilitating personal revelations and community cohesion.

Omondi (2025, 167–175) analyzes the significance of visions and dreams in the prophetism of the Luo of Nyanza from 1900 to 1920, illustrating how they acted as channels for divine communication that affected social and religious aspects. Notable prophetic figures, like the Kikuyu seer Mugo wa Kiburu, utilized metaphors to predict significant events, influencing community responses to European arrival and shaping decisions related to farming and resistance. Similarly, Luo diviners were noted for using prophetic insights to guide community attitudes towards missionaries.

1.4 Integrative Approach

The integrative model of psychology and spirituality/theology seeks to connect psychological principles with spiritual beliefs, promoting a comprehensive understanding of human experience. It posits that spirituality and psychology complement each other, enhancing mental health practices. Scholars like McMinn (1996, 34) and Pargament (1997, 73) emphasize the importance of integrating spiritual assessment in therapy, as spirituality can serve as a source of strength during adversity. The model includes frameworks such as Transpersonal Psychology, which emphasizes personal growth through spiritual experiences, and the Spirituality and Health Model, which links spiritual practices to improved health outcomes. However, challenges remain, such as concerns about scientific rigor and the risk of spiritual bypassing. The integrative model becomes relevant in understanding and interpreting visions and dreams in a holistic manner of a biopsychosociotechno-spiritual nature.

1.5 The Problem

A significant gap exists in how therapists handle vision and dream experiences. Many psychotherapists “psychopathologize” visions, treating

them purely as symptoms of mental illness (NIMH 2024). Conversely, some spiritually oriented therapists may overspiritualize them, ignoring potential emotional distress or traumatic roots, such as PTSD-related nightmares (APA 2022). The therapist is often left in a dilemma: Is this a spiritual experience to be honored, or a psychological symptom to be treated?

This thesis is grounded in the field of Psycho-Spiritual Therapy, a holistic approach that integrates modern psychotherapy and spiritual direction with cultural sensitivity (Egunjobi 2024a). This framework is hoped to provide psycho-spiritual therapists in Kenya with tools to navigate the “thin line” between spiritual mysticism and psychological symptoms (e.g., the “dark night of the soul” versus depression). It will also assist them to utilize discernment as a theological and clinical skill to distinguish between meaningful revelation and psychological distress (Egunjobi 2024b). Current scholarship is scarce regarding the integration of theological, psychological, and cultural understandings of visions in Kenyan therapeutic practice.

2. Research Questions

The study was guided by main and subsidiary research questions.

2.1 Main Research Question

The main research question of this study is: How might the psycho-spiritual understanding of visions and dreams help psycho-spiritual therapists in determining whether clients’ visions and dreams presented during therapy are a spiritual experience or psychosis, to develop an integrative framework towards offering a holistic intervention?

2.2 Subsidiary Questions

The following subsidiary questions were derived from the main research question:

- i. What lessons can psycho-spiritual therapists learn from the prevailing psychological discourse about visions and dreams to aid them in psycho-spiritual therapy?
- ii. How might an established biblical or spiritual understanding of visions and dreams help the psycho-spiritual therapists in dealing with the issues of visions and dreams in psycho-spiritual therapy?
- iii. What criteria can psycho-spiritual therapists develop from psychological and spiritual standpoints in distinguishing whether a client's vision or dream is a psychological or spiritual reality?
- iv. How might the psycho-spiritual understanding of visions and dreams help in the training of psycho-spiritual therapists in Kenya?

3. Research Methodology

The study involved 139 therapists from the Psycho-Spiritual Institute of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation in Kenya, Africa, with a sample of 25 selected via purposive non-probability sampling. Data collection incorporated 15 individual interviews and focus groups with 10 participants not involved in the interview, using a self-developed guide with 34 items, and adhered to ethical standards.

Analysis included thematic and content methods, presented in words, tables, and figures, seeking to distinguish spiritual experiences from psychosis through phenomenological reduction. The study emphasizes Practical Theology related to pastoral care, integrating Christian counseling and theology, and applies Appreciative Inquiry methodology proposed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) in four steps: Discovery (exploring current

practices), Dream (analyzing biblical visions), Design (creating integrative approaches), and Destiny (implementing the model in therapist training). This model aims to enhance holistic healing for clients.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Demographic Information of the Participants

The demographic profile of psycho-spiritual therapists participating in interviews and focus groups reveals key characteristics related to gender, educational level, and experience. Among the participants, there was a slight gender disparity (11 males, 14 females), favoring females, which makes good gender representation in the study. All possess at least a master's degree in psycho-spiritual therapy, with six either having or pursuing doctoral studies. Their experience ranges from two to eight years, which is consistent with the requirement for registration and licensing for practice in Kenya.

4.2 Psycho-spiritual Therapists' General Understanding of Visions and Dreams

This study explored psycho-spiritual therapists' encounters with clients' visions and dreams, revealing that most therapists have addressed these issues in their practice. Interview participants universally reported dealing with dreams and visions, while focus group participants noted that dreams were more frequently encountered. For instance, a participant said she has experienced visions and dreams, "particularly dreams", and another said that "Visions have been the least common." Regarding the general understanding of visions and dreams, the following themes emerged:

- Visions and dreams are biopsychosociotechno-spiritually factored and carry deeply rooted biological, psychological, emotional, socio-cultural, technological, and spiritual life baggage.
- Visions and dreams are products of a person's mental processes, whether conscious or unconscious.
- Visions and dreams are personal and subjective experiences.
- Visions and dreams can be metaphorical or symbolic. They can use objects to describe the reality of human experiences.
- Visions and dreams use symbols, images, and words to reveal to us another side of life lived and yet to live.
- Visions and dreams are means by which God communicates with his people.
- While visions and dreams are not the same, some dreams can be revelatory.
- Visions and dreams can sometimes be a sign of Malaria.
- Visions can be displayed in post-traumatic dreams with vivid storylines and verbalization of the inner theater.

Psychological theories (e.g., psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, transpersonal, existential, humanistic, gestalt, and narrative approaches) provide frameworks for understanding and interpreting these experiences.

Most of the psycho-spiritual therapists expressed their understanding of vision and dreams through personal experiences. While the majority believe that vision and dreams have both psychological and theological or spiritual meaning, one interview participant expressed a disbelief in visions and dreams.

4.3 Distinguishing Between Visions and Dreams

The findings revealed that visions and dreams are not the same. It was understood that visions happen in a conscious state while dreams mostly happen in an unconscious mind, that is, visions happen in the moment, but dreams pertain to the past, present, and future. Dreams are more important to human wellness than visions. According to a Focus Group Discussant, “if we do not dream, we will be sick people because dream really help us to release a lot of stress and a lot of experience that we have in the course of the day.” Dreams are not visions, and visions are not dreams but both can have revelation as a content. So, sleeping and not sleeping is a distinguishing factor. Other distinguishing characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

	Visions	Dreams
State of Occurrence	Wake State	During Sleep
Consciousness	Conscious	Unconscious
Prediction	Predictive	Less Predictive
Experienced by	A few	Everyone
Spirituality	Usually Spiritually/ Metaphysical	Not Necessarily Spiritual
Ordinary	Extra-ordinary	Ordinary
Revelation	Revelatory	Sometimes revelatory
Prophetism	Prophetic	Sometimes prophetic
Hallucinatory	Can be hallucinatory	Real experience

Verifiability	Usually verified when it happened	Not verifiable except the dream is revelatory
Necessity to Personal Wellness	Not necessary	Necessary for releasing stress

Table 1: Differences between visions and dreams

4.4 How Psychological Understanding Supports Psycho-Spiritual Therapy

Psycho-spiritual therapists can enhance their practice by integrating psychological and spiritual insights, maintaining cultural and personal sensitivity, and using a holistic, client-centered approach to visions and dreams. This integration supports more accurate assessment, reduces misdiagnosis, and fosters holistic healing. These are presented in Table 2.

Lesson Area	Key Insights
Psychological Frameworks	Use diverse psychological theories for interpretation.
Assessment	Explore emotional, medical, and trauma history.
Critical Probing	Deep assessment and discernment to distinguish between spiritual and psychological origins.
Cultural Sensitivity	Respect and integrate cultural meanings and symbols.

Therapeutic Tools	Employ a range of psychological assessments and interventions.
Therapist Self-Awareness	Maintain boundaries, avoid bias, and bracket personal beliefs.
Client-Centered Approach	Empower clients to find meaning in their experiences.
Integration Challenges	Address gaps in training, tools, and cultural competence.

Table 2: Key Lessons

4.5 How Biblical and Spiritual Understanding Supports Psycho-Spiritual Therapy

An established biblical or spiritual understanding enables psycho-spiritual therapists to approach visions and dreams with discernment, respect, and holistic care. It was found that:

Biblical and spiritual perspectives provide a foundational framework for understanding visions and dreams as forms of divine communication, revelation, or guidance. This helps therapists recognize that such experiences are not always pathological or problematic but may be spiritually significant.

The Bible addresses both genuine and false visions/dreams, offering criteria for discernment. Therapists can use scriptural principles to help clients distinguish between authentic spiritual experiences and those that may be misleading or not from God.

Therapists can incorporate spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, scriptural reflection, and discernment exercises into therapy.

These practices help clients process and find meaning in their visions and dreams and connect their experiences to their faith journey.

Biblical understanding encourages therapists to respect the client's personal and cultural interpretations of visions and dreams. This fosters a client-centered approach, empowering clients to explore and interpret their experiences within their own spiritual and cultural context.

Spiritual perspectives remind therapists to maintain humility, avoid imposing personal beliefs, and facilitate self-reflection rather than direct interpretation. This supports ethical practice and helps clients develop their own understanding of their experiences.

When necessary, therapists can collaborate with spiritual leaders, pastors, or other professionals to provide comprehensive support for clients whose visions and dreams have strong spiritual significance.

4.6 Criteria for Distinguishing Psychological vs. Spiritual Visions and Dreams

The study found that while psychological and spiritual experiences of visions and dreams can overlap, there are several key criteria that psycho-spiritual therapists can use to distinguish between them. Psycho-spiritual therapists can distinguish between psychological and spiritual visions and dreams by systematically evaluating the nature, source, context, emotional impact, and meaning of the experience, while remaining sensitive to cultural and individual differences. These criteria are best applied through a holistic, client-centered assessment that considers context, content, and impact. Table 3 provides some basic distinctions.

Theme	Psychological Visions and Dreams	Spiritual Visions and Dreams
Nature	Reflect emotional states, fears, traumas, and unconscious thoughts.	Reflect spiritual insights, messages, and divine guidance.
Source	Arise from life experiences, psychological struggles, or emotional disturbances.	Arise from spiritual encounters, mystical experiences, or divine intervention.
Function	Provide insights into emotional, cognitive, and behavioral patterns.	Offer guidance, transformation, and spiritual awakening.
Symbols and Interpretation	Symbols often represent emotional struggles or unresolved issues. Interpreted through psychological methods (e.g., dream analysis).	Symbols are seen as messages from a higher power, interpreted through spiritual or prophetic lenses.
Verification	Can be verified by the person's life history, emotional state, or psychological context.	Cannot be verified through conventional means; they are faith-based and transcend physical reality.

Context	Occur during times of stress, trauma, or unresolved emotional issues. They often reflect the subconscious mind.	Occur during prayer, meditation, or moments of spiritual focus, providing insights or revelations.
Emotional Impact	Typically tied to psychological distress (e.g., anxiety, fear, depression).	Can lead to spiritual awakening, peace, or transformation. May feel divinely inspired or a call to action.
Role in Therapy	Address emotional healing, self-awareness, and resolving psychological issues through therapeutic techniques (e.g., CBT).	Provide spiritual guidance, encourage growth, and offer clarity on life paths, often guided by spiritual practices or principles.
Relation to the Self	Often linked to personal fears, desires, or emotional struggles. The focus is on psychological insight.	Linked to the person's relationship with the divine or spiritual realm, often focusing on faith or destiny.
Manifestation	Manifest in sleep (dreams) or waking states (visions), often reflecting emotional or psychological states.	Manifest during deep contemplation, prayer, or moments of heightened spiritual awareness.

Purpose	To resolve inner emotional conflicts, promote self-awareness, and heal past traumas.	To provide divine guidance, transformation, or warnings for the person’s spiritual journey.
Example in Therapy	Dreams of falling, being chased, or encountering unresolved emotional trauma. Interpreted for healing emotional issues.	Visions of spiritual symbols, divine figures, or prophetic messages that guide the person spiritually. Interpreted for spiritual growth.

Table 3: Basic distinctions between psychological and spiritual experiences of visions and dreams

4.7 How Psycho-Spiritual Understanding of Visions and Dreams Enhances Therapist Training in Kenya

In the first place, the findings of this study reveal that understanding, interpretations, and intervening clients’ visions and dreams in therapy are not specifically taught during the training of the psycho-spiritual therapists. However, it was found that the understanding of visions and dreams can enhance their training in the following ways:

4.7.1 Promotes Holistic and Integrative Training

A psycho-spiritual understanding may encourage therapists to integrate psychological, spiritual, and cultural perspectives when working with

clients who experience visions and dreams. This holistic approach ensures that therapists are equipped to address the full range of meanings, psychological, spiritual, and cultural, behind these experiences, rather than reducing them to mere symptoms or spiritual phenomena.

4.7.2 Develops Key Competencies and Skills

Training informed by psycho-spiritual understanding may emphasize the development of essential skills, such as:

- Attentive listening and empathic understanding.
- Discernment and biblical interpretation.
- Dream analysis and interpretation from both psychological and spiritual viewpoints.
- Biopsychosociotechno-spiritual assessment.
- Cultural humility and sensitivity.
- Open-mindedness and unconditional positive regard.
- Trauma awareness and the ability to distinguish between trauma-related dreams and spiritual experiences.

4.7.3 Encourages Cultural Sensitivity

Therapists can be trained to recognize and respect the cultural context of visions and dreams, understanding that symbols and meanings can vary widely across Kenyan communities. This cultural competence is vital for effective and respectful therapeutic practice.

4.7.4 Fosters Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The psycho-spiritual approach may encourage collaboration with other professionals, such as psychologists, spiritual leaders, and medical

practitioners, to provide comprehensive care. This interdisciplinary model will ensure that clients receive well-rounded support for both psychological and spiritual dimensions of their experiences.

4.7.5 Supports Client-Centered and Empowering Practice

Therapists can be taught to facilitate clients' own meaning-making processes, empowering them to interpret their visions and dreams within their personal, spiritual, and cultural frameworks. This reduces the risk of imposing therapist biases and supports client autonomy.

4.7.6 Addresses Gaps in Current Training

This research highlights the need for more formalized training in dream and vision interpretation, the development of assessment tools, and the reduction of stigma around spiritual experiences in therapy. Integrating psycho-spiritual understanding into training programs can address these gaps and prepares therapists for the realities of practice in Kenya.

4.7.7 Promotes Holistic Healing and Wellbeing

By equipping therapists with an integrative framework, training programs will enable them to support clients' psychological, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing. This approach may foster self-awareness, reduce anxiety, and help clients discover meaning and purpose in their experiences.

A psycho-spiritual understanding of visions and dreams, when embedded in the training of therapists in Kenya, can lead to a more holistic, culturally sensitive, and client-centered therapeutic practice. It may equip therapists with the skills, frameworks, and collaborative mindset needed to address

the complex realities of visions and dreams, ultimately promoting healing and wellbeing for clients.

5. Designing an Integrative Approach

This section details the integration of psychological and spiritual visions and dreams through a diagrammatic approach. Psychological visions, represented in Circle A, relate to hallucinations linked to disorders like schizophrenia, while spiritual visions (Circle B) pertain to insights understood by visionaries. The integration occurs at point C, highlighting the overlap between the two realms such that psychological or spiritual vision is experienced in a wake state. Similarly, psychological dreams (Circle D) arise from issues such as stress, contrasting with spiritual dreams (Circle E) that convey divine messages. Integration at F provides a dual perspective for interpretation, especially when both psychological and spiritual dreams occur while sleeping. Also, the psychological vision (Circle A) and psychological dream (Circle D) overlap at the integration point G where both can reflect the unconscious, while the spiritual or theological vision (Circle B) is integrated with the spiritual dream (Circle E) at H as revelation from the Divine. The holistic integration (I) captures the biopsychosociotechno-spiritual nature of these experiences, emphasizing their capacity for guidance and transformation. Cultural contexts significantly shape the interpretation of these experiences, reinforcing identity and traditions, and it forms the context within which visions and dreams are understood and interpreted as depicted in Figure 1.

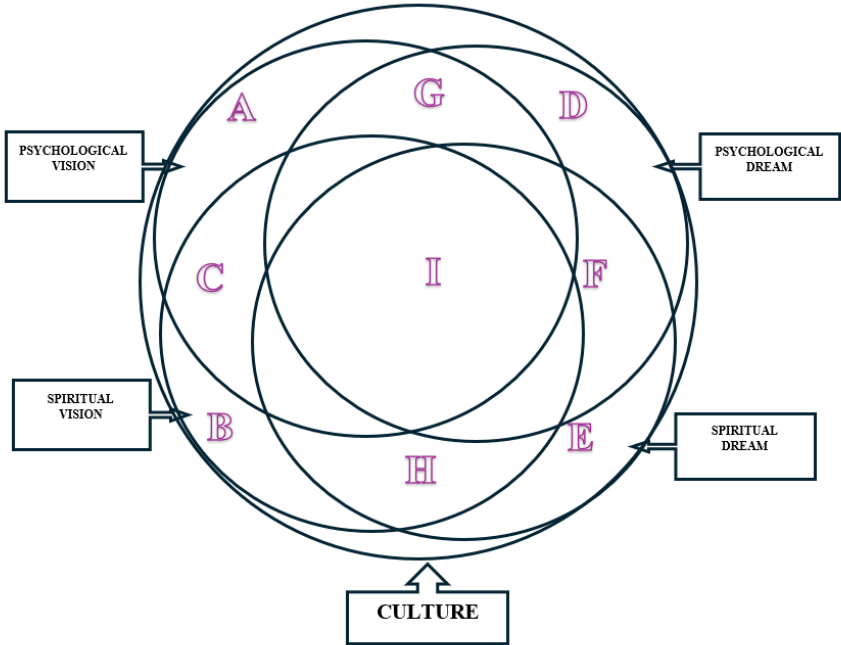


Figure 1: Psycho-Spiritual Integration of Vision and Dream within Cultural Context

Having established an integrative framework for psycho-spiritual therapy, the approach is designed to enhance healing, transformation, and well-being by examining vision and dream experiences through psychological and spiritual lenses without neglecting cultural contexts. This framework views visions and dreams as essential messages that guide individuals toward holistic healing rather than mere psychological phenomena.

The process of holistic healing involves addressing unconscious wounds and spiritual disconnection while exploring visions and dreams to reframe traumatic memories and foster emotional catharsis. The therapy aligns with Jung’s concept of the “shadow” by integrating repressed emotions and unacknowledged identities to facilitate authentic selfhood.

The framework comprises a systematic six-stage approach:

- Encounter – experiencing dreams or visions.
- Expression – sharing these experiences with the therapist.
- Exploration – understanding them psychologically, spiritually, and culturally.
- Diagnosis/Discernment – assessing for psychological disorders and spiritual meanings.
- Interpretation – generating relevant insights.
- Integration – translating insights into actionable steps for holistic well-being.

This structured approach aids therapists in effectively guiding clients toward personal growth and healing while considering cultural, psychological, and spiritual contexts.

5.2 Criteria for Distinguishing Psychological and Spiritual Vision and Dream

Determining the nature of vision and dream experiences involves evaluating factors like vividness, remembrance, and the absence of medication effects. Spiritual visions aligned with Scripture enhance personal and communal growth, while dreams may indicate psychological issues or divine communication. Discernment requires scriptural guidance to differentiate true from false prophetic dreams, based on their accordance with Scripture, consistency with God's character, and fulfillment of prophecy. True prophetic dreams ultimately aim to uplift spirituality, providing guidance away from sin, in line with the teachings of St. Paul and warnings from Jesus about false prophets. The communal impact of a dream and the moral character of the prophet are authenticity indicators, vital for

psycho-spiritual therapists to understand when interpreting revelatory experiences. Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic step-by-step process for discernment.

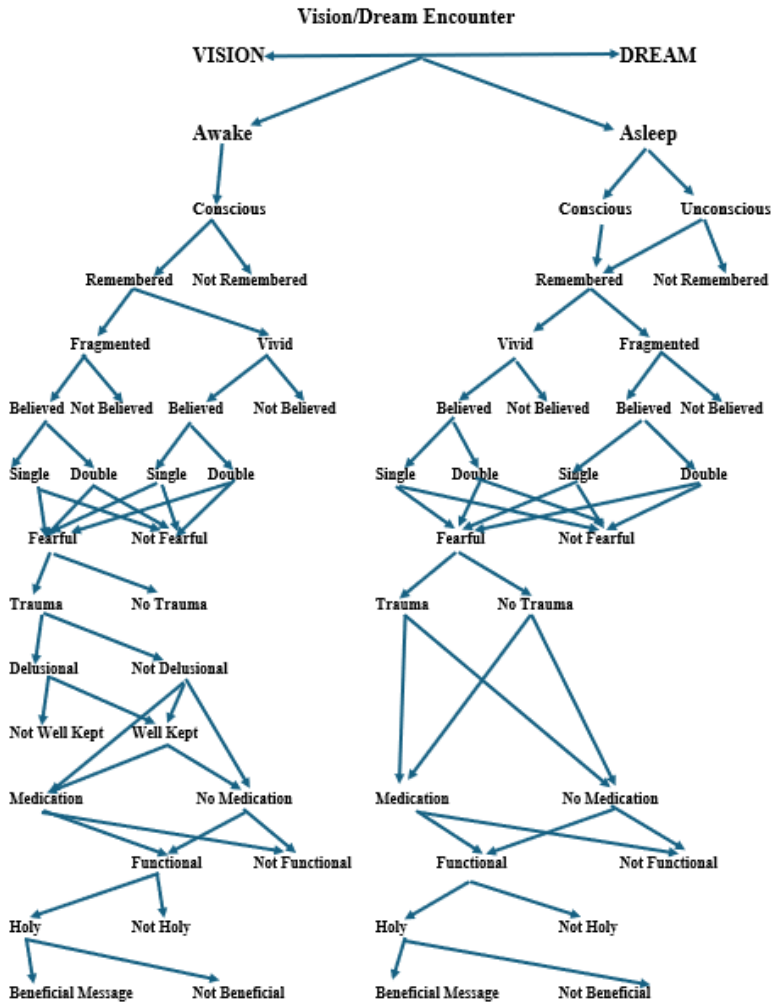


Figure 2: Criteria for Distinguishing Psychological and Spiritual Vision and Dream

The integration framework connects theological and pastoral principles with biblical foundations, addressing visions and dreams, while recognizing charismatic and mystical traditions. It promotes respectful interfaith engagement, allowing clients to explore faith while retaining cultural identities. The psycho-spiritual integrative framework offers benefits like increased self-awareness, anxiety reduction, discovery of spiritual gifts, a holistic understanding, and interdisciplinary collaboration. However, it faces limitations including inadequate therapist training, risks of misinterpretation, absence of standardized diagnostic tools, imposition of personal beliefs, and potential cultural disrespect. To enhance psycho-spiritual therapy, educational institutions should incorporate spiritual perspectives in training, develop relevant curricula, provide practical experience, and promote research and discussion on integrated therapies.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of visions and dreams within psycho-spiritual therapy, emphasizing their dual significance as both psychological phenomena and potential channels of divine communication. Through qualitative inquiry involving psycho-spiritual therapists in Kenya, the study reveals that visions and dreams are frequent and meaningful elements in therapeutic contexts, yet there is a notable gap in formal training for therapists regarding their interpretation and discernment.

The findings underscore the necessity for an integrative framework that draws from psychological, theological, and cultural perspectives. Such a framework enables therapists to distinguish between spiritual experiences and psychosis, thereby reducing the risk of misdiagnosis and fostering holistic healing. The research demonstrates that visions and

dreams are deeply embedded in cultural and religious traditions, and their meanings are best understood through a biopsychosociotechno-spiritual lens.

It proposed a systematic, six-stage approach to the assessment and integration of visions and dreams as practical tools for therapists to support clients' psychological and spiritual well-being. The research also highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and client-centered practice in psycho-spiritual therapy.

Finally, it advocates for the inclusion of psycho-spiritual understanding of visions and dreams in the training curricula of therapists in Kenya. Such integration will equip practitioners with the competencies needed to address the complex realities of visions and dreams, promote holistic healing, and respect the diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds of clients. This study contributes to the advancement of psycho-spiritual therapy, offering a model that bridges gaps between psychology, spirituality, and culture for the benefit of both therapists and clients.

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Applying the Hebrew Rhetorical-Literary Features of the Book of Micah in Translation

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Supervisors: Prof. Ernst Wendland and the late Dr Lynell Zogbo

Abstract

This study was motivated by a need to provide information that translation teams require to translate prophetic literature in general and the book of Micah in particular. We describe conceptual frames and covenant blends assumed by Micah's audience, but not by the Elani.¹ We also explain the macro- and microstructures of source and receptor language texts. We discuss key characteristics of high-quality translations and draw heavily upon Wendland's Literary Functional Equivalence Translation Model (LiFE) and Hill's Relevance Translation Model to express the rhetorical-literary features of the Biblical Hebrew source text of Micah in the Elani translation.

¹ 'Elani' is a pseudonym for an agrarian, Asian people group.

1. Quality in Translation

A thorough understanding of the source text is the bedrock upon which all Bible translation is done, but this is not easily acquired nor automatically guaranteed. Unfortunately, many mother tongue translators (MTTs) and translation advisors (TAs) do not have access to biblical languages, commentaries, and/or linguistic articles which pertain to prophetic literature to find the information they need to translate prophetic passages. Along with a solid working knowledge of Hebrew poetic forms, an extensive understanding of the receptor language and its verbal art forms is also foundational to producing high quality translations of the Bible. However, many translation teams either do not collect an adequate variety of receptor language texts and/or do not know how to analyze their linguistic and rhetorical-literary features and apply them in their translations. A comprehensive understanding of trustworthy translation principles and methods is also crucial for bridging the gap between the source language (SL) text and the receptor language (RL) translation of it. However, not all MTTs and TAs are aware of recent developments in translation approaches that advocate for innovative methods for drafting, community checking, dynamically representing the genre of the SL text in the RL translation, producing a variety of Scripture products, and optimally utilizing contextual adjustment materials. The goal of our research has been to address these challenges for the book of Micah:

- by gathering and synthesizing research that applies to prophetic literature, Micah in particular, and presenting it topically, often in tables which summarize or highlight key points;²
- by demonstrating several types of SL and RL rhetorical-literary and text analyses;
- by explaining and exemplifying translation principles and processes which enable translation teams to more effectively bridge the cognitive and linguistic gaps between SL and RL texts and to produce aesthetically pleasing Scripture products.

Our research reveals that the Literary-Functional Equivalence (LiFE) Translation Model (Wendland 2011) and the Relevance Translation Model (Hill 2006; Hill et.al. 2011) are effective tools for producing good quality translations, as recommended by the 2023 Bible Translation (BT) conference³ and Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI). This involves utilizing multiple analytical approaches (cognitive linguistic, rhetorical-literary, and text analyses) and translation processes (drafting, editing, community checking, back translating, consultant checking), as well as applying relevance theory, functional equivalence, skopos theory, and cognitive semantics to represent the socio-historical background,

² Examples include Discourse Type and Verb Form, Spectrum of OT (Old Testament) Literature, Types of OT Poetry, BH (Biblical Hebrew) Prophetic Speech Formulas, BH Default Word Order, BH Verbal System, Translation Continuum, OT Prophets, Historical Context of Micah, Composition of Micah, Boundary and Cohesion Markers, Default and Marked Features, and VO and OV Constituent Order.

³ Among the most insightful presentations were 1) Floor and Harmelink (2023) who argue for a new set of standards for both translation processes and translation products, 2) Hemphill and King (2023) who state that translation can be understood in terms of metaphors which focus on different aspects of the translation process and product, and 3) Kroneman (2023) who advocates for multifaceted text analysis as a reliable method to ensure higher quality translations.

linguistic features, rhetorical-literary traits, and conceptual frames and blends of the SL Scriptures in engaging RL versions.

The Elani translation team strives to apply these translation principles and models to produce an idiomatic, functional equivalent version of the Bible which preserves, as much as possible, the literary character and biblical imagery of the SL text in a meaningful way for the RL community. The translation team attempts to use lexical and grammatical forms of the RL to produce a translation with a natural style and a clear and understandable message. The Elani translation avoids the rigid lexical concordance of extremely literal versions and the excessive explication of implicit information found in freer versions. Table I is a comparison of the **Elani version** with several national language versions (**red lettering**) and English versions (**blue lettering**).

	More Literal Idiomatic		More	
Interlinear	CUV TCV	CCB	Elani	
NASB ESV	RSV NLT CEV	NIV	GNT	The Message Cotton Patch
Highly Literal Formal Equivalent		Idiomatic Dynamic Equivalent Functional Equivalent		Freer

Reproduces the grammatical features of the SL text with high consistency and maintains lexical concordance.		Uses natural grammatical and lexical forms of the RL.	Does not reproduce the linguistic features of the SL text.
Unnatural style		Natural Style	Natural Style
Message of the SL text is not adequately communicated.		Message of the SL text is clear and understandable.	Message of the SL text is relevant and clear but may be distorted.

Table 1: *Elani Version in Translation Continuum*

The Elani translation employs various *contextual adjustment materials* to expand the cognitive environment of the Elani people, so that they can interpret the book of Micah readily and accurately.⁴ These materials provide key background information of ANE geography, the history of Israel, the Jewish religion and culture, the role of prophets, and the coming Jewish

⁴ Contextual adjustment materials (e.g., introductions, headings, footnotes, maps, stories) provide information concerning the meaning and implications of the SL text, i.e. the cognitive environment of the original audience, to improve its reception by the RL audience.

Messiah. Testing carried out by our translation team verified that these materials improve the cognitive environment of the Elani, thereby making the message more relevant and meaningful to them. Adding background information and/or implied information in the text, in footnotes, in the Introduction, in a collection of OT and NT stories, maps, and/or via songs improve understanding and enhance the impact of Micah significantly. For example, information concerning the historical context (in the introduction to the book) explaining that Micah was not only addressing the internal corruption of the people of the northern and southern kingdoms but also the external oppression and invasion of the Assyrians makes clear to the Elani audience who the three major players are.

2. Covenant (Un)Faithfulness

Micah did not deliver his prophetic message in a vacuum, but to the Jewish people who were profoundly influenced by extensive historical and socio-cultural precedents as well as sacred writings. One key component of their cognitive framework is that God had established, faithfully maintained, and jealously guarded his special relationship with his chosen people, Israel, even while they had repeatedly strayed from it. He did this through covenants (*berit*) he established with them.

2.1 Mental Frames

We see evidence of the covenantal relationship between God and his people through various mental frames and metaphorical blends which undergirded the cognitive environment of the Jewish people in pre-exilic times.⁵ We posit that the following frames—Prophetic Speech, Covenant,

⁵ Conceptual frames are “clusters of related knowledge, remembered experiences,

Lawsuit, Marriage, Adultery, Cleanliness, Purity, and Shepherd—were part of the mindset of the people of Israel who received Micah's message. The Prophetic Speech Frame, EVOKED by the prophetic speech formula (Mic 1:1), informed people that God spoke authoritatively through Micah, via visions, to communicate a prophetic message to his people Israel, both positive and negative, as well as applying imminently and in the distant future. The Covenant Frame, activated by covenantal vocabulary and references, was a major frame of reference for the people of Israel who understood that Yahweh had chosen them to be in a special relationship with him via various covenants that he established with them.⁶ The Lawsuit Frame, signalled by a courtroom scene with defendants, plaintiffs, prosecutors, witnesses, and a judge (Mic 1:2, 6:1–2, 7:9), was another dominant conceptual network of well-established Jewish practices concerning legal proceedings. The Marriage and Adultery Frames, which were evoked by references to Israel's pagan prostitution (Mic 1:7), pointed to well-established Jewish marriage customs and laws regarding adultery. The Cleanliness and Purity Frames evoked by references to detestable practices (Mic 2:10, 3:2–3), constituted a network of ideas Jewish people shared concerning physical cleanliness and purity which were prerequisites for meeting with or serving Yahweh. The Shepherd Frame, activated by references to shepherding and sheep (Mic 2:12–13; 5:2–6, 7:14), specified the qualities of good and bad shepherds.

2.2 Covenant Blends

cultural values and shared beliefs" (Salisbury 2011, 89–90). Content from two or more of these mental spaces can combine to produce metaphorical blends. These blends inherit some structure and traits from their input frames but are more than the sum of their parts. Blends are new structures with unique applications and interpretations (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 39–44).

⁶ An extensive list of these is provided in the PhD thesis in 3.2.3.

These conceptual frames combine to form covenant blends which have divine and human elements, with the former consistently upholding the covenant and the latter, frequently transgressing it. Each blend addresses the issue of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel from a different angle, but for the same purpose: to reinforce the principles and guidelines of the Torah as well as the blessings and curses associated with a proper/improper relationship with him.

The covenant lawsuit blend describes a contentious relationship between God and his people Israel. Israel is found guilty of covenant transgressions, but Yahweh is vindicated for his righteousness in dealing with them.

The marriage and adultery covenant blend dynamically expresses the faithful/unfaithful status of covenant partners. Israel is depicted as the adulterous wife who repeatedly transgressed covenant stipulations, while Yahweh is the beloved husband who persistently fulfilled covenant demands.

The cleanliness and purity covenant blend provides the terms by which the Israelites could worship and maintain their covenant relationship with Yahweh. This blend depicts Israel, whose grievous aberrations of the covenant made her an abomination (ritually and morally unclean and impure), versus Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

The shepherd covenant blend provides important details concerning the unique covenant-keeping shepherd, the coming Savior-Messiah, that Micah and his contemporaries predicted. Israel is the sheep who refused to follow the shepherd, while Yahweh is the shepherd who refused to abandon his flock. These promises concerning a Messianic deliverer indicate that by his faithfulness to the covenants, he atones for their sins, leads them to safety, protects them from their enemies, and

invites them to join him in his kingdom.

These covenant blends are triggered by certain lexical items and rhetorical-literary devices, which can either be replicated in translation and/or provided in contextual adjustment materials.

2.3 Macrostructure of Micah

Though the prophet Micah delivered the message, it did not originate with him: he was rather the vessel through which Yahweh spoke to his people both in condemnation and in blessing concerning present circumstances and future events. As such, the book of Micah is prophetic in nature and labelled as prophetic genre.

2.3.1 Subgenres of Prophetic Literature in Micah

Indictments, warnings of judgment, and predictions of deliverance are the major subgenres within the book. Lament and praise also appear as Micah's response to them. Waltke (2007, 13), Soenksen (2020, 15–17), Wendland (2019), Patterson and Hill (2008, 299), and Hoyt (2019a, 557–559) also recognize similar reproach/indictment, doom/judgment, hope/salvation/deliverance passages within Micah, along with messages of woe/lament and hymn/praise.

Rhetorically, the lament elements of 1:8/10–16 and the praise elements of 7:18–20 increase the text's emotive force and intensify its overall impact. They heighten the seriousness of an accusation or coming judgment and the beauty of coming deliverance (Zogbo and Wendland 2020, 18–19). As such, it is possible to view them as a blending of several genres: lament-judgment (Mic 1:8/10–16) and praise-deliverance (Mic 7:18–20).⁷ By doing so,

⁷ We claim that 1:8–9 are hinge verses that are linked to the stanzas which precede and

we avoid being too rigid in our definition of genre, per Soenksen’s (2020, 16) advice, while recognizing the cognitive complexity of Micah’s literary style.

2.3.2 Structure of Micah

Although it has been claimed that the book of Micah lacks a systematic structure (Hillers 1984, 8; R. Smith 1984, 11–12), many Bible scholars identify either a bipartite, tripartite, or quadripartite division of the book of Micah. The tri-partite divisions are the most favored.

Quadripartite Division			
1–3		4–5	6:1–7:7
7:8–20			
1–2	3:1–4:8	4:9–5:15	6–7
Tripartite Division			
1–3		4–5	6–7
1–2	3–5		6–7
Bipartite Division			
1–5			6–7

Table 2: Structure of Micah

In concurrence with Waltke (2007, 15–16), Hoyt (2019a, 564), Patterson and Hill (2008, 302), McComiskey and Longman (2008, 499), Wendland (2019, 54, 60, 68), R. Smith (1984, 8), and Allen (1976, 257–258), we advocate a *tripartite division* of the book of Micah, involving three cycles of judgment and deliverance from 1:2–2:13, 3:1–5:15, and 6:1–7:20. Our distinctive contribution follow them. As such, they could be considered a short lament, and thus an example of the lament subgenre within the prophetic book of Micah. We view 1:10–16 as a separate stanza whose focus is the judgment of Judah towns.

followed by the steadfast covenant faithfulness of Yahweh. We interpret the stanzas within these subsections primarily as *indictments*, *warnings of judgment*, and *predictions of deliverance*. These divisions are substantiated by multiple boundary markers, cohesive devices, and prominence features in the BH text that divide or unify these literary units.

Cycle 1	1:1 – 2:13	JUDGMENT AND DELIVERANCE
1 st Section 1:2 – 2:11	Covenant unfaithfulness of Samaria and Jerusalem	
1:2–7	Indictment of nations	
	1:2–4	Indictment of all peoples
	1:5–7	Indictment and Judgment of Samaria, Indictment of Jerusalem
1:8–9	Micah's lament, Jerusalem besieged	
1:10–16	Judgment of Judean towns	
2:1–11	Judgment against God's people for mistreating others	
	2:1–5	Wicked oppressors indicted and judged
	2:6–11	People who reject Micah's message indicted and judged
2 nd Section 2:12 – 2:13	Covenant faithfulness of the Shepherd of Israel	

Cycle 2	3:1 – 5:15	JUDGMENT AND DELIVERANCE
1 st Section 3:1 – 12	Covenant Unfaithfulness of the Leaders of Israel	
3:1–4	Indictment of the rulers of Israel	

3:5–8	Indictment of the false prophets of Israel and vindication of Micah
3:9–12	Judgment against various leaders of Israel
2 nd Section 4:1 – 5:15	Covenant Faithfulness of Yahweh
4:1–8	Future Messianic Kingdom
4:9 – 5:1	Present suffering and future deliverance of Israel
5:2–6	Future Messianic Ruler/King
5:7–9	Future vindication of the remnant of Jacob among the nations
5:10–15	Future purification of Israel and judgments against the nations

Cycle 3	6:1 – 7:20	JUDGMENT AND DELIVERANCE
1 st Section 6:1 –16	Covenant unfaithfulness of God's people	
6:1–5	Indictment against God's people and implied indictment against God	
	6:1–2 General indictment against God's people	
	6:3-5 Implied indictment against God and his defense	
6:6–8	Righteous requirements of the Mosaic Covenant	
6:9–12	Indictment against wicked people for dishonest practices	
6:13–16	Judgment of God's people	
2 nd Section 7:1–13	Covenant unfaithfulness of the peoples of the earth	

7:I-7	Indictment of peoples for transgressing the Noahic covenant
7:8-13	Vindication of the righteous, judgment of the wicked
3 rd Section 7:14-20	Covenant faithfulness of Yahweh
7:14-17	God's people honoured, but nations shamed
7:18-20	Remnant of God's inheritance forgiven and redeemed

Table 3: Macrostructure of Micah

In the Elani translation of Micah, this macrostructure is represented in a *Table of Contents* in the *Introduction* and also in *headings* dispersed throughout the translation to draw attention to the major themes of covenant (un)faithfulness as they are expressed in indictments, warnings of judgment, and predictions of deliverance.

2.3.3 Covenant lawsuits

We propose that indictments, warnings of judgment, and predictions of deliverance, corporately constitute covenant lawsuits, in contradistinction to Bible scholars who omit crucial deliverances (hope/salvation) from lawsuits (Hoyt 2019a; Waltke 2007; Allen 1976, 363; Longacre and Bowling 2015).⁸ These intertwined, overlapping covenant lawsuits are the means by which Yahweh addresses their unfaithfulness to their covenant with him in contrast to his own covenant faithfulness. Some of these covenant

⁸ We understand a *lawsuit* to be a legal proceeding which involves multiple parties (plaintiff, defendant, witnesses, and judge) and processes and may result in positive or negative consequences. An *indictment* is a formal accusation for a serious crime. It is not the whole lawsuit. *Judgments* and *deliverances* are the punishments and rewards meted out to guilty and innocent plaintiffs, respectively.

lawsuits are easy to identify as their indictments and judgments and/or deliverances occur in rapid succession; others require more probing as their elements occur in different chapters, even in different cycles, and are not in chronological order. These covenant lawsuits include one against the whole earth, one distinctly addressed to the northern kingdom, some to the southern kingdom, one to (the 12 tribes of) Israel and perhaps surprisingly, a covenant lawsuit against Yahweh. Some lawsuits result in punishment, while others result in deliverance. In several lawsuits, an outcome of judgment and an integral part of deliverance is purification from idolatry: for Samaria in 1:7, for Israel in 5:12–14, and for the remnant of his inheritance in 7:19, as displayed below:

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Against Peoples/Nations			
Indictment	1:2		7:2–4
Judgment (wicked)		5:15	7:10, 13, 16, 17
Vindication (righteous)			7:7–9
Deliverance (remnant)		4:1–2	7:18–19
Against Samaria (Northern Kingdom)			
Indictment	1:5, 7		
Judgment	1:6, 7		
Vindication			
Deliverance			
Against Jerusalem (Southern Kingdom)			

Indictment	1:5; 2:1-2, 8-9	3:1-3, 5, 9-11	
Judgment	1:9-16; 2:3-5, 11	3:4, 6-7, 12; 4:10	
Vindication (Micah)		3:8	
Deliverance (remnant)		4:1-8	
Against God's people (Jacob/Israel)			
Indictment			6:2, 10-12
Judgment			6:13-16
Vindication			
Deliverance (remnant)	2:12-13	(4:1-8) 5:12-14	7:18-20
Against Yahweh			
Indictment			6:3
Judgment			
Vindication ⁹		4:1-8; 5:2-5a, 12-14	6:4-5; 7:18-20

⁹ These are Yahweh's righteous acts on behalf of his people that demonstrate his covenant faithfulness and prevent anyone from condemning his behavior.

Table 4: Lawsuits in Micah

3. Microstructure of Micah

Our study of Micah revealed significant rhetorical-literary devices in virtually every verse of the book. Poetic *parallelisms* constitute the framework for presenting, reinforcing, and expounding Micah's points.¹⁰ They involve "versets in which feelings get stronger, images sharper, actions more powerful or more extreme," (Alter 1985, 23). They were a literary tool that prophets often employed to intensify their indictments, warnings, and consolations (Alter 1985, 137, 161).

- *Word order variations* draw attention to switches in attention, boundaries, and climaxes in the book. Preposed constituents may indicate new temporal or spatial situations, new participants (agents or addressees), or new topics, and therefore present discontinuities of time, space, participants, and theme (Mic 4:1, 4:6, 4:8, 4:9, 5:2, 5:10). They express focus, contrast, or surprise. They can also reiterate a former situation (through renewal) and thus present continuities which reinforce a preceding clause and/or highlight a following one (Mic 4:10). The more complex and prolific they are, the more disruptive, and the more rhetorical effects they communicate (Levinsohn 2011; 2015, 64, 82).
- *Metaphors and similes* create vivid images which affect our perspective on Israel's situation. They evoke feelings of revulsion for Israel's adultery (Mic 1:7) and ritual uncleanness (Mic 3:2–3), of grief for her impending judgment (Mic 3:12), and of wonder for her amazing forgiving God (Mic 7:18).
- *Compactness of expression* (Mic 3:6–7, 6:14–15) presents judgments

¹⁰ Many examples of these are provided in 4.5.1 of the PhD thesis.

with a terseness and rapidity that reinforce the intensity and relentlessness of imminent chastisement.

- *Irony and sarcasm* convey scorn for God's rebellious people (Mic 2:4, 2:11).
- *Personification* reveals what Jerusalem will experience. For example, "Zion" is a daughter who will suffer as a woman in labour (Mic 4:10), a warrior who is to arise and thresh her enemies (Mic 4:13), or a king who is to reign (Mic 4:8).
- *Metonymy* and *synecdoche* are also effectively employed. Rods (Mic 5:1, 6:9), swords (Mic 6:14), and staffs (Mic 7:14) are used in place of the more abstract notions of destruction and discipline. Body parts become substitutes for the people who possess them (Mic 2:3, 3:4, 3:11, 2:1, 5:9, 7:3, 6:12, 7:2, 7:5).
- *Rhetorical questions* have very noticeable literary effects. They structure texts, intensify utterances, draw attention to that which follows, and evoke strong emotions. They are also persuasive devices that force us to contemplate and embrace the perspective of the speaker. Four RQs in Micah 6:6–7 draw attention to 6:8, which is the climax of the stanza and considered one of the most important verses in the book. Four questions in Micah 1:5 make Yahweh's indictment there especially vivid. Other RQs express reproach/indignation (Mic 1:5, 3:1, 4:9), rebuke and sadness (Mic 6:3), and sarcasm (Mic 7:10).
- *Speech quote formulas* highlight the divine origin of many speech acts and indicate that the prophet's message deserves the utmost attention.¹¹

When helped to identify and understand these poetic features and

¹¹ A comprehensive list of these is provided in 4.5.5 of the PhD thesis.

rhetorical devices in the Hebrew text, the Elani translation team realized that these could be expressed in an Elani translation in captivating and memorable ways. As a result of our study, the translation team employed poetic formatting to indicate stanza divisions and parallelisms. They also (1) replicated many figures of speech, (2) employed creative Elani equivalents (e.g., Elani particles and expressives, Elani RQs and antithetical statements, Elani serial verb constructions, and natural Elani word order), (3) added intratextual explanations (explicit renderings within the text itself), and (4) used extratextual helps (e.g., explanation of the meaning in footnotes and comments about the role of prophets and prophecy in the introduction) to make the biblical text's rhetorical-literary features more relevant to the Elani and to draw attention to the authoritative divine nature of Micah's message. Careful audience testing verified that the Elani understood and remembered these effects.

4. Elani Verbal Art Forms

Research on the socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts of the Elani over the past 25 years has enhanced our understanding of their culture, language, and verbal art forms and improved the quality of the Elani version of the Bible. Their animistic beliefs and religious practices, as well as the linguistic features of their language, have profoundly impacted the translation process and products. For example, a disinterest in frequenting spirit houses and a lack of comprehensive liturgical worship practices among the Elani have resulted in a limited supply of animistic prayers and religious songs. Ruling spirits, mountain spirits, and demons that do not speak to them of future events—only present and past issues—has resulted in a lack of predictive verbal art forms (prophetic literature). But a

continued love of singing and dancing has produced a variety of acappella songs, dancing songs, and drinking songs that celebrate life, grief, and loss. Elani has a wealth of stylistic devices to express a wide range of attitudes and ideas: criticism, rebuke, warning, ridicule, praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and laments. These include:

- *Particles*: Elani has a prolific (75+) selection of verbal, phrasal, clausal, and sentential particles with numerous pragmatic and rhetorical effects which significantly enhance the communicative impact of utterances.
- *Expressives*:¹² Elani has three- and four-syllable utterances, which are phonologically catchy and semantically complex words (adjectives, adverbs, or nouns), that are highly marked lexical items. They are generated with AAA, AB-AC, AA-BB and AB-CD combinations. They draw attention to a particular trait, by expressing intensification, indicating totality, or providing onomatopoeia. *Idioms* are also effective.
- *Word order variations*: As in Hebrew, the position of core arguments and adjuncts (e.g., subject, objects, temporal, locative, manner adverbials) in the clause may change due to pragmatic reasons, resulting in marked word order and increased prominence of the moved constituent. In Elani, however, the verb complex is always the last core constituent in the clause.
- *Complex verb phrases (VPs)*: Elements are either added or repeated within the verb complex to make the verb more prominent.
- *Marked noun phrases/pronouns and vocatives*: Participants are clearly identified and accentuated through complex noun phrases and

¹² ‘Expressive’ is the term used among many Tibeto-Burman linguists for what many linguists worldwide call ‘ideophones’.

pronouns, with particles, and/or via marked word orders (e.g., fronting).

- *Parallel structures* (bicolons and tricolons): Parallel lines are common in Elani songs. They promote cohesion within the text by linking adjacent lines to one another, emphasize key points by repeating similar ideas, and produce concise utterances that communicate more directly and powerfully than wordy equivalents.
- *Repetition*: Repetition of words and phrases attracts attention to the reduplicated core constituent, underlines important themes, adds force to utterances, and creates appealing rhythmic patterns.
- *Rhetorical devices*: These include *RQs*, *antithetical statements*, *emphatic statements*, *mitigated commands*, *refrains*, *dialogue*, and *quoted speech*. In particular, Elani speakers use emphatic and exaggerated statements, antithetical statements and rhetorical questions with disparaging emotive particles, along with marked 2nd person pronouns, to forcefully reprove the wrongdoings of others.
- *Figures of speech*: Elani figures of speech are also dynamic communication tools that resonate strongly with the Elani people who tend to pay attention to them and readily remember them.

Elani Christians have creatively used these stylistic features of the Elani language and verbal art forms to translate poignant indictments and judgments, caustic sarcasm, and doleful laments, as well as create beautiful Christian prayers and songs that express adoration, gratitude, supplication, and sorrow. They have also used the melodies of traditional mourning songs and invigorating drinking songs to express the grief of Micah's lament and the cheerfulness of his praise.

Our study of Elani texts (e.g., narrative stories and reports, procedural how-to-do-it instructions, hortatory admonitions and advice, expository essays, and songs) revealed many insights concerning the

people themselves. Their vulnerability in sharing their joys and sorrows, their creativity in communicating their ideas and perspectives, and their openness in expressing their reactions to each other's texts, opened a window for us into their soul and enriched our lives immensely. The Elani who were exposed to these texts also reported that they were deeply impacted by the content and the style of what their peers said and even desired to emulate it in their own communication with others.

5. Relevance to Bible Translation

This research and the multifaceted methodology employed aim to improve the quality of the translation of Micah, and by extension, other biblical prophetic literature as well, not only for the Elani people but also for other people groups, especially for those who speak related languages. Ideally, the findings of this thesis will be especially relevant and beneficial to mother tongue translators, translation advisors, and translation consultants who grapple with interpreting and rendering prophetic literature into other languages. It is hoped that these results may also impact translation communities, administrators, and funders who are invested in the translation project, as they come to understand the importance of (1) studying prophetic rhetoric, (2) seriously collecting and analysing RL texts, (3) creatively producing a variety of contextual adjustment materials, and (4) sustained iterative checking and editing. Finally, it is our deep desire that the Elani people will actively engage with and be radically transformed by the Elani translation of Micah's prophetic words.

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The Concept of the Mind and the Spiritual Transformation of the Believer in the Letters of Paul: A Systematic Analysis

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Abstract

This study analyzes Paul's concept of the nature of the mind and its role in the spiritual transformation of the individual believer between regeneration and glorification. Although Paul states that the mind is the means of transformation in Romans 12:2, the exact role and mechanism by which the mind contributes to the transformation of believers has not been adequately analyzed and characterized. The dissertation, which is within the discipline of systematic theology with a strong biblical theology element, examines the Apostle's use of terminologies of concepts of the mind in relation to spiritual transformation in representative passages of his letters. Paul's lexicon and conceptions demonstrate how pervasive the concept of the mind is in his writings. Systematic analysis of key passages indicates that his concept of the mind is non-technical, aligning with common Greek parlance and differing from his contemporaries among Greco-Roman

philosophers and some Hellenistic Jewish writers. Further, exegetical analysis, comparison, and synthesis of Romans 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 2:6–3:3, 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:6, Ephesians 4:17–24, and Philippians 4:6–9 in their respective contexts also demonstrate coherence and consistency in Paul's theology of the mind's role as the indispensable, foundational vehicle of transformation into Christlikeness. This has profound implications for the teaching ministry of the Church.

1. Introduction

Scholars acknowledge that the mind is a neglected topic among theologians, but that it plays a critical role in spiritual transformation. Keener (2016, 13) claims that Paul uses cognitive language to connect key elements of his theology. Saucy (2013, 165–166) argues that of all the human faculties, Scripture prioritizes the thinking faculty. Bond (2005, 259) demonstrates that cognitive language provides a lexical bridge between Paul's theology and his ethics. Issler (2012, 28), Keener (2016), and Moreland (2009, 131–133) stress the role of belief in the transformation process. Willard (2002; 2016) states that change is difficult but begins with the thoughts. However, none develop a systematic theology of Paul's concept of the mind or its role in transformation. This literary study considers Paul's conceptual language of the mind and his background, then examines his understanding of the mind and its role in spiritual transformation in Romans and four passages in Paul's other letters, concluding with an analysis and synthesis of the findings.

2. The Pauline Use of Terminology for the Mind

Determining Paul's understanding of the mind is crucial to clarifying his teaching about mind renewal and the mind's relationship to spiritual

transformation. Altogether, Paul employs over eighty different cognitive terms in his thirteen letters¹ (Louw and Nida 1989, 321, 324–325, 334–343, 380–388). Although the Apostle makes numerous direct and indirect references to the mind and thinking, three key terms shed light on his understanding of the concept of the mind itself. The first is *φρόνημα* and its cognates, which has a broad semantic range for cognitive functions (BDAG 2000, s.v. *προνέω*; Silva 2014, s.v. *προνέω*). The second is *νοῦς* and its cognates, which Paul identifies as the object of renewal and means of transformation in Romans 12:2. The third term, *καρδία* (heart), is a Hebrew concept carried over from the Septuagint into the NT (Silva 2014, s.v. *καρδία*). Although the concept can refer to the whole immaterial inner core of the person (Moreland 1997, 60–61; Saucy 2013, 44, 92–93), Carasik (2006, 9) claims that OT usage refers primarily to cognitive activity. Saucy (2013, 50, 95–96) argues that the OT concept is carried over into the NT, with heart continuing to be used predominately for a person's thinking faculty. Thus, Paul's writings, *καρδία* and *νοῦς* seem to be used interchangeably, although *καρδία* appears to have a wider semantic range.

A study of Paul's use of cognitive terms in their literary contexts indicates that Paul understands the mind as more than a constellation of thoughts (contra Jewett 1971) and more than a disposition or worldview (contra Jewett 1971). It is an entity that is renewable and that can have a disposition rather than being a disposition. The concept is inclusive of more than the reasoning function of the mind (contra Greco-Roman and some Jewish Diaspora thinkers), is inequivalent with the brain (contra Brown and Strawn 2012; Green 2010; Murphy 2006), and is distinct from other human faculties (contra Carasik 2006, 11; Willard 2002, 33).

¹ This dissertation regards all thirteen letters canonically attributed to Paul as authentically Pauline.

According to Paul, the mind is the immaterial thinking faculty. Paul writes of God's mind (Rom 11:33–3), the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), and the mind of the Spirit (Rom 8:27). Since God is a spirit, his mind must be immaterial. As a Jew who believed in the Old Testament, Paul would have believed that humans are made in God's image (Gen 1:26–27). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul thought of the human mind also as immaterial. Although Paul never directly defined the concept of the mind, a perusal of cognitive terms and their context in his letters indicates that he included a broad spectrum of functions of thought in his understanding. For Paul, the mind is inclusive of the whole realm of thought (Silva 2014, s.v. νοῦς). Further, he could distinguish between the faculties, with each mention of the mind being in the context of thinking, suggesting a focus on the cognitive faculty rather than the entire inner person (Rom 1:28; 7:23, 25; 11:34; 14:5; 1 Cor 1:10; 2:16; 14:14–15, 19; Eph 4:17–18; 22–23; Phil 4:7–8). For example, humans know and understand the truth about God, but because they do not see fit to retain that knowledge, God gives them over to unfit minds (Rom 1:20–21, 25, 28, 32). The futility of unbelievers' minds is directly connected to their lack of understanding (Eph 4:17–18). Hence, Paul appears to view the mind as the immaterial thinking faculty in a non-technical, commonplace way that corresponds to common Greek parlance, which views the mind as the organ of thought and denotes the whole realm of thought.

3. Paul in Relation to His Background

Paul's understanding of the mind appears to have coincided with common Greek usage, but it differs from that of his contemporaries among the Greco-Roman philosophers, as well as some Jewish Diaspora thinkers who adopted Greek philosophical concepts (Keener 2016, 208, 292; Visala

2018, 98). First, the Greco-Roman moralists narrowed their definition of the mind to the logical reasoning aspects of the thinking faculty, and some equated *νοῦς* with the divine (Lee 2020, 438, 444–445; Silva 2014, s.v. *νοῦς*), while Paul assumed the whole spectrum of thinking and did not define God as a mind. The semantic value of Paul's language is that of common speech rather than the abstract usage of philosophy (White and Fitzgerald 2003, 29). Second, all the philosophical schools thought that the mind is free of corruption and that reason is a neutral, trustworthy guide (Carr 2022, 55; Lee 2020, 57, 60, 98). However, Paul teaches that the human mind is corrupted and enslaved to deception (Rom 3:9–20; Eph 4:17–18; Allen 2017, 28; Piper 2010, 63; Schreiner 2014, 261). Third, Greco-Roman thinkers believed that self-mastery is attainable through self-effort, assuming that moral progress is completely under the individual's control (Carr 2022, 66–67; Engberg–Pedersen 2014, 502; Keener 2016, 77; Lee 2020, 98, 24, 277), but Paul was convinced that self-effort is useless without the Spirit's enablement (Rom 7:18; 8:2–4, 13; Bond 2005, 201–202; Carr 2022, 284–285; Issler 2012, 133; Keener 2016, 209). Fourth, unlike the philosophers who therefore thought that moral improvement results from education in philosophy and the use of reason, Paul indicates that it results from a transformed worldview that reflects the thinking of Christ through the learning of truth and reliance on the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:20–21; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Carr 2022, 58, 64; 263; Keener 2016, 252; Lee 2020, 262). His thinking about the mind aligns with the OT intellectual concept of the heart.

Although Hebrew did not have a dedicated word for mind, the OT writers seem fully aware of the significance of thought in the life of a human being. They demonstrate that a relationship with God that includes growing in knowledge and understanding of him should result in obedience and aid in spiritual growth toward the goal of holiness (Ps 1:2–3;

Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:25–28). God’s people were instructed to meditate on his Word and seek wisdom to avoid sin and become righteous. The concept of thinking in the OT entails corresponding behavior (Saucy 1993, 36). Leaders of the Qumran community, who were contemporaries of Paul, placed a strong emphasis on the importance of knowledge and right thinking as the basis for right living. The later writers of rabbinic literature exalted wisdom and the study and retention of Scripture for the transformation of moral life. Both the Qumran community and the rabbis wrote of the mind and thinking in an ordinary, non-technical manner. Non-Pauline NT writers’ references to the mind suggest that their understanding does not differ from Paul’s, including a belief that the mind was corrupted by the fall of humanity. Nevertheless, for them, the mind is “the focus of spiritual understanding and renewal” (Silva 2014, 430). Thus, Paul’s thinking is in harmony with both OT concepts and other NT writers (Saucy 2013, 95). The OT and NT backgrounds demonstrate Paul’s compatibility with the rest of Scripture, while Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds establish the milieu in which Paul ministered.

4. Paul's Concept of the Mind in Relation to Spiritual Transformation

Cognitive language is evident throughout Paul’s letters. His letters reveal a consistency of conceptualization of the mind. His understanding of mind renewal and the mind’s role in the transformation of the believer emerges as a harmonious and cohesive whole. The pivotal passage of Romans 12:1–2 directly addresses the importance of the thinking faculty for both doctrinal understanding and ethical instruction but leaves many unanswered questions due to its brevity. Studying that passage in the context of the

entire letter to the Romans forms a fuller picture of Paul's thought which relevant passages from four of Paul's other letters confirm and enhance.

4.1 Romans 12:2 in Context: A Depraved Mind Contrasted with a Renewed Mind

The theme of the mind runs through the letter to the Romans and is prominent in sections that concentrate on the transformation of the believer. Paul teaches that the mind is depraved yet renewable with patterns of thought needing total restructuring. According to Romans 12:2, the mind is the object of renewal and the means of spiritual transformation. Renewal results in the ability to approve the will of God. However, the whole process can be hindered if believers conform to the world's way of thinking instead of taking responsibility to choose to think according to truth.

The first three chapters of Romans demonstrate that renewal is needed because the human mind is depraved. Human corruption began in the mind with the suppression of truth, the resulting void being filled with speculation, leading to all manner of improper attitudes and behaviors (Rom 1:18, 21, 25, 28–31). As Tidball (2014, 24) states, “The account of the fall in Genesis 2:17 draws attention to the importance of the mind in causing humanity's downfall; consequently, it is vital that that which played such a crucial role in causing the problem should be addressed in the giving of the solution.”

Deception enslaves the mind until a person comes to faith in Christ. Then the process of mind renewal and spiritual transformation begins as union with Christ enables believers to overcome deceptive thought patterns and submit themselves to God (Rom 6). Romans 7–8 shows that the mind has limitations and lacks power apart from dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit. Chapter 8 indicates that there are two possible major ways of

thinking, so the believer must deliberately focus his thoughts on the things of the Spirit and choose thoughts that align with truth. The chapter also states that the goal of transformation is Christlikeness (Rom 8:29).

Romans 12:3–16:27 provide concrete examples of how believers should think about themselves, others, and life situations to behave properly. A mind renewed according to truth results in a transformed life.

4.2 First Corinthians 2:6–3:3; God’s wisdom contrasted with human wisdom

In 1 Corinthians, Paul seeks to correct the worldview of the Christians concerning their concepts of wisdom and the Holy Spirit’s role in the believer’s life. In 1 Corinthians 2:6–3:3, Paul repudiates human wisdom, yet he writes of revealing God’s wisdom to those who can understand it. This passage explains the role of the Holy Spirit in mind renewal. Paul indicates that the human mind is limited; no person can understand God’s wisdom unless the Holy Spirit illumines his mind and teaches him (Sweatman 2015, 237). Even the believer is dependent on the Spirit to grant him understanding (Cardona 2023, 281). Fortunately, God desires believers to know what Christ has done for them, so he has given them the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:12, 16). The challenge is to learn to think according to Christ’s mind, which is cultivated through renewing the mind (Rom 12:2). However, despite having the mind of Christ, believers can fail to grow spiritually (1 Cor 3:1–3).

The root of the problem is failure to understand rather than lack of knowledge or intellectual ability (1 Cor 2:8, 14). Receiving the mind of Christ makes it possible for believers to escape continued conformity to the world’s way of thinking, but transformation is not guaranteed. Believers can choose their pattern of thinking, as Romans 12:2 also indicates. First Corinthians 3:1–3 highlights the concept that the degree of conformity of a

believer's mind to spiritual truth may be employed as a measure of his or her spiritual transformation.

4.3 Second Corinthians 3:12–4:6; A Blinded Mind Contrasted with a Christ-focused Mind

Second Corinthians 3:12–4:6 demonstrates that the human problem is not a lack of information but a lack of understanding. Knowledge is a prerequisite to understanding but does not necessarily result in life transformation. An inability to understand God's truth is due to unbelief accompanied by the tendency to interpret God's Word through the lens of preconceived core beliefs that distort truth. Thus, belief plays a vital role in mind renewal. Core beliefs at the deepest level of the mind are difficult to change (Saucy 2013, 104), but God expects them to change. The deeper a truth penetrates, the greater its influence (105–106). As believers focus on growing in their knowledge of Christ, their minds are renewed by the transformation of core beliefs (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; Keown 2017, 360). Second Corinthians 3:18 explains the nature and goal of the transformation. The goal is Christlikeness.

Further, understanding cannot be gained through human effort alone but is the work of the Holy Spirit to remove blindness and illumine the mind (2 Cor 3:16–18). This passage elaborates on the Holy Spirit's role in both mind renewal and spiritual transformation. The Spirit works to transform believers' character into Christlikeness as they fix their thoughts on the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). God gives all believers the ability to understand his truth (2 Cor 4:6), and his Spirit is the agent that works the transformation in them. However, he has given believers the responsibility of intentionally focusing their minds on the Lord. This intentional mental focus is indispensable to the process of spiritual transformation.

4.4 Ephesians 4:17–24; Contrast between Old and New Ways of Thinking

In Ephesians 4:17–24, Paul contrasts the unbeliever’s way of thinking with the thought patterns of the renewed mind (Baugh 2016, 332, 373). Before becoming believers, all people live with a marred thinking faculty that is not neutral, because it is unable to view life according to ultimate truth (Schreiner 2014, 260). Thus, unbelievers’ lifestyles are determined by their futile thinking that results in a propensity for deceptive desires, indicating that the mind is the impetus behind sinful behavior (Eph 4:17; Baugh 2016, 359). When a person becomes a believer, old thinking patterns remain, and the believer must choose to change (Cohick 2020, 242). God designed humans to be thinking beings who must choose between truth and deception (Eph 4:21–22).

To experience transformation, a believer’s thinking must change through an ongoing process of renewal to become characterized by the truth that is in Jesus (Eph 4:21). Truth must be learned and truly believed to replace old patterns. The exhortation to mind renewal is sandwiched between “lay aside the old self” and “put on the new self,” indicating that the mind is foundational to behavioral changes (Eph 4:22–24). In Ephesians 4:24, Paul further explains God’s role in the believer’s transformation by asserting that God has created the new self. He also sheds light on the goal of transformation by describing the new creation as characterized by righteousness and truth.

4.5 Philippians 4:6–9; A Disciplined Mind Contrasted with an Earthly-focused Mind

Philippians 4:6–9 shows that the mind is critical to spiritual growth and well-being. Paul illustrates the mind renewal process by means of a practical

application (Phil 4:6–7). The mind is the residence of worries that plague the human race (Hoffman 2020, 23–24), but right thinking combined with prayer results in God’s peace, relieving believers of the pervasive mental struggle.

Philippians 4:8 defines the nature of a renewed mind’s thoughts. Believers are instructed to develop the habit of making mental decisions to fill their minds with thinking that aligns with God’s truth (Phil 4:8). Believers have a responsibility to decisively choose to think (*λογίζομαι*) in a God-honoring way because deceptive patterns of thinking continue to afflict people after they become believers and, therefore, must be deliberately and actively eradicated through making choices and forming new habits by meditating on truth (Keener 2005, 170; Saucy 2013, 197, 199; Saxton 2015, 1–3, 5–6, 133). Right thinking is a choice made in obedience to Paul’s command. He joins the ethical and the cognitive as he instructs believers to keep pursuing excellence in both thinking and action by focusing on what is right and putting into practice what they have learned from his teaching and example (Phil 4:8–9). Keeping the right focus and following the right examples are the keys to standing firm and not being distracted from the truth.

4.6 Summary of the Survey

Regardless of the context and situational exigencies for writing, Paul’s letters reveal a distinctive theological concept of the human mind, indicating that he thinks of it in a non-technical way as the immaterial thinking faculty. More significantly, they show that the spiritual transformation of the believer is contingent upon the renewing of the person’s mind. The above passages confirm and contribute to Paul’s statement in Romans 12:2 that mind renewal is the means of spiritual transformation, demonstrating

that the mind plays an indispensable, foundational role as the vehicle of spiritual transformation.

5. The Mind is the Indispensable, Foundational Vehicle for Spiritual Transformation

In his letters, Paul gives prominence to the mind and its role in spiritual transformation both indirectly and directly. Analyzing and synthesizing the findings from the preceding exegetical survey indicates that he understood the mind to be indispensable to spiritual transformation. It is also foundational to any spiritual growth in a believer's life. In fact, not only is it indispensable and foundational, but it is the vehicle through which transformation occurs.

5.1 The Mind is Indispensable to Spiritual Transformation

The mind is indispensable for at least four reasons. First, the mind is indispensable in Paul's conception because of its effect on behavior. He states that the way unbelievers live is the result of how they think (Eph 4:17; Keener 2016, 168, 209; Moo 2018, 315). Paul stresses the need for the renewal of the mind for believers because as the thought life is renewed, sinful patterns of behavior are replaced with godly behavior (Rom 6:11; 12:2–3; Eph 4:22–24; Arnold 2010, n.p.).

Second and related is the Apostle's expectation that filling the mind with God's truth will result in changes in behavior. Paul addresses the minds of his audience both in person and through letter writing to teach them both doctrine and ethics because he believed that learning truth would result in the transformation of the whole person, including behavior (Keener 2009, 2; Oswalt 2023, 278; 1 Cor 5:19, 11; 7:1; 8:1–13; 2 Cor 2:9; 1 Tim 4:11). After

speaking of the wisdom the believers had been taught, Paul expresses concern that the Corinthians had failed to incorporate that wisdom into their lives (1 Cor 2:6–7, 12–13; 3:1–3; Taylor 2014, 97). Their behavior revealed a lack of change in their thinking, causing Paul to express that he could not teach them further truth (1 Cor 3:2; Sweatman 2015, 223), even though he wanted to feed their minds with truth to transform their actions. For Paul, worldview precedes and determines behavior (Rom 8:5; Keener 2009, 82; 2016, 115; Thompson 2011, 128).

Third, Paul's expectation accounts for his pattern of correcting wrong thinking to correct behavior (Fee 2009, 272; Köstenberger 2020, 269). When believers failed to grow and change, Paul's first step was to correct their thinking (Thistleton 2000, 33). When he heard that believers in the churches were acting in unChristlike ways, he wrote letters to those believers, addressing the improper behavior (1 Cor 1:10; 5:1; 6:1–6; 2 Cor 2:4–11; Gal 4:9–10; Keener 2009, 2). Discussing wrong behavior in a letter addresses the mind.

Finally, the emphasis Paul put on knowledge and understanding implies their necessity for spiritual transformation. As Paul discusses spiritual transformation in his letters, he often asks, "Do you not know?" (Rom 6:3, 16; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:15). If Paul was referring merely to gaining intellectual information, he probably would not have connected the acquisition of knowledge to the need for transformation. Willard (2009, 37) defines what is commonly called head knowledge as knowledge devoid of belief. God designed humans to live by belief in facts because facts accord with reality, so to know reality, a person must learn truth (Willard 2016, 403–404). If believers are to embrace and live according to truth, truth must be known. However, information is not adequate, for knowledge without spiritual understanding is ineffective (1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 3:14; Sweatman 2015,

235). Spiritual understanding is distinct from intellectual understanding because the former is transforming while the latter may not be. This does not mean spiritual understanding is noncognitive (Moreland 2009, 92–93). When Paul states that renewing the mind results in transformation, he indicates the need for the knowledge of spiritual truth combined with an understanding of that truth plus belief in that truth (Rom 12:2; Eph 5:17).

In summary, thoughts determine behavior, and knowledge and understanding are necessary for transformation. Limited mental ability does not negate these principles (Mohler 2011, 65; Schreiner 2014, 261–262). Nor does an assumption that learning can bypass the mind, since that is not the type of learning that Paul indicates is necessary for spiritual growth (Saucy 2013, 165). Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the mind is indispensable to spiritual transformation.

5.2 The Mind is Foundational to Spiritual Transformation

The mind is not only indispensable to spiritual transformation but is also foundational for six reasons. First, in Romans 12:2, Paul directly states that mind renewal is the means of transformation. Ephesians 4:23 seems to be in harmony with this claim. Paul does more than state this truth, since he exhorts believers to pursue mind renewal for the purpose of seeking transformation (Leidenhag and Mullins 2018, 196). If mind renewal precedes transformation, and transformation depends on mind renewal, then the mind is foundational to spiritual transformation (Peterson 1995, 133).

Second, Paul backs his declaration by writing letters to churches for the purpose of encouraging spiritual growth. Writing creates an opportunity for sharing knowledge without the speaker and listener being in the same place simultaneously (Witherington and Myers 2022, 15). Letters target the mind (Willington 2017, 3, 6, 14). In his letters, Paul emphasizes that the

Scriptures were written for instruction (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16–17). He stresses the critical role of truth in overcoming deception (Eph 4:20–24). Further, Paul frequently uses the hearing and seeing metaphors for cognitive learning, reinforcing the foundational role he gives to the mind (Harris 2005, 328; Hoehner 2009, 260; Rom 11:8, 10; 15:21; 2 Cor 3:7, 13; 3:14–16, 18; 4:3–4, 6). Additionally, Paul places emphasis on learning, including doctrinal learning, by constantly encouraging believers to gain greater knowledge of truth (1 Cor 2:12–13; 2 Cor 4:2–3; Eph 4:20; Carson 1991, 566; Willard 2016, 42). His letters also display extensive use of cognitive terms.

Third, Paul teaches that the mind is the spiritual battleground where growth or the lack thereof is determined. This indicates that believers can continue in ungodly thought patterns, but they can also escape those patterns. Saucy (2013, 174) calls the mind the “front line of spiritual warfare.” If the mind were not foundational, it is unlikely that deception targeting the mind would be Satan’s primary mode of attack to prevent spiritual transformation (Saucy 2013, 174; Willard 2002, 100).

Fourth, Paul’s goal was to transform the worldview of believers to come into line with Christ’s thinking (Turner 2013, 189). People not only think according to their basic view of life, but their behavior stems from their worldview (Issler 2009, 184; 2012, 96; Keener 2016, 252; Moreland 2000, 39). Unbelievers have a faulty framework that does not automatically change when they become believers, so believers can continue to view life through their old beliefs and concepts (Saucy 1993, 50; Schreiner 2014, 261). The Corinthian church’s tendency to exalt worldly wisdom is a prime example (1 Cor 1:18–3:3; Sweatman 2015, 223).

Fifth, to accomplish that goal, Paul warns against deception and stresses the need to replace deception with truth (Eph 4:15–25; Phil 4:8). Truth corresponds to reality and thus affects people’s lives whether they

believe it or not (Willard 2016, 374–376). Truth appeals to the mind, so truth is rejected by suppressing it in the thought life (Rom 1:18, 25). Humanity suppressed truth, resulting in God giving humanity over to depraved minds (Rom 1:28). Paul would not have warned so strongly against deception if it were not destructive to spiritual growth (Issler 2009, 190; Moreland 2000, 37; Saucy 2013, 173; Schreiner 2014, 261, 272). Nor would he have promoted learning truth if it were not critical to transformation. Even the way Paul logically organizes his letters demonstrates how foundational truth is to godly behavior because he often first lays out doctrinal truth upon which he then builds practical instruction. Throughout his writings, Paul stresses the need to learn truth to renew the thought life because he was convinced that as the mind is renewed, the deceptive patterns of behavior will be replaced with godly behavior (Rom 6:11; 12:2; Eph 4:22–24; Col 2:8–3:10; Arnold 2010, n.p.). Paul's letters demonstrate that God has given believers a noetic capacity that enables them to understand theological truths as well as God's will to put those truths into practice in their own lives (Bond 2005, 67).

Finally, in addition to knowledge and right beliefs, understanding, which is also based in the mind, is essential. To understand is to mentally grasp or comprehend the meaning or significance of something and, therefore, see things as they really are (DeWeese 2011, 18; Moreland 2000, 38–39). Spiritually, understanding is foundational to living a transformed life. Thus, the mind is foundational to spiritual growth, but it is more than that.

5.3 The Mind is the Vehicle for Spiritual Transformation

The mind is indispensable and foundational to spiritual growth, but it is also the means of transformation. The believer receives inputs from sources of truth that aid spiritual growth, ranging from the Word of God, the Holy

Spirit, and the indwelling Christ to the church, its teaching, and spiritual experiences. Is the mind among these inputs? It is reasonable to conclude that rather than being one of the inputs, the human mind is the recipient of the inputs. All the sources channel truth into the mind and work to renew it. The mind itself is not the source of truth. However, the inputs a believer receives reshape patterns of thinking, allowing the mind to function as the means through which those inputs bring about transformation in the whole person.

For transformation of the entire person to happen, the mind itself needs to be renewed (Rom 12:2; Keener 2016, 254; Saucy 2013, 165–166, 197; Visala 2018, 98). This transformation occurs as believers learn the Scriptures, relate to Christ and his Spirit, are taught truth through the church both formally and informally, and assess experiences. As believers take truth in and meditate upon it, the Lord uses that truth to replace wrong thinking patterns with Christlike patterns (Saucy 2013, 176, 197). Core beliefs based on deception are erased, and beliefs based on God's Word are developed (Issler 2009, 188, 191; Willard 2002, 98; 2016, 5).

This process is the combined effort of the Holy Spirit and the believer, who is expected to take responsibility to fill his mind with spiritual truth as God effects the transformation (Carr 2022, 270; Issler 2009, 197). When the Holy Spirit's transforming work intersects with human responsibility, the Spirit works through the mind because the believer needs knowledge to participate (Moreland 2000, 37; Rickabaugh 2013, 205; Willard 2014, 39, 61). Mind renewal is a process of learning and internalizing truth (Combs 2006, 22). Thus, the mind is the vehicle for change, taking in the inputs from sources of truth, which first renew the mind to affect transformation in the rest of the person. As the believer's mind is renewed, he increasingly reflects Christ in all facets of his life (Bond 2005, 260; Saucy 2013, 110, 167).

The mind is both the recipient of inputs from sources of truth for spiritual transformation and the vehicle through which those inputs work to bring about the transformation of the whole person. As Millar (2021, 234) states, the mind is “the gateway to the whole person.” All the inputs from sources of truth ultimately lead to transformation through the mind as Paul conceptualizes it, indicating that the mind is the vehicle through which transformation occurs as the believer cooperates with the Spirit.

The conclusions of this study have significance for practical theology, especially concerning how the church approaches discipleship and teaching for life change. Paul’s emphasis on the role of the mind in the transformation of the believer suggests that teaching is the most fundamental work of the church among believers, that failure to teach about mind renewal can hinder transformation, and that understanding of the mind’s role can aid believers in overcoming deception and learning to think and live according to truth.

6. Conclusion

Paul seems to have perceived the mind in a non-technical way as the immaterial thinking faculty. He viewed the mind as the vehicle of change because all sources of truth for spiritual transformation target the mind to bring about transformation. It is foundational because it is the starting point of change. However, it is more than the starting point. The mind is involved in the entire process, so it is indispensable at every stage of growth. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul conceives of the mind as the indispensable, foundational vehicle through which God works spiritual transformation in the believer.

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Conflictos en clave de poder/autoridad en la Iglesia Evangélica Congregacional en la Argentina, una denominación histórica, a partir de sus vínculos con la Nueva Reforma Apostólica

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Resumen

La presente investigación titulada “Conflictos en clave de poder/autoridad en la Iglesia Evangélica Congregacional (IEC) en la Argentina, una denominación histórica, a partir de sus vínculos con la Nueva Reforma Apostólica,” está focalizado en analizar y poner en evidencia las relaciones de crisis que se suceden internamente a partir de la vinculación de algunos de sus integrantes con la Nueva Reforma Apostólica (NRA). Para la investigación de campo se ha escogido una iglesia fuertemente identificada

con la NRA, una iglesia de corte más histórica y pastores vinculados al Consejo General, que es el órgano de autoridad de la IEC. Enmarcamos este trabajo empírico con una revisión histórico bibliográfica, un análisis exegético de textos bíblicos escogido y la opinión sobre la autoridad eclesial vertida por teólogos referentes de la Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana. Finalizamos el trabajo con una propuesta de acción que sea superadora a los postulados de la NRA y aplicable en el contexto de la IEC, facilitando su contextualización, valorando su historia e incentivando su unidad institucional.

1. Introducción

Si bien la IEC tiene una rica historia de un siglo de existencia, debe reconocerse la falta de teorización sobre prácticas eclesiológicas y teológicas. Esta falencia abre la posibilidad a prácticas importadas y copiadas de movimientos que están en auge en el ambiente evangélico, como en este caso el de la NRA. Durante casi todo este siglo, la IEC ha sido un grupo compacto en liturgia y teología en todo el territorio argentino. Era muy fácil sentirse “como en casa” visitando alguna otra congregación de la IEC en cualquier lugar del país. Fue en la última década del siglo XX cuando algunas Iglesias locales y sus pastores, con el afán de ciertos cambios que den como resultado mayor crecimiento, optaron por involucrarse con la Nueva Reforma Apostólica. Esta actitud comenzó a generar tensiones que afectaron esa unidad nacional.

Personalmente, he trabajado algunos aspectos tendientes a brindar claridad sobre la doctrina y eclesiología de la IEC, considerando la importancia que esto reviste. El interés de esta investigación está precedido, precisamente, por los trabajos anteriores.

Presentamos en este trabajo la tarea investigativa en torno a la realidad que experimenta la Iglesia Evangélica Congregacional en la Argentina, particularmente, concerniente a vínculos que se están dando hacia su interior, con el movimiento de la NRA, y las consecuentes tensiones y conflictos en relación a la autoridad/poder como consecuencia de esta relación con una red foránea a la denominación en particular.

2. Metodología de la Investigación

Se ha considerado como guía la metodología de Don Browning, que respondía a las preguntas que se han propuesto. Una teología descriptiva, una teología histórica (bíblica y teológica), una teología sistemática y la propuesta de una teología práctica estratégica.

Pregunta principal: ¿De qué manera se producen y evidencian las tensiones/conflictos entre la denominación IEC y la iglesia local en cuanto a la comprensión del poder/autoridad, influenciado por la NRA? Las preguntas secundarias son: ¿Cuál es la comprensión actual de las características eclesiológicas que se evidencian en la IEC, y en cuáles se manifiestan mayores tensiones y conflictos a causa de la NRA? ¿Cuáles son los núcleos bíblicos y teológicos históricos del debate sobre la vigencia de los apóstoles en el contexto de la iglesia cristiana? ¿Cuáles serían los conceptos bíblicos que nos permitirían sistematizar una correcta comprensión del ministerio del apóstol en el contexto actual de la IEC? ¿Qué recomendaciones estratégicas se pueden plantear para corregir y re-vincular las iglesias bajo un concepto de autoridad bíblica, teológica y contextualmente pertinentes?

La tesis combina un aspecto teórico bibliográfico con otro empírico, por lo que, en ese sentido podemos considerarla un diseño de investigación mixta. La presente investigación se encuadra en la Teología Práctica, en el

área de la eclesiología, específicamente en cuanto al gobierno /autoridad en la iglesia. Para lo dicho, será necesaria una correcta comprensión bíblica al indagar ciertos textos del Nuevo Testamento. Además, será fundamental el aporte de la teología sistemática para organizar esas enseñanzas de las Sagradas Escrituras, ofreciendo alternativas para el presente.

3. Revisión Bibliográfica

Se ha realizado un acercamiento histórico a la IEC y el análisis bíblico previo respecto del concepto de autoridad/poder, prestando especial atención a textos que son los predilectos de la NRA para sostener la importancia jerárquica del apóstol.

Repaso histórico

El núcleo base de la IEC en la Argentina estuvo conformado por inmigrantes ruso-alemanes que llegaron al país a finales del siglo XIX, instalándose en la provincia de Entre Ríos; si bien es cierto que, muy rápidamente, se fueron incorporando a esta nueva iglesia en Argentina inmigrantes alemanes provenientes de Polonia y que se habían afincado más al Norte del país, específicamente en la provincia de Misiones.

La gran cantidad de conflictos bélicos que se dieron lugar en el centro de Europa, sumado a la guerra de los siete años (1756-1763), han dejado gran parte de aquella Alemania en ruinas, lo que motivó que en los siguientes años muchos buscasen nuevos horizontes alejándose de sus tierras, dejando todo atrás en búsqueda de mejores posibilidades de vida para ellos como para su descendencia.

Una de las varias oportunidades de emigración se les presentó cuando la Emperatriz rusa Catalina II, también llamada Catalina la Grande,

de origen alemán, extiende la invitación a estos empobrecidos alemanes a poblar el vasto territorio ruso. Son un poco más de 30.000 personas las que acceden y emprenden el largo y duro camino de la emigración, rumbo a una tierra desconocida, inhóspita y de un clima muy adverso, pero en búsqueda de la tierra prometida. La mayoría de ellos eran pobladores de la zona de Hessel, de diferentes profesiones, esperanzados y con fe (Riffel 2008, 18; Reichel 2023, 21; Popp-Denning 1977, 16).

Al llegar a Rusia prestaron juramento de súbditos a la Corona rusa, en una ceremonia que se realizó para tal fin en una Iglesia Luterana (Riffel 2008, 20). De aquí fueron conducidos a la región del Volga, el lugar asignado.

Rápidamente han logrado establecerse, construir sus casas, sus templos, sus aldeas. Gozaban de ciertos privilegios como el no tener que cumplir con el servicio militar obligatorio, podían mantener su propio idioma, vivir según las costumbres alemanas en territorio ruso. Esto hizo de que aún después de doscientos años viviendo en territorio ruso ellos se consideraban alemanes; y en cierto sentido superiores a sus vecinos rusos.

Muchas promesas incumplidas motivaron que la colectividad alemana en el Volga pensara en volver a emigrar. En ese contexto aparece en escena el Nuevo Mundo, buscando europeos para poblar los vastos territorios del continente americano. “Muchas familias pusieron los ojos en las nuevas naciones que habían surgido a la vida independiente en las Américas. Así fue como a fines del siglo XIX algunas se dirigieron a Canadá y los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, en tanto que otros se encaminaron hacia el Brasil y la Argentina” (Powell 2002, 22).

Los primeros contingentes en salir de Rusia hacia América, particularmente hacia el Norte, ocurre durante el año 1872, mientras que los que lo hicieron hacia el Sur, específicamente a Brasil y Argentina, fue a

partir del año 1877 (Reichel 2023, 22), realizando el periplo vía Volga (Rusia) hacia Hamburgo (Alemania) y desde allí hacia Buenos Aires (Argentina), en el caso de quienes llegaron a nuestro país.

Estos inmigrantes trajeron consigo su bagaje espiritual, el que se fue forjando y modelando también en estas tierras por las influencias que se fueron dando en su historia. Riffel dice que “al emprender el viaje, los emigrantes se llevaron consigo su Biblia y su Himnario. Raras veces faltaba el libro de oraciones. En el tren y en el barco tenían tiempo de profundizar en ellos, no sólo por aburrimiento, sino por una genuina necesidad interior” (2008, 140–141).

Al arribar a la Argentina tuvieron algún contacto con la Iglesia Evangélica Alemana, que ya estaba en el país, asociándose luego al SEARP (Sínodo Evangélico Alemán en el Río de la Plata). En este sentido concuerdan Riffel (2008, 141) y Beros (2012, 77) en que fueron abandonados a su suerte por mucho tiempo debido a la escasez de ministros evangélicos que pudieran asistirlos y acompañarlos espiritualmente.

Esta realidad propició incomodidades espirituales y búsqueda de mayor acompañamiento en el desarrollo de su fe, lo que pronto desembocó en una división, donde un grupo más deseoso de reuniones con mayor frecuencia, con énfasis en una predicación confrontativa y de “conversión”, comenzó a reunirse en las aulas de la escuela de alemán, acompañados y liderados por quien fuera el maestro de alemán de la colonia.

El año 1920 se produce la ruptura definitiva de un grupo de creyentes en la Aldea San Antonio y poblados aledaños en cuanto a su vinculación eclesial con el SEARP, formalizándose esta nueva comunidad bajo el nombre de *Deutsche Evangelische Gemeinde San Antonio*, que tradujeron al castellano como “Sociedad Evangélica Alemana de San Antonio”, cambiando para 1924 por “Congregación Evangélica Libre Congregacional.”

Por intermedio de familiares miembros de Iglesias Congregacionales germanas en los Estados Unidos se contactó con la *German Congregational Church*, solicitando ayuda para la formalización de una nueva iglesia, teniendo en cuenta la similitud de conceptos teológicos y eclesiológicos entre ambos.¹

De esta manera, en 1924 llegó a Entre Ríos el misionero John Hoelzer, comisionado con el objeto de realizar un sondeo y organizar las primeras congregaciones, siguiendo instrucciones de la “Conferencia de Illinois” ... Esta integración se formalizó el 29 de junio de 1924, cuando en una asamblea extraordinaria las congregaciones entrerrianas que se habían agrupado (seis en ese momento) tomaron la decisión de adherirse a la iglesia de referencia en los Estados Unidos (Powell 2002, 30).

1 Podemos ubicar intentos congregacionales de instalarse en la Argentina por intermedio de los misioneros John Clark Brigham y Theophilus Parvin quienes en 1823 fueron enviados por la *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) con el mandato de testear la posibilidad de iniciar una avanzada misionera en América del Sur, más precisamente en Buenos Aires, en proceso de independización. En ambos casos, permanecieron en el país por escaso tiempo (dos años), complementando su tarea con la colaboración en la implementación del sistema lancasteriano de enseñanza, traído al país por el pastor escocés James (Diego) Thompson. Estos intentos no dieron frutos positivos y ambos misioneros volvieron a su país de origen (Oliphant 1945, 85–103).

La misma agencia misionera (ABCFM), una década después, envía a los pastores congregacionales William Arms y Titus Coan con el fin de explorar la factibilidad de iniciar una base misionera entre los habitantes nativos bien al sur de la Patagonia. Los mismos recorren la zona entre noviembre de 1833 y abril de 1834, entregando un informe no favorable a las autoridades de la ABCFM (Coan, 1880).

Unos años después, durante el año 1865 llega a las costas argentinas un grupo de galeses con la decisión de colonizar la Patagonia. Este proyecto fue motivado y movilizado por el pastor congregacional Michael D. Jones desde Gales y junto al grupo movilizado llegaron los pastores Abraham Matthews y Lewis Humphreys, ambos congregacionales, encargados de asistir espiritualmente a estos inmigrantes. Estas iglesias se organizaron como independientes, y no llevan el nombre “congregacional” como identificadorio.

Según lo señala William Chrystal (2016), la obra en la Argentina fue el segundo campo misionero, después de Canadá, iniciado y apoyado por este grupo congregacional,² la *German Congregational Church*.

Beros hace mención que estos inmigrantes que conformaron el grupo inicial de la IEC, en su gran mayoría, se identificaban con el movimiento pietista y las corrientes de reavivamiento espiritual de fines del siglo XIX, notándose la importancia que le daban a la lectura de la Biblia, los libros de oraciones y su potente estilo de canto (2012, 31). Entre ellos, dice, se puede identificar a “los hermanos” quienes asumían la responsabilidad espiritual y de prédica conversionista.

A partir de este contacto y compromiso, la misión en Argentina es dirigida por misioneros americanos con el apoyo de la iglesia norteamericana hasta el año 1971, en el que el último misionero regresa a su país, dejando a la IEC al mando de obreros nacionales, hijos de inmigrantes.

Análisis exegético

Las categorías de autoridad y poder constituyen dos de los conceptos más determinantes en la teología bíblica. Desde el Antiguo Testamento hasta el Nuevo Testamento, la Escritura articula una visión del poder divino que se diferencia radicalmente de las concepciones políticas, militares y religiosas de su tiempo. En el mundo bíblico, la autoridad (ἐξουσία, *exousía*) remite al derecho legítimo de actuar, mientras que el poder (δύναμις,

² Aclaramos que, cuando Chrystal dice que es el segundo campo misionero hace referencia exclusivamente a lo emprendido por estas congregaciones alemanas; teniendo en cuenta que las Iglesias Congregacionales en los Estados Unidos han sido pioneras en el movimiento misionero mundial. Sus contactos y evangelización a los naturales pobladores del continente norteamericano, los envíos de misioneros a países de África y Asia, la formación de las primeras sociedades misioneras que enviaban y sostenían misioneros en distintos lugares.

dynamis) señala la capacidad efectiva de llevar a cabo una acción. Estas dos dimensiones, aunque distintas, son complementarias: la autoridad establece la legitimidad, y el poder garantiza la eficacia.

Vale señalar a priori, lo que muy bien señala David Roldán argumentando que, el poder es una realidad humana y divina, por lo que no podemos catalogarlo como bueno o malo, sino que depende de la implementación o aplicación del mismo, de cuáles serían las relaciones de poder que Dios prefiere (2014, 36).

La tesis se ha enfocado particularmente en dos textos paulinos, 1 Corintios 12:28 y Efesios 4:11, que vienen a representar los textos preferidos por la NRA.

El primer texto, 1 Corintios 12:18, comienza resaltando que Dios es el responsable de la distribución y diversidad de los dones en el seno de la iglesia. De disponer las muchas partes como él quiso (Fee 1998, 699), “a los que Dios puso en la iglesia...” Aun cuando sean los miembros de la iglesia los que llaman, ordenan o instalan a los hermanos en sus posiciones, es tan sólo por intermedio de ellos que Dios manifiesta a quienes él ha llamado o escogido para una posición oficial en la iglesia de acuerdo a la variedad de dones que él distribuye entre los miembros del cuerpo (Kistemaker 1998, 481), tal como lo expresa el autor de la epístola a los Hebreos: “Nadie ocupa ese cargo por iniciativa propia; más bien, lo ocupa el que es llamado por Dios” (Heb. 5:4).

Estos carismas, o el ejercicio de los roles mencionados en este pasaje, nada tienen que ver con aspiraciones personales o búsqueda personal individual. Le son atribuidos a Dios mismo. Es Dios quien por su voluntad ha asignado a ciertas personas con las habilidades propias de los carismas que se mencionan aquí y les ha puesto al servicio de la iglesia. Esta afirmación deja sin efecto cualquier interés personal por liderar o expresar

algún don en particular. La organización interna de la iglesia y el rol que cada uno de sus miembros ejerza depende de cómo Dios distribuya esas capacidades y establezca así las responsabilidades de cada uno de aquellos que componen la *ekklesia*. Es para las necesidades de funcionamiento de la iglesia que Dios ha dotado de creyentes capacitados, aptos por medio de dones por él asignados (Pérez Millos 2019, 689).

En la imagen del cuerpo, del contexto que utiliza el apóstol, deja en claro que la cabeza del mismo es Cristo. Esto es fundamental para entender que al ser Cristo la cabeza, es él quien la gobierna, quien la rige, y en este caso también quien la habilita con dones para el servicio. El cuerpo tiene sentido cuando está unido a la cabeza, por lo que es insustituible, como el mismo Jesús lo manifestó: “separados de mí no pueden ustedes hacer nada” (Jn. 15:5).

Es aquí, en Corintios, la única vez que Pablo enumera algunos de los dones utilizando adjetivos numerales ordinales. Es la única vez que, en el contexto de los carismas, se plantea a unos en primer lugar, otros en segundo, estableciendo así una especie de ranking. Si bien en Efesios 4:11 tenemos un pasaje muy similar, con un ordenamiento similar, pero allí no están numerados. Esta particularidad nos induce a ciertas preguntas, como, por ejemplo: ¿cuál es la razón de enumerarlos? ¿se está pretendiendo jerarquizar a estos dones por sobre los demás o es tan solo una expresión de su narrativa? ¿tienen que darse estos dones y en ese orden en cada una de las comunidades cristianas? ¿cuál es su importancia al no seguir el mismo estilo en las descripciones de las otras listas de dones?

Para interpretar el versículo 28 es sumamente importante considerar el contexto anterior del Cuerpo de Cristo como también el posterior, donde se afirma que no existen dones más importantes o jerárquicos por sobre los demás. El quitar la mirada del contexto sería riesgoso para poder entender a

Pablo, o le haríamos decir a Pablo algo que no estaba en su propósito. Pablo no parece tener en mente una “jerarquía de autoridad” aunque podemos pensar en una jerarquía de valor o utilidad, con valor o utilidad medida en términos de la capacidad de establecer y edificar una iglesia (Ciampa y Rosner 2010, 610).

El apóstol mismo no manifiesta superioridad de su rol para con los demás creyentes, no se considera siendo parte de una élite dirigencial eclesiástica; más bien sabe considerarse “hermano” y “siervo” de los demás. Salvo escasas excepciones y es ante situaciones muy particulares, como lo expresa Dunn (1981) en las que expone su ministerio apostólico haciendo una defensa del mismo, hablándolos en distintos tonos de autoridad: dando órdenes (1 Co. 7:10), mandando (1 Co. 7:17), amonestando (1 Co. 4:14), amenazando (1 Co. 4:21), subiendo el nivel autoritario cuando su evangelio está en peligro (2 Co. 11:1), o cuando la unidad de la iglesia está siendo amenazada (1 Co. 5:1-5). Afirmando siempre que “su autoridad se encamina a la edificación y no a la destrucción de la iglesia” (1981, 444-445).

Entender las expresiones “primero”, “segundo”, “tercero”, como una graduación de importancia sería violar el objetivo principal de Pablo en este pasaje. Coinciden en ver esta enumeración como un orden cronológico de precedencia, Blomberg (2012, 295-296), Schreinder, (2018, 268-269), Thiselton (2000, 1014) cuando afirma que la iglesia no suscita a sus apóstoles sino que responde al testimonio apostólico, Fee (1998, 701-702), Foulkes (1999, 352), Taylor (2014, 301), sosteniendo que es en éste sentido que se afirma que la iglesia está establecida sobre el testimonio o fundamento de los apóstoles y profetas (Ef. 2:20), ya que ambos ministerios fueron indispensables en el establecimiento de la iglesia. Para que exista una comunidad cristiana en algún lugar se requiere el ministerio del plantador de iglesia, la proclamación regular de la Palabra de Dios y la

enseñanza y discipulado de los nuevos creyentes. En ese sentido aparecen primero el apóstol, luego el profeta y después los maestros. Se realiza aquí una asimilación y relación de la tarea del apóstol con la del plantador de iglesias.

Blomberg (2012) particularmente sostiene que entender “en primer lugar”, “en segundo lugar” como una graduación de importancia, sería violar el objetivo fundamental de la exposición que hace el apóstol. En su opinión, “establecer una congregación local requiere el ministerio del plantador de iglesias. A continuación, ha de seguir la regular proclamación de la Palabra de Dios. Los maestros deben, después, complementar la evangelización con el discipulado y la transmisión de las verdades cardinales de la fe” (Blomberg 2012, 295-296). Tan solamente cuando se llegue a esta instancia se puede decir que la comunidad cristiana es capaz de movilizar la acción de todos los demás dones.

Dunn plantea que este orden fijado por Pablo es teniendo en cuenta la prioridad o autoridad que tenía el fundador dentro de esa nueva comunidad. Usando sus propias palabras, “el apóstol ejercía autoridad dentro de una comunidad no como un apóstol de la Iglesia universal, sino como fundador de esa comunidad” (1981, 441). Por lo tanto, es de entender que quien estaba al frente, liderando, con algún grado de jerarquía era el iniciador de la obra local. En ese sentido Dunn no circunscribe el ministerio apostólico a los doce, sino que argumenta que el versículo 28 estaría haciendo referencia a un concepto más amplio de apóstol y no sólo a los doce.

En el caso de Kistemaker es más contundente en manifestar que Pablo no estaba sugiriendo que debía haber un apóstol en cada iglesia local, ya que señala que los apóstoles sirvieron a toda la iglesia en sus primeros años de formación, por lo que el oficio apostólico fue sólo para

ese tiempo y que cesó con la muerte del último apóstol; teniendo en cuenta que los requisitos del apostolado (haber estado con Jesús) hacían imposible que pudiese hablarse de sucesores o de sucesión apostólica (1998, 480). Esta posición también es sostenida por autores como Trenchard, quien sostiene que en el sentido restrictivo y especial sólo se puede señalar a los que vieron al Cristo resucitado (1980, 117), Hodge (1996, 284—285), entre otros.

En el segundo texto, Efesios 4:11, “el énfasis no se halla en los apóstoles, profetas, etc., como oficiales, sino como dones de Cristo a su iglesia” (Hendriksen 1984, 214).

Se da inicio mencionando a los apóstoles, al igual que en 1 Corintios 12:28, especialmente comisionados y enviados por el Señor Jesucristo. Esto incluye a los Doce y al mismo Pablo. Proporcionaron el vínculo esencial con su maestro, y su papel fue fundamental para los primeros cristianos.

“El uso de la palabra apóstol aquí obedece al sentido restringido, especial, técnico, ya mencionado, pero es necesario puntualizar que tiene un significado más amplio o general que equivale a enviado o misionero; uno a quien se le ha encomendado cierta misión o tarea a realizar” (Trenchard y Wikham 1980, 107). Barclay es más contundente al sostener que aquí se hace referencia pura y exclusivamente a los apóstoles en el sentido restringido y que por lo tanto éstos tenían que acabarse con la muerte de aquellos que habían estado con Jesús (Barclay 1998, 181), pasándose luego a entender el apostolado en un sentido más general, vinculado con la actividad misional. En la misma dirección se expresa Schlier, sosteniendo que no hay razones para suponer que este pasaje haga referencia a un concepto más amplio o general del apóstol, sino a aquellos que habiendo recibido del Señor mismo la gracia han establecido el fundamento de la iglesia (1991, 257—258). Añadimos aquí también la posición de John Stott al considerar que “debe ser en este sentido que Pablo está utilizando la palabra apóstoles aquí, porque los pone al principio de la lista, como lo hace también en 1

Corintios 12:28 y es así como ha usado la palabra en su carta, refiriéndose a sí mismo (Ef. 1:1) y a sus compañeros apóstoles, como fundamento de la Iglesia y órganos de revelación (Ef. 2:20, 3:26). Por lo tanto, no cabe duda de que, en este sentido no hay apóstoles hoy” (Stott 1987, 152–153).

Ninguno de los textos analizados presenta la función apostólica con un rol de autoridad superior a los demás carismas y como revelación válida para la instauración del mismo en la iglesia actual.

4. Investigación Empírica: proceso y descubrimientos

En palabras de Marzilli (2019, 24), “el universo de iglesias evangélicas está en proceso de cambio y renovación. Su gobierno..., formas, ritos e incluso algunas concepciones, perspectivas teológicas y pastorales están cambiando.”

La observación de ambas iglesias en cuanto a la manera de relacionarse con la denominación y/o su apertura hacia ministerios apostólicos nos dará un panorama más real de las circunstancias que inducen a una relación de tensión en la IEC propiciada por esta vinculación con la NRA.

La pretendida superioridad o como lo denominan, de “madurez espiritual,” de quienes abrazan los presupuestos de la NRA impiden un diálogo sincero y análisis bíblico-teológico profundo de lo que está ocurriendo. Conceptos tales como “esto no se entiende con teología, sino por revelación,”³ ubican a los actores en posiciones en los que la opinión del otro no es válida, ni pretende ser oído, menos aún debatido.

Entre los aspectos sobresalientes de esta relación tensa, nos proponemos observar respecto de la desarticulación denominacional que

³ Expresado por uno de los líderes de la “Iglesia A”, al pretender argumentar la validez del ministerio apostólico-profético según su visión.

se está propiciando desde sectores NRA, el desconocimiento hacia las autoridades de la IEC, el abandono de estructuras eclesiológicas clásicas en el congregacionalismo argentino y la implementación de conceptos teológicos foráneos de dudosa base bíblica.

Para ello se tomaron en cuenta dos iglesias diferentes, una conservadora y otra involucrada en el NRA, además de la opinión de personas vinculadas al órgano de autoridad de la IEC a nivel nacional.

En la “Iglesia A,” plenamente involucrada en la red apostólica, la convicción es rotunda respecto de la disposición organizacional por intermedio de la autoridad del apóstol y sus vinculaciones con redes afines, las que trascienden lo denominacional.

Al ser consultado el pastor de la “Iglesia A” respecto de cuál fue la motivación que lo llevó a orientar la iglesia desde la perspectiva de la NRA, su respuesta manifestó que fue con el propósito de revitalizarla, viendo como otras, de distintas denominaciones, estaban “creciendo.” Sostuvo que entendía que la estructura organizativa histórica pasaba a ser un impedimento para hacer crecer numéricamente la misma. En su argumentación, se ha planteado que la elección democrática del liderazgo impedía el ejercicio de los dones, por lo que consideraba apropiado que la elección de los mismos debería ser realizada por la persona del pastor.⁴

En el caso de la IEC, la “Iglesia A,” que formó parte de la investigación, es el fiel reflejo de las demás que están en la misma situación. Si bien mantienen sus vínculos con la IEC por aspectos que pueden ser

4 Esta decisión concuerda con lo que señala David Roldán, al plantear que “podríamos decir que la NRA opta por liderazgos de tipo “carismático” y “caudillista” no democráticos. Para quienes defienden la NRA, la misión de la iglesia debe entenderse en términos de crecimiento numérico de las congregaciones, que deben pasar de ser “mega-iglesias”. Las “mega-iglesias” no podrían —según los presupuestos del NRA— gestionarse democráticamente, sino mediante un liderazgo fuertemente centralizado, carismático y apostólico” (2014, 67-68).

solamente de conveniencia administrativa, están sujetos a la visión y autoridad emanada de la red apostólica.

Los encuestados manifestaron que la iglesia recibe la “palabra profética” de parte de los líderes de la red a la que están vinculados y que esta palabra “direcciona” la visión de la misma.

Además, se ha detectado que se toman decisiones no aprobadas por la IEC, como el caso del nombramiento de “apóstoles” dentro de la iglesia local, sin el consentimiento de la autoridad denominacional. Este nombramiento lo hacen desde las redes apostólicas. Vale aclarar que la IEC no ha aceptado (aún) el reconocimiento ordenado del rol de apóstol, tal como lo pretenden desde las redes apostólicas. En consecuencia, se plantea aquí una situación de crisis de autoridad frente a la autoridad denominacional.

Si se desconocen vínculos denominacionales que fungen como órganos de control y/o interdependencia, ¿cuáles otros vínculos se fomentan en la iglesia? En este caso, aparece como dato sorprendente el conocimiento muy consistente por parte de los encuestados de las relaciones que la “Iglesia A” mantiene por fuera de lo local, específicamente con la red apostólica. El nivel de conocimiento de la red y de quienes la conforman, sus principales referentes, lo han manifestado todos los participantes de la encuesta en la “Iglesia A.”

Preguntamos a nuestros entrevistados respecto de la injerencia externa que puede manifestarse en las actividades de la iglesia local, pudiéndose escoger varias opciones. En este caso, la “iglesia A” expresa fehacientemente y por amplio margen (80%) la aceptación de lineamientos dirigidos por los integrantes de las redes apostólicas. Hubo un 30% que consideró que en cuanto a aspectos administrativos se puede considerar válido la intervención de la IEC y de sus autoridades. Llamativamente observamos aquí la injerencia de iglesias vecinas, lo que implica una

vinculación con iglesias que comparten la misma visión apostólica dentro de la ciudad como así también en la provincia y el país.

Observamos aquí que se está produciendo una distinción en cuanto a la comprensión y aceptación de autoridad. Los líderes principales de las redes apostólicas están siendo aceptados como autoridad espiritual (consejería, acompañamiento fraternal, recomendaciones en cuanto a la misión, rendición de cuentas respecto del ministerio y de la vida personal del pastor, etc.), mientras que las autoridades denominacionales solamente son tenidas en cuenta en cuestiones menores o administrativas.

En resumen, la primera tensión evidenciada tiene que ver con lo que se experimenta entre las iglesias locales, es decir, entre las vinculadas a la NRA y las que mantienen una fuerte identidad histórica. Se ha roto todo vínculo fraternal de relaciones profundas, de identidad. Es evidente la intención intervencionista de las iglesias relacionadas a la NRA para con las más conservadoras, aprovechándose de su propaganda proselitista a favor de este “nuevo” modelo eclesiológico. Se ha corroborado la insistencia en la implementación de la función del apóstol como autoridad superior a la de los demás pastores. Se manifiestan constantemente, y cada vez de manera más acentuada, las diferencias teológicas y eclesiológicas. Si bien es cierto que se comparte formalmente la dependencia a la misma denominación, la IEC, este vínculo no podría ser considerado como de unidad teniendo en cuenta las diferencias sustanciales manifestadas.

Por otro lado, se han corroborado conflictos en cuanto a la relación entre las iglesias vinculadas a la NRA y la autoridad que deviene del órgano de autoridad de la IEC, como lo es la Asamblea General Ordinaria y su brazo ejecutivo, el Consejo General de la IEC. Tal como lo analizamos anteriormente, cuando se desconoce la autoridad de la IEC, de manera consciente o inconsciente, esto se traduce en una situación que como mínimo genera rispideces y descontento.

Las iglesias vinculadas a la NRA, dada su consideración de que el apóstol es la autoridad espiritual máxima, no considera, no reconoce como autoridad a quienes no ostenten esa función, aun fungiendo como autoridad denominacional.

Se demostró que aquellas iglesias vinculadas con la NRA no asumen su responsabilidad de reconocer a las autoridades denominacionales como autoridad en asuntos espirituales, simplemente acatan definiciones administrativas y aquellas que les facilitan continuar sujetas a la autoridad apostólica y profética de la red a la que están vinculadas.

Se corroboró la implementación de prácticas no autorizadas por la denominación, desoyendo los lineamientos y recomendaciones que oportunamente las autoridades denominacionales les han hecho al respecto.

En cuanto a la reacción de las autoridades, se ha comprobado una actitud de “dejar que suceda,” no tomando en cuenta el asunto como algo serio, con el fin de apaciguar las diferencias.

Lo paradójico en esta crisis tiene que ver con un dato que no es habitual hallar en otras denominaciones de carácter similar a la IEC y que también se enfrentan al avance de la NRA. En este caso, aquellas iglesias vinculadas a los movimientos y redes apostólicas no se han separado de la denominación y no hay indicios de que lo intenten. Al contrario, insisten en ser avaladas a continuar en ese sentido, además de estar buscando ocupar espacios de decisiones que puedan impulsar a toda la IEC hacia paradigmas de la NRA.

5. Conclusión

Teniendo en cuenta las tensiones y conflictos que experimenta la IEC como denominación debido a la vinculación de algunos de sus pastores e iglesias

con la NRA, debemos plantearnos una propuesta de acción. ¿Qué podemos hacer para minimizar el impacto de la NRA hacia el interior de la IEC? ¿Cuáles son esos aspectos clave que inducen a la búsqueda de respuestas en las propuestas teológicas/eclesiológicas de la NRA? ¿Cuál sería el aporte que podemos realizar para evitar que estas relaciones se sigan sucediendo?

Necesitamos idear y plantear un proyecto de revinculación y fortalecimiento de las iglesias pertenecientes a la denominación que, dejando atrás aquellas cuestiones que produjeron divisiones entre las mismas, pueda suplir las falencias que indujeron a la búsqueda de soluciones en las propuestas de la NRA.

Este proyecto de acción estará basado en cuatro pilares, cuatro ejes, los que identificamos como IECA (siglas que hacen referencia a Iglesia Evangélica Congregacional Argentina, por lo que será fácilmente relacionado a la denominación). Este acrónimo, “IECA,” intenta abarcar áreas que deberán ser corregidas a la luz de las Escrituras. En algunos casos esta corrección de comprensión deberá servir para evitar prácticas propias de la NRA, mientras que otras serán para debatir la viabilidad de aquellos aspectos que ya se han inmiscuido y que responden precisamente a los postulados de este movimiento.

Los ejes sobre los cuales hemos de trabajar, y que entendemos que resumen las áreas de dificultad, son los siguientes:

Identidad histórica. Valorización del legado y fundamento eclesial.
Eclesiología colaborativa. Importancia bíblica. Viabilidad.
Eclesiología sana.

Compañerismo en unidad. Importancia de red denominacional.
Ámbito de reflexión. Espacio para discusión y reflexión de todo aquello que aparezca como novedad en el ambiente evangélico.

Entendemos que, si en la práctica se da un fortalecimiento en cada uno de esos ejes, será más difícil que las iglesias locales y sus líderes se vinculen y adopten tan fácilmente prácticas, cualquiera sea su origen, que generen tensiones y conflictos internos afectando la identidad característica de la IEC.

No podemos dejar de soslayar respecto de la dificultad para dialogar con los sectores fuertemente vinculados a la NRA, quienes presentan una férrea oposición a opiniones que difieran de las enseñanzas transmitidas por sus referentes (apóstoles-profetas), muchas de las cuales están sustentadas en nuevas revelaciones; descartándose de plano un trabajo exegético-teológico y contextualizado que pueda poner en jaque sus convicciones. Aun así y todo vale la pena intentarlo, para el bien mancomunado. Siempre habrá sectores dispuestos al diálogo y a la evaluación objetiva del quehacer de la IEC.

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La prevención de la fatiga por compasión en el cuidado pastoral en la zona sur de Puerto Rico

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Resumen

En Puerto Rico, y el mundo, es común que los/as profesionales de la salud mental y los pastores, capellanes y clérigos religiosos acompañen a las víctimas de algún evento traumático. Sin embargo, la exposición prolongada al evento y a las víctimas, puede desatar efectos negativos y costo emocional en ellos, según explica Velázquez (cit. en Forty 2012) y Gentry (2002, 21), y también condiciones altamente incapacitantes: *Burnout*, Estrés Traumático Secundario y Fatiga por Compasión (Gentry & Dietz 2020, 79–89). Este estudio se propone investigar los conocimientos y las prácticas preventivas de los pastores en relación al síndrome de la fatiga por compasión, también conocido como estrés secundario postraumático, en el período 2017–2019 (huracán María y terremoto), con la finalidad de proponer pautas bíblicas y teológicas que ayuden a desarrollar medidas

preventivas en el acompañamiento eventos traumáticos y/o desastres de la naturaleza.

1. Planteamiento del Problema

En el contexto del ministerio evangélico, los pastores son pilares fundamentales que ofrecen apoyo espiritual y emocional a sus congregaciones y comunidades, muchas veces en medio de desastres naturales y experiencias traumáticas. Sin embargo, esta labor tan noble puede generar una carga emocional, mental y espiritual considerable, dando lugar a un fenómeno conocido como *fatiga por compasión*. En esta investigación presentamos cómo los pastores evangélicos puertorriqueños que formaron parte de la investigación, en medio de un devastador desastre natural el Huracán (María 2017), experimentaron los síntomas de la fatiga por compasión. Examinaremos las formas en que estos pastores fueron impactados y, lo más relevante de nuestra investigación, qué medidas de prevención conocían y lograron implementar para prevenir la fatiga por compasión y mantener un equilibrio saludable en su vida personal y ministerial.

Como profesor y supervisor de educación clínica pastoral he desarrollado un fuerte interés en el área del cuidado clínico pastoral. En los pasados años he sido testigo del fuerte impacto emocional y espiritual que han experimentado los pastores del área sur de Puerto Rico como resultado de su involucramiento con las personas que han sufrido traumas y han sido afectadas por dos eventos de la naturaleza, el Huracán María 2017 y el terremoto 2019. El involucramiento de la pastoral con sus iglesias y comunidades fue espontáneo e inmediato. A estos dos eventos se suma la pandemia del COVID 19, la cual continúa teniendo sus secuelas en la población en general y en la pastoral particularmente. Pastores de diversas

denominaciones han estado reportando serias condiciones de angustia emocional y espiritual, lo que ha estado afectando su salud integral y su labor ministerial. Los pastores del área sur este de Puerto Rico han estado reportando distrés espiritual y emocional, lo cual los confronta con la posibilidad, incluso, de renunciar al ministerio, ya que no lograron prevenir ni manejar los efectos negativos generados por la fatiga por compasión y sus derivados.

Se colige de la investigación que los pastores del área sureste de Puerto Rico entrevistados fueron impactados emocional y espiritualmente y, en menor o mayor escala, están sufriendo de fatiga por compasión. La fatiga por compasión no solo impacta la salud integral de los pastores, sino que también afecta y lacera el desempeño de su labor pastoral. De manera que el motivo principal de la investigación será presentar una serie de recomendaciones y pautas para concientizar, educar y prevenir la fatiga por compasión entre los pastores puertorriqueños enfatizando en un abordaje bíblico y teológico enfocado en la persona de los pastores desde un paradigma sistémico.

De la revisión previa de la literatura sobre el tema analizado se desprende que las investigaciones sobre el fenómeno de la fatiga por compasión han ido creciendo considerablemente en los pasados años (Sweileh 2020, 7), mucho se ha escrito sobre las causas, los factores de riesgo y la prevención de la fatiga por compasión en las enfermeras, los médicos, los terapeutas y otros cuidadores. Sin embargo, la investigación sobre las causas y los factores de riesgo de la fatiga por compasión entre los pastores del área sureste de Puerto Rico no está documentada en la literatura existente hasta donde se logró indagar.

2. Marco Teórico

Joinson (1992) fue el primero en identificar la fatiga por compasión como una modalidad particular de agotamiento, relacionada directamente con las profesiones de cuidado, especialmente la enfermería. Basándose en los principios de Joinson, Figley (1995) argumentó que la fatiga por compasión es un efecto natural del trabajo con individuos que han atravesado situaciones muy estresantes en sus vidas. Así, los individuos que poseen una gran habilidad para percibir y manifestar empatía suelen enfrentar un mayor riesgo de sufrimiento por compasión. Los pastores y otros profesionales, aunque no hayan vivido la experiencia de manera directa, pueden presentar síntomas de lo que llamamos “estrés traumático secundario.” Figley (1995, 7) resumió: “Es el estrés derivado de asistir o desear asistir a una persona traumatizada o en sufrimiento.” El modelo teórico predominante que propone la manifestación de la fatiga por compasión se fundamenta en un marco de proceso de estrés (Adams et al., 2006; Figley 2002a). La fatiga por compasión se ha definido como los “comportamientos y emociones naturales que surgen al conocer un evento traumático vivido por alguien importante: el estrés que se origina al ayudar o desear ayudar a una persona herida o en sufrimiento” (Figley 1995, 7). Los aspectos fundamentales de este modelo abarca: la habilidad empática, la reacción empática y el estrés por compasión remanente.

Estas perspectivas teóricas son fundamentales para capacitar a la pastoral en cuanto al síndrome y efectos de la fatiga por compasión y a las maneras de conocer y prevenirla.

3. Objetivos

En cuanto al objetivo general de la investigación, consiste en presentar una descripción del fenómeno de la fatiga por compasión y la necesidad

de implementar medidas preventivas para evitar o minimizar sus efectos, así como también describir cómo esta afecta la vida y la forma en que los pastores ofrecen cuidados a sus feligreses en los eventos traumáticos.

Esta investigación busca examinar el conocimiento de los pastores/as en cuanto a la fatiga por compasión y analizar cómo ellos pudieron prevenirse, con la finalidad de evitar o reducir su impacto y algunos de sus efectos negativos. Específicamente, se centrará en el trabajo pastoral de acompañamiento, apoyo y ayuda de los/las pastores en medio de sus experiencias traumáticas durante el huracán María, el terremoto y los temblores, y la pandemia ocurridos en Puerto Rico desde el año 2017 al presente.

En cuanto a los objetivos específicos se fijan los siguientes:

Establecer cuáles fueron las medidas preventivas implementadas por los participantes de la investigación para manejar el estrés secundario postraumático que podría generar la fatiga por compasión al momento de acompañar a las víctimas del estrés postraumático.

Descubrir cuáles fueron las causas por la que algunos pastores sufren de fatiga por compasión al acompañar a personas que sufrieron alguna experiencia traumática.

Descubrir las herramientas profesionales utilizadas en el trabajo pastoral en eventos traumáticos que les ayudaron a prevenir la fatiga por compasión.

Identificar si el uso que dan a la Biblia y la teología les ayudaron a prevenir la fatiga por compasión al encontrarse en circunstancias catastróficas, a fin de diseñar respuestas apropiadas.

Identificar predictores de la satisfacción por compasión que ayuden en la prevención de la fatiga por compasión en agentes pastorales que atienden a personas que sufren de estrés postraumático.

4. Preguntas de Investigación

¿Cómo prevenir la fatiga por compasión en pastores expuestos a los relatos traumáticos de sus feligreses?

Preguntas subsidiarias

- i. ¿Qué medidas de prevención ejercieron los pastores para protegerse de la fatiga por compasión?
- ii. ¿Cómo la falta de medidas preventivas contra la fatiga por compasión afecta la vida y ministerio de los pastores al estar expuestos de forma secundaria a eventos traumáticos y catastróficos?
- iii. ¿Qué factores impidieron que los pastores tomarán medidas preventivas para evitar fatiga por compasión como resultado de los eventos catastróficos en el área sur de Puerto Rico?
- iv. ¿De qué manera la asistencia profesional sirvió como factor preventivo de la fatiga por compasión entre los entrevistados en el estudio?
- v. ¿Cómo respondieron y cuáles fueron las respuestas bíblicas y teológicas utilizadas que ayudaron a los pastores a prevenir la fatiga por compasión al acompañar los feligreses y procurar su propia estabilidad emocional y espiritual?

5. Locación de la Investigación

El tema de la investigación consiste en la prevención de la fatiga por compasión en el cuidado pastoral, de manera particular en un grupo de 15 pastores de diferentes denominaciones evangélicas en la zona sur de Puerto Rico. En cuanto al marco temporal de la investigación el estudio se realizó durante los años 2022 al 2025.

El motivo de presentar este trabajo de investigación responde a reconocer que aun cuando el síndrome de la fatiga por compasión es un asunto abordado y estudiado en diversas disciplinas y profesiones, como el campo de la enfermería y el trabajo social, existe un enorme vacío al respecto en el contexto eclesiástico, pastoral hispanoparlante.

6. Marco Teológico y Bíblico

Aun cuando el marco teórico de la investigación se basó, fundamentalmente, en la teoría de Figley en cuanto a la fatiga por compasión y sus derivados, a sugerencia del supervisor de la tesis se incluyeron dos capítulos donde se aborda la revisión de literatura desde la Biblia y la teología pastoral en relación a la fatiga por compasión. Los dos capítulos incluidos constituyeron el marco teológico y bíblico desde donde se aborda y discute el síndrome de la fatiga por compasión. En relación al marco teológico se analizaron, entre otras, las teologías del trauma, el trauma emocional, el trauma humano, la satisfacción por compasión y la relectura teológica que sirve como predictor a la prevención de la fatiga por compasión.

En el marco bíblico se abordó, entre otros, un análisis del pasaje Lucas 10:25–37. El motivo del samaritano compasivo, la satisfacción por compasión y el fruto del Espíritu. Algunas pautas bíblicas para la prevención salubrista de la fatiga por compasión de acuerdo al relato bíblico del Samaritano Compasivo.

El paradigma hermenéutico, para efectos de nuestra investigación, se fundamenta en varias teorías hermenéuticas. Es necesario reconocer la importancia de las teorías hermenéuticas modernas de algunos filósofos como H.G. Gadamer y P. Ricoeur, cuyas obras proponen un marco teórico muy importante para los intérpretes de las Escrituras (Wit 2002, 187).

Además de las teorías de Gadamer y Ricoeur estaremos proponiendo el modelo hermenéutico de Severino Croatto (2002).

Lo que pretende la hermenéutica es proponer un mensaje para los lectores actuales. Como señala de Wit (2002, 226), la lectura hermenéutica se ve frente a la tarea de convertir el texto antiguo en mensaje para la actualidad. Estos dos paradigmas nos permitirán realizar una interpretación fenomenológica e integradora de la parábola examinada. Es de suma importancia ver el texto con todo el rigor histórico, literario y contextual. En ese sentido, creemos que nuestra propuesta exegética y hermenéutica nos permitirá realizar una exégesis bíblica utilizando un modelo cualitativo relacional sistémico y ecosistémico, contextual, que equivale a decir que tiene una visión de totalidades. De esta manera estaremos proponiendo una forma exegética, hermenéutica y sistémica para analizar y examinar cómo la parábola del samaritano, contenida en el evangelio de Lucas 10:25–37, funciona como paradigma de prevención del estrés postraumático secundario (fatiga por compasión).

La propuesta hermenéutica de Severino Croatto (2011) ha permitido reflexionar, accionar, relacionar, integrar e interrelacionar diferentes disciplinas y conceptos que, desde el marco de la complejidad, aportan al tema investigado. La educación, concientización y prevención son elementos esenciales para promover la salud y el bienestar de los/las pastores que, como parte inherente de su vocación, acompañan a personas en eventos traumáticos.

En resumen, el modelo hermenéutico de Severino Croatto sugiere una interpretación de los textos bíblicos que considera tanto el contexto histórico y cultural como el contexto actual de los lectores. Aboga por una hermenéutica dinámica y relevante, que tome en cuenta el trasfondo cultural y social de los pasajes bíblicos y los lea en diálogo con otros recursos teológicos y experiencias personales (Croatto 1994, 84).

7. Metodología

La presente es una investigación cualitativa y descriptiva, partiendo de una hermenéutica contextual. El paradigma fenomenológico se constituye en un método cualitativo, cuyo propósito fundamental es poder explorar, describir y comprender las experiencias y vivencias de los individuos tal como éstos las vivieron. Lo que interesa es saber qué vivió el sujeto en su experiencia. Para este enfoque, lo primordial es comprender que el fenómeno es parte de un todo significativo y no hay posibilidad de analizarlo sin el abordaje holístico en relación con la experiencia de la que forma parte (Amaya 2020, 2).

La investigación contiene 7 capítulos a través de los cuales se desarrolla y aborda el tema de la prevención de la fatiga por compasión en el cuidado pastoral en la zona sur de Puerto Rico, ofreciendo, de manera sistemática, la información, el resultado, las recomendaciones y las conclusiones del estudio.

Respecto del modelo cualitativo, es necesario señalar que es un modelo que se caracteriza por fundamentarse en el paradigma fenomenológico y la teoría interpretativa. En cuanto a la naturaleza de la realidad, esta es dinámica, múltiple, holística, construida y divergente. En síntesis, la finalidad de esta investigación consiste en comprender e interpretar la realidad, los significados de los individuos, sus percepciones, interacciones y acciones (Barrantes 2002, 61).

Para efecto de esta investigación, las medidas de prevención del estrés postraumático secundario y la comprensión del impacto emocional y espiritual del síndrome de fatiga por compasión en pastores puertorriqueños está implícita. La investigación cualitativa persigue conocer la realidad del objeto de la investigación desde el punto de vista de los propios sujetos de estudio; pretende conocer a los individuos en sus propios y particulares

contextos, llegando a saber lo que sienten para poder comprender cómo ven las cosas.

7.1 Técnicas para recolección de la información

Para llevar a cabo la investigación se elaboró un plan detallado de los procedimientos, lo que permitió investigar los aspectos relacionados con las diferentes categorías de análisis propuestas. Se hizo uso de técnica conversacional de entrevista semiestructurada fenomenológica. El cuestionario de preguntas contiene 4 secciones, cada una formada por 6 preguntas abiertas.

Las fuentes de información del estudio fueron contrastadas mediante una conversación marcada por el respeto, apertura, sensibilidad y empatía hacia los entrevistados. Esto hizo posible que los participantes proporcionarán los datos e impresiones, pudiendo sentir de forma abierta y desde sus propias vivencias (Kostere 2022, 39). De acuerdo con la metodología fenomenológica, el investigador diseñó los instrumentos en orden a las necesidades que plantea la investigación. De otra parte y según Monje (2011, 112), citando a Cuestas (2006), la fenomenología hermenéutica, tiene como objetivo comprender una vivencia, lo que constituye el objeto de la recolección de los datos y la información en esta investigación.

7.2 Criterios de selección de la investigación

La investigación se limitará a un grupo de 15 pastores/as de diferentes denominaciones evangélicas del área sur de Puerto Rico, que ejercieron su profesión durante los años 2017 a 2019. Todos los participantes de la investigación deben haber vivido y acompañado a sus congregaciones en el momento de las experiencias traumáticas del huracán María (2017), y del terremoto de 2019. Como se demuestra, los criterios de selección no son

aleatorios, sino intencionales, de acuerdo con el tema de investigación, a la función pastoral que desempeñaban y al área geográfica azotada por los fenómenos naturales (huracán y terremoto).

En cuanto al modelo canónico y texto crucial por el que se ha optado, es el relato de Lucas 10: 25–37, que se refiere a una acción de entrega al prójimo que lo necesita.

Esta investigación propone algunas medidas para prevenir la fatiga por compasión entre los pastores, apoyadas en un paradigma bíblico y teológico utilizando como principal fundamento bíblico la parábola del samaritano compasivo contenida en el evangelio de Lucas 10:25–37.

8. Análisis de Resultados

El estudio permitió no solo describir el fenómeno de la fatiga por compasión sino también conocer la escasa atención que se ha dado a las medidas preventivas. Además, se identificaron algunas causas y el efecto negativo del fenómeno en los participantes de la investigación. En la medida que se examinan y conocen los datos se irá llegando a las conclusiones y recomendaciones más relevantes y pertinentes de la investigación.

La investigación logró establecer que el grupo de pastores participantes en su mayoría experimentaron síntomas de fatiga por compasión. El estudio indaga sobre la capacitación y adiestramiento de los pastores en diferentes categorías profesionales, tales como: salud mental, consejería pastoral, manejo de crisis, superación de pérdidas, traumatología, tanatología, manejo de ansiedad, entre otros. Un hallazgo muy significativo identificado fue el hecho de la pobre o escasa preparación pastoral en las áreas de capacitaciones especiales. En cuanto a el manejo de crisis, solo el 8% había recibido algún tipo de capacitación. De igual

forma, solamente un 8% recibió capacitación en el manejo de la ansiedad. En relación con la capacitación pastoral en el área de manejo de pérdida, el estudio mostró que solo el 5% de los participantes habían recibido algún tipo de capacitación.

Por otra parte, el 73% de los participantes experimentaron pensamientos e imágenes dolorosas asociados a los eventos traumáticos primarios y secundarios narrados por sus feligreses, lo que concuerda con lo señalado por Gentry (2020). Queda lo suficientemente claro que los entrevistados, en su mayoría, no implementaron estrategias para prevenir el síndrome del “rescatista”, lo que los expuso a experimentar sentimientos de impotencia y frustración al advertir que no son capaces de rescatar a los demás de sus experiencias traumáticas. Como dato significativo, se obtuvo que el 35% de los entrevistados no habían escuchado hablar de la imagen de “rescatista” aplicada a los pastores.

Asimismo, el 71% de los pastores se sienten algo capacitados en relación con su preparación profesional. Evidentemente, la mayoría de los pastores no han sido capacitados y adiestrados en estrategias de manejo de traumas, por lo que es un asunto importante para considerar en el capítulo de recomendaciones. La pobre capacitación en destrezas profesionales en el manejo del trauma es una causa común de la fatiga por compasión. La investigación evidenció que, aun cuando el 68% de los encuestados señaló sentirse algo capacitado, sin embargo, al aplicar sus conocimientos y destrezas de cuidado pastoral no fueron capaces de manejar el estrés postraumático secundario.

De otra parte, de acuerdo con el testimonio de los participantes de la investigación, los pastores que señalaron la importancia de unirse a un grupo de pares no lograron unirse debido a que no identificaron algún grupo que sistemáticamente se estuviera reuniendo. Sin duda esto

representa un gran desafío para las iglesias autónomas en las cuales no cuentan con programas de cuidado y apoyo para los pastores y mucho menos existen grupos de pares.

Es necesario señalar que una de las causas más significativas por las cuales la mayoría de los participantes de la investigación manifestaron síntomas de fatiga por compasión se debió a su espíritu rescatista. El 47% de los pastores del estudio señalaron que es importante acudir al rescate de las personas traumatizadas en todo momento.

Recurrir a las prácticas espirituales resultó ser un recurso de fe muy importante para los pastores a la hora de poder fortalecerse espiritualmente y así acompañar a los feligreses en sus experiencias y vivencias traumáticas. De ahí que el 97% de los pastores indicó que las disciplinas espirituales fueron un elemento muy valioso para acompañar a los feligreses en sus experiencias traumáticas.

Todo agente pastoral que sirve en contexto de trauma se expone a altos niveles de estrés, de ahí la imperante necesidad de establecer medidas preventivas para poder identificar y anticipar los estresores de la ansiedad. De acuerdo con Robinson (2024, 4) encontrar significado espiritual es un componente vital para poder prevenir el estrés traumático primario y secundario. Como ya se mencionó, al carecer la pastoral de destrezas profesionales para enfrentar y superar las experiencias traumáticas, recurre a sus recursos espirituales en términos bíblicos y teológicos.

9. Conclusiones y Propuestas

En cuanto al objetivo general de la investigación consiste en presentar una descripción del fenómeno de la fatiga por compasión y, por lo tanto, cómo esta afecta la vida y la forma en que los pastores ofrecen cuidados a sus feligreses en los eventos traumáticos para, de esta forma, advertir sobre la

necesidad de implementar medidas preventivas que eviten o minimicen sus efectos. Es de señalar que el estudio permitió no solo describir el fenómeno, sino también conocer la escasa atención que se ha dado a las medidas preventivas. Además, se identificaron algunas causas y el efecto negativo del fenómeno en los participantes de la investigación.

La investigación reflejó la falta de medidas preventivas y la escasa capacitación y adiestramiento en las áreas de manejo de estrés, crisis y superación de pérdidas, entre otros. La satisfacción por compasión, de acuerdo con esta investigación y el paradigma bíblico utilizado en el estudio, es probablemente el mayor recurso para prevenir la fatiga por compasión entre los pastores.

La aportación mayor de la presente investigación consiste en ser la primera que servirá para capacitar a la pastoral en el conocimiento del síndrome de fatiga por compasión, la identificación de sus síntomas, y los factores preventivos.

A la luz de los datos obtenidos en este estudio se observa que los pastores en general no tienen una noción completa sobre algunos factores preventivos de la fatiga por compasión, razón por la cual no pudieron implementarlos. De aquí que el valor de esta investigación consistió en presentar de manera concreta una estrategia bíblica y teológica para ayudar a los pastores a prevenir la fatiga por compasión. Las pautas estratégicas presentadas en la investigación se fundamentan en la parábola del Samaritano compasivo contenida en evangelio de Lucas capítulo 10:25–37.

De manera, entonces, que el objetivo general de la investigación es conocer y describir las medidas de prevención de la fatiga por compasión desde un paradigma bíblico basado en la parábola del samaritano compasivo (Lucas 10:25–37) y desde estrategias profesionales implementadas por la pastoral.

Ante las constantes amenazas de desastres naturales y otros tipos de experiencias traumáticas en Puerto Rico, es de vital importancia capacitar a la pastoral puertorriqueña, proveyendo los conocimientos necesarios sobre el fenómeno de la fatiga por compasión y sus implicaciones en la vida y ministerio pastoral. Además, es crucial el desarrollo de medidas preventivas tanto desde el lente bíblico, la teología pastoral, como de las ciencias que estudian las experiencias del estrés postraumático secundario. Por ello, la investigación propone enfatizar en el cuidado que debe ejercer todo agente de cuidado espiritual al reconocer que una de las causas medulares para evitar la fatiga por compasión es manejar la sobre identificación con el sufrimiento de los demás.

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