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**Literary Art as Countercheck to Women Trafficking: An  
Explication of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* and Chika  
Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street***

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**Abstract**

Trafficking has been described as all activities that entail the conveyance, sheltering and trade in humans within or across national and international boundaries through deceit, kidnap, or other forceful means with the intent of engaging victims in forced services or labour. Trafficking, particularly in women and children, is considered by the international community a fast growing global avarice. Dominant features of the globalised trade include: domestic servitude and prostitution which is different in comparison to the context of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. This study takes on prostitution in trafficking, engaging the inherent potential and the existing influence of the literary writer to conscientise, redefine and reposition the society. This is done by examining portrayals of character-types, development of the plot and depths of the thematic preoccupation and literary elements which have contributed immensely to the re-definition of Africa in Africa, and Africa before the international community. This paper employs Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, novels that thematically dwell on this global concern. It critically engages national and international postures in examining dimensions of trafficking such as: trafficking as an industry and cartel, prostitution as a vocation for the trafficked, portrayals of the stake holders, portrayals of the victims, value systems that promote the desire of young women to live and earn money abroad, and the psychological, physiological as well as sociological import of being trafficked and being a sex- slave. *Trafficked* and *On Black Sisters' Street* are Nigerian

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literary templates that serve as conscientisation and deterrence for the class of women this new tool of trade targets.

## **Introduction**

By the end of the last millennium and beginning of the new one, international and national agencies and pressure groups began to report gruesome findings on trafficking as a global crime. More startling is the extent to which the global avarice had become institutionalised and pressure groups began to decry the industry and its cartel bringing forth to the centre its implication on the international community as a whole. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) by 2007 provided detailed information on this crime that reportedly shames human existence.<sup>1</sup> Among several definitions of the trade is the much favoured and quoted United States Government definition in Miko and Park, which describes the act as:

All acts involved in the transport, harbouring, or sale of persons within national or across international borders through coercion, force, kidnaping, deception or fraud, for purposes of placing persons in situations of forced labour or services, such as forced prostitution, domestic servitude, debt bondage or other slavery-like practices (1).<sup>2</sup>

Other definitions take into consideration, cases of minors and the polemics of consent and lack of consent by the trafficked persons and their relations. The dimensions of trafficking that become evident in this engagement include the well-established cartel controlled agencies and industries that are rooted deeply as international enterprise. The consistent rise in trafficking in people, a flourishing international crime activity across continents, belies accurate statistics

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2017). *Human Trafficking*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.html>

<sup>2</sup> Miko, F. T. and Park, G. (2002). "Trafficking in Women and Children: The U.S. and International Response". p. 1.

because it is a clandestine criminal activity. By conservative statistical details, about 700000 persons are victims of trafficking each year, the key players being the South East and South Asia, former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa (4).<sup>3</sup>

The outstanding success the trade has enjoyed stems from several factors. The manifold crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries include large displacements from wars, extreme poverty, induced misplacement of priorities in governance, unemployment among the youths and desire of many economic migrants seeking greener pastures. There are also instances of families trading and pawning their children because of extreme poverty and many other extraneous reasons. The extreme low risks associated with trafficking particularly inadequate legal instruments to combat the enterprise and its perpetrators has made the trade to flourish. The other attraction lies in the huge tax free profits generated from the same persons over a long period which makes it more attractive and lucrative to the key actors in the trafficking cartel.

Traffickers source for their victims in diverse ways, some are offered lucrative jobs abroad, others, kidnapped or enticed with phony jobs, as done in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*. Miko and Park observe that there are no universal stereotypes about recruiting victims (4).<sup>4</sup> However age seems to be a common denominator because target persons range from early and mid and late teens to age. This is understandably so because:

The fear among customers of infection with HIV and AIDS has driven traffickers to recruit younger women and girls, some as young as seven, erroneously perceived by customers to be too young to have been infected (4).<sup>5</sup>

## **The Polemics and Economics of Trafficking**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 4.

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Reports of several agencies including Miko and Park portray prostitution as the most profitable vocation for the traffickers and the trafficked.<sup>6</sup> Other publications succinctly capture the economics and the politics of prostitution as the preferred vocation of the trafficking agency globally. However, Miko and Park is most germane to this inquiry.<sup>7</sup> Miko and Park reported that victims go through ‘cruel mental and physical abuse’ this is with a view to keeping them subdued and in servitude.<sup>8</sup> Narratives of battering, confinement, rape and sexual abuse abound. All categories of victims are on arrival to their destination have their travel documents collected by the agents of the agencies that facilitated their migration. Very many are forced to endure unprotected sex with large number of partners, working very long hours therefore ‘...suffer mental break-downs and are exposed to sexually-transmitted diseases...’ (4).<sup>9</sup>

In 2013, Abiodun Oluwarotimi wrote of the United States of America’s report on Nigeria being a major contributor to human trafficking.<sup>10</sup> The report noted that the Nigerian government neither particularly responsive to the menace of trafficking in Nigeria nor its consequent effect on other nations. According to the U.S Secretary of States, ‘Nigeria was a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking’ (13).<sup>11</sup> The reports implied that as at 2013 Nigeria had not fully complied with the minimum standard for the elimination of trafficking despite demonstrating a fair attempt in engaging the anti-trafficking laws with which the country had prosecuted twenty five traffickers. The country had embarked on the training of several agencies and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Miko, F. T. and Park, G. (2002). “Trafficking in Women and Children: The U.S. and International Response”. p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Oluwarotimi, A. (2013). “Nigeria: U.S. Human Trafficking Report Indicts FG, Judiciary”. p. 13. Retrieved from <https://allafrica.com/stories/201406230355.html>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 13.

*Literary Art as Countercheck to Women Trafficking: An Explication of...* personnel to address the extensive rate of trafficking. Nigeria was reported as responsible for supplying women and girls for forced prostitution in most parts of the world. It was also established that young as well as mature females ‘primarily from Benin City in Edo State – are subjected to forced prostitution in Italy...’ while those from other states served as forced prostitutes in other parts of the world (14).<sup>12</sup>

Plambech’s seminal paper on “Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers” opens up vistas in trafficking in Nigeria (138).<sup>13</sup> It corroborates U.S report on the location most Nigerian trafficked women came from, but not on their being subjected to forced prostitution. Plambech’s ethnographic study uncovers the politics and economics of migration among Nigerian sex workers (138).<sup>14</sup> It observes the active time line for the Edo migrants began in 1986 as a response to the National Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The Edo people of Benin had prior to that time been reputed for taking high level risk migration through the Sahara deserts and across the Mediterranean Sea or relocating to Europe with false travel documents ultimately fitting into European sex agency. The evident push and pull factors were largely influenced by SAP in Nigeria and high demand for sex workers in Europe.

The Benin experience however negates the single sided narrative and empirical realities of ‘victimhood’ in trafficking and migration. Plambech therefore captured the reality of contracted labour: Most of the participants in the trade:... did not know all of the conditions and hazards involved in their job in Europe, yet all but one knew they were going to sell sex (139).<sup>15</sup> They also knew they would work under a “madam,” and they anticipated and accepted two to three years of hard work while repaying the debt. By then, they hoped to have repaid their

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Plambech, S. (2016). “Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers”. *Feminist Economics*. 23.3: 138.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 139.

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madams and to have started working for themselves. Thus, in most cases it seems more precise to conceptualise the processes in the Nigerian context as indentured labour (139).<sup>16</sup>

Most Nigerian women migrants to countries like Italy are ‘self-recruited’, members of their families consult with persons that can facilitate travel documents as well as reliable ‘madams’ they can depend on even when they are or become exploitative. Chika Unigwe’s four characters fall within this category (113).<sup>17</sup> They know before setting out that they will have a relationship of dependency on their Madams. Bettio, Giusta and Di Tommaso describe this pattern as:

...“informed” enrolment into a system of indentured sex work migration, choice of occupational choice identity within the sex work industry, access to credit, or more general ability to make economic choices under constraint (2).<sup>18</sup>

This largely makes a clear distinction between ‘trafficking’ and ‘illegal’ migration. Plambech observed that as the boundary policing in the last two decades became tighter, established migrants inhabiting Europe set up a comprehensive agency to facilitate passages and organised earnings from such restricted territories (140).<sup>19</sup> In Plambech’s words:

...migrants already in Europe began to recruit and organise the migration of women from Nigeria, fronting the money for travel, providing temporary

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<sup>16</sup> Plambech, S. (2016). Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers. *Feminist Economics*. 23.3:134-159.

<sup>17</sup> Unigwe, C. (2010). *On Black Sisters’ Street*. London: Vintage Books. p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Bettio, F., Giusta, M. and Di Tommaso, M. (2017). “Sex Work and Trafficking: Moving Beyond Dichotomies”. *Feminist Economics*. 23.3.1-22.

<sup>19</sup> Plambech, S. (2016). Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers. *Feminist Economics*. 23.3:134-159.

*Literary Art as Countercheck to Women Trafficking: An Explication of... accommodation and job brokering, and creating a system of indentured sex work migration' (140).<sup>20</sup>*

The value system that promote the desire of young women to live and earn money abroad are numerous. The four characters in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* had been pushed to the wall. Sisi, a graduate, was driven by her hopeless state of unemployment and even a future bleaker than her parents. Ama is child raped by her 'father' for several years before discovering that her mother had lied about her who her real father was, strangely her mother was willing to send her away the minute she opened her mouth to accuse her mother's husband of the rape he did commit. Efe loses her mother at a tender age, her father slips into a state of drunkenness and she ends up with a teenage pregnancy having been lured by a married man who refuses to accept his child. Joyce is a victim of war. Sudanese born girl who witnesses the wiping out of her entire family and who is at the same time, gang-raped by the same soldiers. She is temporarily given hope, consoled and comforted by a soldier who creates to her an impression that he could marry her. At some point he is sternly warned off Joyce by his mother, and he is quick to relieve himself of her burden by registering her with the indenture agency. Dele, the Lagos agent, we are told is '... the common denominator in their lives.' The lives of the four women (113).<sup>21</sup>

Plambech who actually lived among the returned sex workers in Edo State observed that the families of the deported victims that she studied claimed that their families were poor due to under or unemployment and had to skip one or two meals a day. Migration for them is a quest for business opportunities. They all, upon migration, became sole providers for their families through remittances (144).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>21</sup> Unigwe, C. (2010). *On Black Sisters' Street*. London: Vintage Books. p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Plambech, S. (2016). Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers. *Feminist Economics*. 23.3:134-159.

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The agency established for the purpose of such migration is described by Plambech as ‘the facilitation economy’ (144).<sup>23</sup> The chain consists of young male contacts in Benin who characteristically have established female relatives -Madams- in Europe. These networks make up the facilitating agency for the migrants. The Madams most of whom would have served in states of indenture and are able to pay off and invariably take up the ‘madam’ or supervisory roles of a madam. The migrant women often voiced ambiguous moral perspectives about their madams in which they simultaneously viewed them as role models, mother figures, and exploiters (18; 144).<sup>[24] [25]</sup> It is crucial to look at the many ways in which the “job” of facilitating women’s journeys to Europe emerges as a business opportunity and how it is related to the political economy of men’s unemployment and immobility in Benin. The villainous evolving role of the Madam in the agency is understandable. The trafficked and deported victim who still holds her in high esteem does so because she remains a bundle of unforgettable emotions and experiences conditioned by the totality of the agency.

### **The Writer and her Art as Countercheck**

Adimora-Ezeigbo and Chika Unigwe have, through their narratives, placed deliberate restrictions on the actors of the trafficking and sex work migrant agency. Both writers from different perspectives portray innocent victims or a deliberate participants who are the victims in the trafficking agency. The ethnographic economics reveals this much.

While Adimora-Ezeigbo leans towards precaution and advocacy. Her narrative style is laced with instruction for the youth who may be at risk and for the mature woman who still stands the risk of being trafficked. Her thematic preoccupation lies mainly in the narrative of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>24</sup> Kastner K. (2010). “Moving relationships: Family ties of Nigerian migrants on their way to Europe”. *African and Black Diaspora an International Journal* 3(1):17-34.

<sup>25</sup> Plambech, S. (2016). Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers. *Feminist Economics*. 23.3:134-159.

Nneoma and Efe two out of fifteen deported sex slaves, the stigmatization they suffer and the effort of the government and Non-governmental bodies in Nigeria put in to rehabilitate the victims, and prosecute the agents of the cartels that deceive the victims into slavery. Adimora-Ezeigbo takes every opportunity to raise the hydra headed Nigerian problems that triggers most forms of migration. She subtly introduces a pleasant ending, which is unlikely to be plausible, for Nneoma. Nneoma secures admission into the university after her rehabilitation and runs into Ofomata, who she had been engaged to be married to before her unfortunate adventure to Europe, on her first day on campus. Adimora-Ezeigbo writes about and for the pre-teens and the work is published by Lantern Books which dominantly publishes for young readers. It is clear that the thematic preoccupation in *Trafficked* leans heavily towards precaution and advocacy for rehabilitation and reintegration in to the society without consequences or stigmatisation.

Unigwe moves from the popular and politically correct narrative that victimise all categories of participants in the sex-trade to support ethnographic findings that portray the reality that most of the actors know precisely what the trade entails and what it requires of them. She acknowledges the fact that these participants may not have the exact details of full implication of what being a sex migrant entails nor the risk of being deported or the psychological or physiological implications of the trade. She, however, does make it clear that the participants do understand the terms of reference and that the trade in contemporary times needs very little or no deception. Her characters deliberately decide to go with the proposals and protocols of the agency having considered the implication of all the information that was made available to them. Ama, for instance says, 'I made this choice. At least I was given a choice. I came here with my eyes wide open (114)'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Unigwe, C. (2010). *On Black Sisters' Street*. London: Vintage Books. p. 114.

Adimora-Ezeigbo and Unigwe paint portraits of different experiences. While, Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays the agency and the operators of the cartel, who run the trafficking cartel as villains and the trafficked as the innocent and unconscious victims - which is the side of the story possibly narrated to deter the “innocent”. Unigwe’s narrative deters in a different type of way. It painstakingly narrates the challenges that leads to the choice of the migrant indentured sex worker who is ‘knowingly’ ‘trafficked’. She also shocks the reader with the pain and torture of the characters undergo. Sisi on her first date at work thinks she is a woman sinking, a woman required to smile while she sank (208)<sup>27</sup> as her client caresses her she sat still... her heart heavy with a sadness that was close to rage’(212).<sup>28</sup> She is so miserable and pained as her client ‘inaugurates’ her ‘into her new profession’ that ...she ‘baptised herself into it with tears hot and livid’ (213).<sup>29</sup> Unigwe’s women’s narratives give a sharp distinction between ‘willingly’ or ‘knowingly’ participating in the trade. Unigwe neither celebrates the characters: their actions and inactions nor takes up an air of a condescending omniscient narrator. She, instead, allows the reader to encounter and come to terms with the harrowing realities of the trade. This approach to narrating sex work is on its own deterring.

### **Advocacy for Agencies of Restoration and Integration**

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo paints a close portrait of two deported trafficked sex workers the structure of the plot is similar to Chika Unigwe’s. Of the fifteen girls that make the trip back. Adimora-Ezeigbo, as Unigwe does, narrates the experiences of two; Nneoma and Efe through the omniscient voice, strong authorial voice, flashback and biographical narratives. Efe, as Unigwe does with her four characters, initiates the process of ‘telling’ as therapeutic purgation. Efe says ‘Look, why don’t we just tell each other what happened to us? Perhaps finding our voices will help us heal (97).’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>30</sup> Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2008). *Trafficked*. Lagos: Lantern, Books. p. 97.

Efe tells of her birth in Benin. She is raised by a poor family that struggled to put meals on the table she and her elder sister had gone to college while three of her brothers are unable to complete primary education. In her words 'one day I saw an advertisement in a newspaper while I was on a visit to my cousin in Lagos. It asked young men and women who wished to work abroad to come to a certain address to be interviewed (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 99)<sup>31</sup> it was during the military regime when things were really chaotic in Nigeria and people sought for opportunities to work abroad.

She responds to the advert without her cousin's knowledge and was interviewed along with a group. She noted much later that none of the men had been recruited and the ten persons who had been recruited were shortly given a travel schedule. They were made to take an oath and to work for the agency until the debts incurred on processing passports tickets and so forth had been paid.

They were taken to Italy, and settled in Palermo and sold to a certain Madam Gold (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 99)<sup>32</sup> who she claimed used them 'shamelessly' and made them 'walk the streets every night' (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 99).<sup>33</sup> After four years of hard labour Madam Gold Sells Efe to a White pimp, from whom she eventually escaped after working for another two years. Efe flees to Verona teams up with a prostitute and works independently for another year hoping to save up money and return home. Shortly after this, the police intercepts and deports her (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 100).<sup>34</sup>

Nneoma, Adimora-Ezeigbo tells us, is able to relate with Efe's misfortune because of her personal experiences in Europe. She tearfully takes Efe's hands upon realising... They had both been forced to sell their bodies to all comers' (100).<sup>35</sup> Nneoma in her case had

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<sup>31</sup> Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2008). *Trafficked*. Lagos: Lantern, Books. p. 99.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

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rebelled against the status quo, her would-be husband, Ofomata, is to take a traditional role she cannot imagine him occupying in the society because of the sociological implications. She flees from home and without telling her family to a friend who had informed her that an agency had assisted her in securing a teaching job in the United Kingdom. She travels to Lagos with her and in no time the sponsors arrange passports and flight tickets for them. To make the offers plausible to the six of them that were processed simultaneously Nneoma recalls:

They show us pictures of the schools where we will be teaching and give us appointment letters signed with people with English names. They tell us we will have plenty of time to pay back our debts to the agency when we start earning money... I am so happy, I thank my chi. The only thing that worries me is that we have to take an oath and they tell us that the consequences will be severe if we disregard the terms of agreement, disobey them or cut links without settling our debts... (127-128).<sup>36</sup>

It happens that Efe also has similar experience, while Nneoma was made to take an oath with a bible and the image of an *arusi* (idol), Efe's team take their oaths in a shrine between Lagos and Ibadan (128).<sup>37</sup> Adimora-Ezeigbo as earlier stated would create a happy ever after for her characters after they are rehabilitated. It seems not plausible, for instance, that in a real context Nneoma will find the love in the hands of the same man she had fled from and who finally runs into her in the university campus after she is restored.

### **Portraits of the Agency and the Agents**

Nneoma in *Trafficked* relates with Efe and Maria, Nigerian contacts for the agency. These contacts remain warm and friendly treating their recruits like their younger siblings before handing them to unknown

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 127-128.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 128.

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fellows, a man and another woman, they explain that they are the foreign owners of the agency who are traveling with them from the Muritala Mohammed International Airport. From that point onwards the plans change. Nneoma along with others are informed they will travel to Britain enroute Italy. Nneoma as matter of fact states; 'In Italy I discover that I am trafficked' (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 128)<sup>38</sup> without having a say in the matter.

Dele in *On Black Sister's Street* is the Nigerian agent and source for all the characters portrayed as sex workers in the text. Referring to himself as Senghor Dele, he lives a very flashy and flamboyant life with lace suits and makes a show of his wealth in a bid to entice the girls he desires to recruit. Madam in Europe is full of accolades for him, 'Dele was right about you, Ah that man knows his stuff. He never disappoints. He has the best girls on show...' (218).<sup>39</sup> However, the portrayal of his encounter with Ama is the most exploitative and remarkable as it helps her define her posture as a sex worker before she leaves Nigeria.

Ama, had initially turned down the offer of being indentured and spits at Dele for insulting her. The realities of her subsistence makes her eat the humble pie and apologetically goes back to him to accept the offer. Dele accepts her apology but with a pacification request:

You be fire. I shall sample you before you go... but I must sample you... I must, I swear! Ama stood still in front of his table. She knew what was coming and did not move her hand away when he pulled it towards his crotch... (168).<sup>40</sup>

A satisfied and very pleased Dele insists:

'You be real fire' he drawled and smiled at her she also smiled back. Her thoughts already on a new life far

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<sup>38</sup> Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2008). *Trafficked*. Lagos: Lantern, Books. p. 128.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> Unigwe, C. (2010). *On Black Sisters' Street*. London: Vintage Books. p. 168.

from here, earning her own money so that she could build her business empire. And once she was a big woman, people would respect her, even Brother Cyril. This was the dream that spurred her on in Antwerp; the men she slept with were like Dele, just tools she needed to achieve her dream. And her dream was big enough to accommodate all of them (168-169).<sup>41</sup>

Dele says he is deadly, he proves it when he instructs Madam and Segun to kill Sisi. The structure of the receiving agents follow a pattern. A madam and her bodyguard or henchman.

When Nneoma meets her Madam, Madam Dollar, she is disgusted, her opinion of the woman she describes in white heat:

...nothing comes between her and money, she owns us and the man, whom we learn to call Captain, is her bodyguard she keeps us prisoner in her flat...I am completely devastated by the life I'm forced to live: hit the night street, waiting for customers, winter, spring, summer and autumn; come back at dawn, wash, eat and sleep till it all begins again at nightfall (129).<sup>42</sup>

Their job description was repetitive; always walking at night, selling sex to Italian men and foreigners. 'I hate Madam Dollar' she says.

Unigwe deliberately paints the picture of Madam, in *On Black Sister's Street* as a person to be respected yet dreaded, she drops hints of these all over the canvas of the work imagery created in the work... madam was dreaded (4)<sup>43</sup> would not tolerate rough hair, lateness to work and her decisive responses (5),<sup>44</sup> would not attend the party if she was invited (5)<sup>45</sup> you don't want to be in Madams bad books she had dealt

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp. 168-169.

<sup>42</sup> Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2008). *Trafficked*. Lagos: Lantern, Books. p. 129.

<sup>43</sup> Unigwe, C. (2010). *On Black Sisters' Street*. London: Vintage Books. p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 5.

*Literary Art as Countercheck to Women Trafficking: An Explication of...* with Efe by kicking her out of her booth for one week! Ama, the hothead, does not mince her words: 'I don't like Madam. She's a bitch'. Madam in Antwerp is really sophisticated. She introduces herself to Sisi authoritatively 'I am your Madam,' light-skinned, round and short as Sisi expected, she had a Master degree in Business Administration from the University of Lagos and spoke impeccable English and Dutch (116).<sup>46</sup> Her hardness manifests in getting rid of Sisi yet playing innocent by disposing her things and burning an incense.

Madam's bodyguard is Segun. Seemingly uncoordinated, but fixes furniture and stuff around the house. He is the surveillance person who tracks and kills Sisi. The bodyguard in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* is violent often assaulting Nneoma for refusing to cooperate with the customers or not delivering the expected amount of money. He beats her up when she returns empty handed but ensures that she is not disfigured. Madam would remind her that the less money she brings the longer she would have stay with her. Nneoma and two girls are bought by Baron who commences fresh transactions with them. She eventually escapes having stolen his money.

Worthy of note is the semiotic implication of the cover page of the narratives. Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* has the painting of a young frail looking skimpily dressed subdued woman in a room that is fast secured by metal bars and a padlock while Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* is the picture of the back and backside of a curvaceous black woman sitting on a bathtub creating an erotic setting.

### **The Soul as Countercheck to Sex Trade**

Man is in tripartite dimensions: spirit, soul and body. It is apparent that the arguments from ethnographic and other critical studies on trafficking and prostitution focus on the victims of the trade. Having established two types of participation: the forced sex work and the indentured sex work, what comes to the fore is that there are different

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 116.

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dimensions and levels of victimhood in both contexts. Common denominators remain the economics of the trade, the victimisation of the tools of the trade by the agencies of the trade, the stigmatisation and labelling that pursues the tools of the trade long after they are rehabilitated.

The first condition is an absolute situation where the ideals of the worker who had prepared for legitimate work and psychological impact brought about by the deception and assault of the forced sex slavery are deepened by the lack of preparation or readiness on the part of the trafficked person. The act of forced prostituting and the psychological and physiological consequences of the same is portrayed by Adimora-Ezeigbo as she portrays Nneoma as almost always unwilling and uncooperative.

Sometimes I refuse to cooperate with the customers, especially when they demand for positions I find despicable or when they refuse to use a condom or make one of the other nasty demands ... (129).<sup>47</sup>

Baron is a sadist he rapes and beats me. I refuse when customers demand oral or anal sex and insist that they use condoms and I'm sometimes assaulted for this (132).<sup>48</sup>

The other context is that of the 'persons' who appear to be prepared for the enterprise until they are faced with the realities and the consequences of the trade until they practically engage in the enterprise. Unigwe the omniscient narrator portrays characters that are psychologically distressed and ravaged at the realm of the soul. The same characters carry on as though they are contented with the indentured sex work, the consistent upward review of their indebtedness to the agency and the proceeds from their slave hood.

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<sup>47</sup> Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2008). *Trafficked*. Lagos: Lantern, Books. p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 132.

While Adimora-Ezeigbo's dominant characters are rehabilitated and have regrets over being deceived into the trade.

Unigwe's characters are contrastingly portrayed as challenged and broken women who pursue their career as sex workers with all the dignity they can muster. Unigwe does not condemn them but engages them as a deterring agency by portraying the sorrowful soul and depression they consistently live with. Unigwe's masterstroke is in dropping these details when the reader least expects thereby portraying consistent bitterness overlaying whatever impression of joy or fulfilment the characters display. For instance, Ama is consistently angry while Sisi, the most educated and who seemed to be the most prepared to take up the indentured sex slave role, remained the most troubled and discontented. Unigwe revealing the circumstances of her death to the readers and not her housemates is a very loud authorial statement. She refuses to condemn but wills the reader the introspection of the consequence of living such fashion. The cartel is portrayed as an agency that is intolerant of disloyalty and will do anything to protect and uphold its 'integrity'.

## **Conclusion**

Trafficking remains a global avarice and the dimensions of the trade; the agency which includes the ruthless traffickers, the madams and the categories of indentured sex workers continue to be the concern of the international community. Most of those enrolled in indentured relationships, do so without full understanding of the realities of the trade. Their immediate consciousness leans towards the economics of the trade and perceived opportunities. They, however, go ahead with the terms when the agencies alter the agreements, looking to the time they would be free to start the life they desire when they got committed to the indentured sex work.

The persistence and viability of this trade opens up growing theoretical and literary discourse on trafficking. Literature has, in several ways and across continents, served as countercheck to trafficking. Biographical writings, novels, documentary narratives and

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fictionalised texts that capture the syndrome abound. The purpose they serve must be emphasised, for instance as biographies they grant entrance into the ordeals of individuals who have experienced the trade while as documentary narratives they give personalised historical views of the same. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Chika Unigwe's works are fictional and documentary in several ways. By portraying the gory experience of the indentured sex workers they offer a counter check.

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# **Between Biblical Ideals and the Realities of Life: The Problem of Polygamy in the Nigerian Baptist Convention**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the thorny issue of polygamy as it affects the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) churches in the light of biblical injunctions on polygamy and its interpretation by the convention *vis-a-vis* the realities of life for those involved in the controversial practice. The church's interpretation continues to be in tension with African culture within which the church operates; thereby creating further gap between the church and the society. The paper traces the history of the Nigerian Baptist convention and the various controversies surrounding the issue of polygamy and how the church has responded to them. The paper concludes that the Church's position has been harsh in some circumstances and unfair to those polygamists who converted to Christianity. The church needs to take another look at this issue realizing that there is a big gulf between the ideals of biblical prescriptions and what happens in practical life situations.

## **Introduction**

One of the issues that have often confronted Christians is the gap between the ideals of biblical injunctions and what happens in real life situation. Marriage, divorce and remarriage have continued to be a problem that the church all over the world has always had to deal with. The tension is how to resolve the true interpretation and the ideals of biblical declaration that there should be no divorce among Christians; and even where one takes place, the two parties are not allowed to remarry as long as they both live. But the reality is that divorce continues to take place among Christians and remarriage has not stopped either. What then are we doing wrong? Another issue,

which is the primary concern of this paper, is the controversial issue of polygamy in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The Church from its inception adopted the view that the ideal marriage situation is the one between a man and a woman. To this extent, the church has a near zero tolerance for polygamy, which is already an entrenched thing in the African and indeed, the Nigerian culture. What should the NBC do with its polygamist members? Should they still be excluded from the Lord's Table and also prevented from holding leadership positions in the church or should they still insist that the second wife be put away in order for them to be allowed into fellowship? This paper seeks to answer these questions and in order to do that, the paper proceeds as follows: introduction, a brief history of the NBC, NBC and the problem of polygamy in its churches, a critical analysis of the problem, and concluding remarks.

### **A Brief Historical Sketch of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC)**

The entity now known as the NBC came into existence in 1850 through the prodigious efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) of America missionary, Thomas Jefferson Bowen. As Ajayi observed, the journey for this onerous task began in 1849, when Bowen was appointed as a missionary of the SBC of America to Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Upon this appointment, Bowen sailed for Nigeria on December 17<sup>th</sup> 1849.<sup>2</sup> He embarked on this journey with Henry C. Goodale of Massachusetts and a “negro from Virginia, Robert F. Hill.”<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of note that Bowen at this time was not completely ignorant of the “Sudan” or the geographical entity now known as Nigeria. He had read to some extent about the country and had developed interest in the land, especially with the conversion of a man by the name of Simeon of Igboho. The three missionaries arrived the

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<sup>1</sup> S. Ademola Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria: Their Genesis, Identity, Doctrinal Beliefs and Practices* (Ibadan: Bookwright, 2009), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ajayi, *The Baptists of Nigeria*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ajayi, *The Baptists of Nigeria*, 22.

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shores of Liberia, West Africa on February 8<sup>th</sup> 1850. Unfortunately, Goodale took ill not long after their arrival in Liberia and the services of Hill was soon to be dispensed with by the SBC Mission Board. By the virtue of these instances, Bowen, was left alone to continue on the journey to Nigeria.<sup>4</sup>

Bowen reached Badagry, Nigeria on August 5<sup>th</sup> 1850. As Ajayi rightly mentioned, it was his desire to head straight for “Bohoo” (Igboho), one time capital of the Old Oyo Empire, where he intended to begin his missionary work.<sup>5</sup> Bowen met with Simeon of Igboho in Badagry and was very happy and was also in high spirit with the prospect of being able to fulfill his dream of establishing his first mission station in Igboho. Unfortunately, this will not be as fate would have it. Simeon warned of the danger of embarking on such a journey to Igboho in view of the various internecine wars going on in Yoruba land at the time.

Considering the crisis in the Yoruba country during the time in question, it became practically impossible for Bowen to continue on his journey to Igboho. The most viable option for him then was to move to Abeokuta. Bowen, however, felt that there was no need to begin another mission work in Abeokuta owing to the fact the Methodist and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had already

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<sup>4</sup> Details of the history cannot be provided presently considering the nature of this paper. However, it was gathered that Goodale’s situation was very critical and it was advised that he return to America for medical attention, but even before that could be done he died in Sama Bo Pora, Liberia. Circumstances leading to the termination of Hill’s position as a missionary of the SBC were not clearly stated, but as it was later gathered from the memoirs of Bowen, there appeared to be disagreements between Hill and Bowen. The former had been asked to remain in Sama Bo Pora to learn the language, which he blatantly turned down. Although it is not clear whether this was mainly responsible for the action of the Mission Board, it was obvious that Bowen and Hill had major disagreements as Bowen himself later observed that Hill was not to be trusted, having considered him “light hearted and vain headed.” See T. J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labors*, 27

<sup>5</sup> Ajayi, *The Baptists of Nigeria*, 24.

commenced missionary activities in Abeokuta a few years before his arrival in Nigeria.

Bowen was well accepted in Abeokuta both by the political leaders of the town and the missionaries who had sojourned there before him. The CMS and Methodist missionaries hosted Bowen and since he had determined not to commence another mission work in Abeokuta, he longed to move out, still with the ambition of getting to Igboho. He was, however, prevented from doing that by the political leaders of Abeokuta, who constantly warned that it was not safe for him to embark on such a journey.<sup>6</sup> Although Bowen was held back in Abeokuta for eighteen months, those eighteen months were not wasted, but it was providential as it afforded him the opportunity to learn the Yoruba language and even produced the first Yoruba language Dictionary that was published in 1885.<sup>7</sup>

After eighteen months, Bowen was finally able to fulfill his ambition as he was now allowed to proceed to the interior of the Yoruba country, still with the intention of going to Igboho. He had a brief stop at Ketu, where he was not well received and he continued on his journey to BiOlorunpelu (now Lanlate), where he preached his first gospel message in Nigeria. The preaching resulted in the conversion of a woman by the name of Oyindamola.<sup>8</sup> Ajayi further added that because Bowen was so much in a hurry to get to Igboho, he could not wait to baptize his first convert, Oyindamola. He hurriedly proceeded on his journey to Igboho as he had desired, but

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<sup>6</sup> Notice that the Egba chiefs who did not allow Bowen to proceed with his plan were not so much concerned about allowing him to build mission stations in the town, but were more concerned about using Bowen for political gains for the consolidation of their country and establishment of power in the region by gaining access to the port of Lagos. The Abeokuta leaders also hoped that Bowen will be able to help them in the acquisition of ammunitions to prosecute their wars against their Ijebu rivals and the Dahomey people. See Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria*, 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> This was in fact a book on Yoruba Grammar and Dictionary and was published by the Smithsonian Institute, Washington. Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria*, 28.

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his popularity soon soared among the various Yoruba monarchs who wanted to host him in their domain. At the end of the day, Kurumi, the son of the Aare Ona kankanfo of Oyo intercepted him and brought him to Ijaiye. Bowen came to Ijaiye and began his mission activities there and eventually made Ijaiye his headquarters having overcome initial difficulties. Not long after this, Bowen began to run out of funds and was therefore forced to return to the United States of America.

Bowen returned in August 1853 accompanied by another set of missionaries and his wife. Upon his return, Bowen continued with his missionary exploits, he succeeded in building a chapel in Ijaiye and also recorded another convert, Tella on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1854.<sup>9</sup> Tella was baptized by Bowen, thus recording the first baptized person by the mission in Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> The Baptist mission work soon spread and Bowen was soon to have a moderate congregation, he administered the Holy Communion and also joined the first couple by the name of William Afe and Sarah Williams. Travis observed that those were most likely to be employees of the Baptist Mission at the time.<sup>11</sup> On February 25, 1854, the Bowens welcomed their first child, Mary Yoruba Bowen, but Mary lived for just three months and died mainly due to harsh weather condition.<sup>12</sup>

In September 1854, another missionary of the Southern Baptist Convention of America joined the Bowens at the Ijaiye station by the name of Rev. William H. Clarke. Clarke's presence gave further assistance to the Bowens and bolstered the expansion of mission work. Clarke was soon to be left to handle the work at the Ijaiye station, which enabled the Bowens to move northward to Ogbomosho, where

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<sup>9</sup> Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Travis Collins, *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria, 1850-1993* (Ibadan: Associated Book Makers, 1993), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Travis Collins, *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria, 1850-1993* (Ibadan: Associated Book Makers, 1993), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs Bowen's Diary entry, February 25, 1854; also see her entry for May 27, 1854.

they established another Baptist mission station in 1855.<sup>13</sup> Not long after this other Baptist missionaries arrived to help strengthen the work of the Baptist mission in Nigeria, among whom are Mr and Mrs D. Phillips (1855), Mr and Mrs R. W. Priest as well as Mr and Mrs Richard H. Stone and Mr. and Mrs. Cason. The presence of these additional hands on the mission field in Nigeria provided the opportunity for the Bowens to begin their itinerant missionary journey further north to places like Ilorin.<sup>14</sup> They were also able to make evangelistic visits to places like Iseyin and Iwo. Ajayi observed that they met with some form of resistance in those towns owing to the prevalence of Islam.<sup>15</sup>

The Bowens served altogether for six years on the Nigerian mission field (1850-1856) and had to return to America. It was their desire to return to continue what they had started, but due to failing health that motive was not to be realized. Bowen retired from the SBC Mission Board in 1856, but his work had been adequately planted on the sands of history and his contribution to mission work in Nigeria and to the Kingdom of God in general cannot be overemphasized. The Baptist church has become established in Nigeria and more than a century after that, the church continues to wax strong and proves to be one of the largest evangelical protestant churches in Nigeria. The NBC today boasts of not less than three million baptized members and over four million in worship attendance every Sunday.

### **Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Problem of Polygamy**

The *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of English Language* provides two shades of definitions for polygamy as follows: 1. "the practice or condition of having more than one spouse, especially, wife at one time." 2. "The habit or system of mating with more than one individual either simultaneously or successively." *The*

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<sup>13</sup> See J. A. Atanda, Editor's Introduction in J. A. Atanda (ed.) W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, ), xv.

<sup>14</sup> Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Ajayi, *Baptists of Nigeria*, 33.

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*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* observed that polygamy is a condition in which “more than one marriage alliance exists concurrently in the same family or group.”<sup>16</sup> For Gaskiyane, polygamy is a “culturally determined, socially acceptable and legally recognized form of permanent marriage where a man has more than one wife at the same time.”<sup>17</sup> A cursory look at the definitions provided so far of polygamy suggests that polygamy is a practice or a form of marriage that involves more than one marriage alliance within a family at the same time or in successive manner. It is a cultural issue and considered an acceptable practice in various societies of the world.<sup>18</sup> The term is technically known as polygyny. The term polyandry, however, is known as a situation or condition in which a woman has more than one husband at the same time. A. Shorter observed that while polygamy is widespread in Africa, polyandry is almost not known or foreign to Africa.<sup>19</sup> Scholars offer a varied opinion on the meaning of polygamy. It has thus been argued that polygamy exists in two forms, that is, one has to do with a condition or situation in which the polygamist lives with and supports more than one wife with their children. The second form is the one in which the husband takes another wife in addition to the one(s) he has previously acquired and eventually deserts the previous one(s).<sup>20</sup> Apart from the definitions earlier proffered, some scholars provide a wider shade of

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<sup>16</sup> O. J. Baab, “Marriage” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, 280.

<sup>17</sup> I. Gaskiyane, *Polygamy: A cultural and Biblical Perspective*, (London: Gazelle Creative Productions Ltd, 2000), 7.

<sup>18</sup> See D.T. Ejenobo, “A Critique of the Attitude of Nigerian Churches to the Practice of Polygamy in Nigeria,” *International Journal of Theology and Reform*, Vol. 2., 2010, 44. Ejenobo further argues that there was a BBC report on June 16, 2000 that indicated that Muslims living in Britain were going to challenge the British law that forbids a man to marry more than one wife as stipulated under Islamic law. Also see, J. Muthengi, “Polygamy and the Church in Africa: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives,” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 14.2, 1995, 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> A Shorter, *East African Societies*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 172.

<sup>20</sup> See Muthengi, “Polygamy and the Church in Africa,” 56.

definition of polygamy to include a situation where a man divorces his wife and marries another one. Such a man is considered to be having two wives since the marriage contract biblically remains binding as long as the spouse who is put away still lives. In a similar vein, the woman who divorces her husband and marries another one is considered to be involved in consecutive polyandry.<sup>21</sup>

For the Nigerian Baptist Convention, its position or perspective on the issue of polygamy is well articulated in its *Constitution and Bye Law*. A Polygamist for them, is

A man who is married to more than one wife at the same time. A man who is divorced or separated from his first wife and married to another, while his first wife is alive. A woman who is separated or divorced from her husband and married to another while the first husband is still alive. A woman who is married to a man who is already married and his wife is alive.<sup>22</sup>

This suggests that the NBC's definition of polygamy falls in line with Hillman's position as mentioned earlier. The point however, is that how did the NBC come to this conclusion and how has it responded to this cultural problem within its churches considering the fact that it operates within a cultural milieu that places high premium on the open practice of polygamy? Several factors might have influenced the NBC's position among which are its affinity to the practice of its forebears, the missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention of America, their position on the authority of the Bible and their literal interpretive approach to Scriptures. In line with the above position of the NBC it has a policy of near zero tolerance for polygamists in its churches. The consequence therefore, is that the NBC introduced to its churches the notion of "one man, one wife." Those who were polygamists were urged to put away their second wife

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<sup>21</sup> E. Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Church*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), 10.

<sup>22</sup> The Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Book of Reports for the 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Sessions*. Ibadan: Baptist Press, 2001, 218.

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upon conversion to Christianity since only the first wife was considered the legal wife. At the same time, men who had more than one wife were not accepted into baptism neither were they allowed to partake in the Holy Communion. Their second wives were also not allowed to partake in baptism or the Communion as long as they remained as wives to the man who has been married before. The implication therefore, is that such people were not accepted as members of the church, but were considered “friends of the church.”

As Ajayi observed, “the missionaries became the thin end of the wedge in breaking down these social customs and practices of the people and replacing them with Western standards.”<sup>23</sup> The new converts were thrust into a state of quandary as they were made to understand that their customs and culture on marriage were inferior to that of the missionaries. Essentially, the missionaries taught that marriage was an affair between a man and a woman and not between multiple partners. Part of the confusion created by the teaching of the missionaries was well demonstrated in a situation with a student pastor at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, who reportedly listened to the lecture by one of his missionary teachers, who said that all polygamists should divorce all their wives except one. The issue then was that the student, who himself was a product of a second wife of a polygamous marriage asked the missionary teacher if he was to go home and encourage his father to divorce his other wives and send the children away including himself. The missionary was not able to answer the question since he was not certain of any biblical passage that directly supports such thought or instruction.<sup>24</sup>

The point to be noted is that in the face of the problem created by the conflict between the African culture and the teachings of the Western missionaries, the latter felt strong about its convictions on the

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<sup>23</sup> Ajayi, *Baptist Work in Nigeria*, 265.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. J. O. Omirinde, Alafia Oluwa Baptist Church, Ilorin in an oral interview, September 18, 1989, cited in Ajayi, *Baptist Work in Nigeria*,

issue of polygamy. It was believed that God's intention and original design was that marriage should be between a man and a woman as seen in the story of creation in Gen. 1: 18, 2: 24-25. The position of the Baptist Foreign Mission Board as adopted by the NBC was further stated in 1938, when the Executive Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, Dr. Charles E. Maddy visited the Nigerian mission field. At a meeting attended by the Executive Secretary, American Baptist missionaries and representatives of all the Baptist Churches in Nigeria, discussion on the issue of polygamy featured prominently. In his response, Dr. Maddy made it clear that the Mission Board believed in monogamy as the acceptable marriage system supported by the Bible. To this end, Ajayi noted that Dr. Maddy urged the various churches of the NBC to purge its membership rolls "at once, excluding from the church membership all those who believed in and practiced polygamy and in case such polygamists grouped as a church, no Baptist pastor must lead such group."<sup>25</sup> This position essentially remained the position of the NBC. Polygamy was rejected as an acceptable practice within the churches of the NBC. The result of such a position was a big crisis that manifested itself within the polity of the NBC churches.

One of the problems created by this position was a state of confusion in several of the local churches where many members who were polygamists before conversion to Christianity acted in line with the teachings of the Church and put all their wives away except one. Expectedly, this led to serious problems between such husbands, the divorced wives, and their families. The situation became more complicated as even wives of polygamists demanded that they be divorced, having listened to and imbibed the teaching of the missionaries. Where will these divorced wives go? Who will be willing to marry them again? What about the social and psychological trauma this created for the children and the women in the society at large. Handan observed that part of the social and psychological

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<sup>25</sup> Ajayi, *Baptist Work in Nigeria*, 266-67.

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problems created by the exclusion of polygamists from the Lord's Table and baptism was that children from the second wife were also denied dedication by the church and this amounted to a near ostracization of such people from the society.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Handan reported that the problem of polygamy precipitated a crisis during the election of deacons in a Baptist Church in the northern part of Nigeria that almost disintegrated the church completely. The church, for a long time was said to have operated without deacons.<sup>27</sup>

Another problem was that it affected the Baptist mission work in Nigeria negatively. Many people who were not in agreement with the teaching broke away and formed their own church. For instance, shortly after the 1938 order excluding polygamists from the church rolls, a large number of people left the church. An example is the one that took place in Shaki, where a large number people left the Baptist Church to form the United African Baptist Church. Also in the city of Iree in present day Oyo State of Nigeria a large number of people left the Baptist and joined the African Church in the same city. This is more so that in several villages majority of the strong members were polygamists. The point with this is that many of those Baptist churches lost their staunch members, thereby stunting the growth of the church. More importantly, the position of the NBC on polygamy affected its ability to reach several village chiefs and *Obas* or traditional rulers who were polygamists. J.F. Ade Ajayi observed that generally, particularly with respect to Christian mission in Nigeria, many of these people who could not be reached owing to the problem of polygamy ended up converting to Islam, which readily accepted polygamists into their fold.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the polygamy issue continued to be a problem in the NBC churches even through the

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<sup>26</sup> A. I. Handan, "The Nigerian Baptist Convention Use of the Bible in Moral Decision Making About Polygamy," Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Western Theological Seminary, Holland Michigan, 2003, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Handan, "The Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Use of the Bible," 42.

<sup>28</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The New of a New Elite*, (London: Longman, 1965), 103.

process of nigerianization of the church. As the issue of polygamy continued to linger in the NBC, it became necessary that the church looked into the crisis once again, which informed the need to set up a committee by the church to look into the problematic issue of polygamy once again in its churches. After a careful consideration of the situation by the committee, it recommended to the NBC that:

- a) The need of newly evangelized persons for the ordinances should take priority over marital status. Therefore no person (including polygamists) who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ should be denied baptism, church membership, and participation in the Lord's Supper.
- b) Polygamists should be evangelized and accepted as they are, with the hope that the Gospel, like the leaven, will effect a general change in the culture, towards the Christian ideals. Therefore, those who are not yet polygamists should be forbidden from becoming polygamists.
- c) No member of the Baptist Church who is a polygamist should hold a church office or position;
- d) Any office holder who becomes a polygamist should be relieved of such office with immediate effect without fear or favor;
- e) The Church should think of other methods of upholding monogamy as the ideal without disobeying the express command of the Lord to baptize those who believe. For example, pastors and church leaders should be encouraged to hold frequent marriage seminars and workshops to uphold the ideals of Christian marriage.<sup>29</sup>

After a careful consideration, the above recommendations were adopted by the NBC. It was the view of the majority of the members

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<sup>29</sup> Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Book of Report for the 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Session*, April 21-26, 2001, 220.

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that any polygamist who has truly confessed Christ as lord and personal savior should not be denied membership of the church. Therefore, those polygamists who want to be baptized should not be denied the opportunity and those who want to partake at the Lord's Table should be allowed to do so but no polygamist could hold any church office. With this it should be noted that the controversial issue of polygamy melted down in the NBC, but it was far from being resolved.

## **A Critical Analysis: Between Biblical Ideals and the Realities of Life**

### ***Biblical Ideals***

An ideal situation is considered a condition of perfection or a state or standard of perfection or excellence. In this circumstance, biblical ideals have to do with a state of perfection as prescribed by the Bible. The position of the Nigerian Baptist Convention as mentioned earlier was contingent upon the teachings and affirmations of the Southern Baptist Convention of America based on the notion that the Bible is the word of God, and as such, reliable for teachings on all matters of faith and practice. In addition, there is a strand of literalism in the approach to biblical interpretation adopted by the NBC. In line with this position, the NBC is persuaded by Scriptures as set out in Genesis 2: 24; Matthew 19:4-5; 1 Timothy 3: 2, 12; Titus 1: 6; and Ephesians 5: 31 that marriage should be monogamous since God did not create Adam and two women at the beginning. God in His wisdom created a suitable helper for Adam, who was taken out of his rib. It is believed by the NBC that the same teachings in Genesis was affirmed throughout the Bible and even in the New Testament as espoused by Paul in his teachings in Timothy, Titus and Ephesians.

Again, the NBC believes that divorce is totally forbidden in the Bible. More importantly, following the teachings of Jesus that, whoever divorces his wife, should remain unmarried as long as the first spouse is alive. This suggests that the marriage to the first woman is held sacrosanct and upheld by God and only death can annul such

arrangements. In line with this understanding, the NBC believes that to divorce one and to marry another woman does not relieve the man who divorces his wife of the contract to the first marriage before God. To this extent, marrying another woman is a polygamous act because such a man has a contract that is still binding on him whether they continue to live together or not. Such people, therefore, ought not to be accepted into fellowship and cannot be leaders in the church. In my understanding, all these passages reveal an ideal situation for humankind. This would have been the situation all things being equal. But the question we are confronted with is this: Do we really have the ideal environment? The fact of the original sin has brought the earth into a situation of fallenness. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden brought about a chaos, disorder and calamity in the world. As Keil has rightly pointed out, we live in an accursed world.<sup>30</sup> With this condition, attaining the ideal will be almost impossible. Recall that the Bible injuncts humanity to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Matt. 5: 48). This already sends a message that humanity is not perfect, therefore, we do not have an ideal situation even though that is what the Bible prescribes.

### ***Realities of Life***

Realities of life are the practical situations we experience in life apart from the prescribed ideals. With the issue of polygamy, it has been seen from the pages of Scriptures especially in the Old Testament that polygamy is almost as old as the Bible itself. Lamech was the first polygamist recorded in the Bible (Gen. 4: 19), Abraham the father of the nation Israel was a polygamist, having taken Hagar as his wife following Sarah's persuasion. Jacob married two sisters and also their maids. Let us not forget that Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachael was not intentional, but it was forced on him as a result of

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<sup>30</sup> C. F. Keil, "The Pentateuch," *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, eds. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, reprint, (Peabody: Hendrickson Press, 1996), 85.

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circumstances of the time.<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, the mother of Samuel, Hannah was from a polygamous home (1Sam. 1: 1-2), David was said to have married several wives and Solomon had the highest number of wives and concubines ever recorded in the Bible (1Kings 11: 1-3). While we may not be in position to state categorically what was responsible for the actions of these biblical figures, it is obvious that certain circumstances might have made them polygamists. In like manner, the situation with members of the NBC who are polygamists might not have been as a result of their fault, but a situation in which they found themselves.

Second, even some of the church fathers and important figures in Church history have contended that there is nowhere in the Bible that polygamy was outrightly forbidden. Both Augustine and Aquinas argued that there was nothing wrong with the practice of polygamy.<sup>32</sup> For Augustine, plurality of marriage was meant for the multiplication of race. Aquinas argued in line with Augustine, noting that multiplication of human race was a primary factor responsible for God to have allowed polygamy in the first instance. Even down to the Reformation, both Luther and Melancthon felt that polygamy was acceptable since it was not condemned by the Mosaic Law.<sup>33</sup> Calvin was not as strongly in support of polygamy as it was seen in Luther, but it should be noted that the council of Trent spoke vehemently against the practice. Karl Barth, however, argued that there is nowhere that the Bible clearly condemned polygamy. In this wise, it could be argued that the NBC's position on polygamy was influenced more by its Western missionary roots than the realities of the culture in which the church found itself.

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<sup>31</sup> Jacob actually was in love with Rachael, but Leah was forced on him since according to the tradition of the land, the younger does not get married before the older. Jacob accepted to labor for another seven years in order to get the woman he loved most.

<sup>32</sup> See D. Barret, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1968), 116; Hillman, 1975, 181.

<sup>33</sup> See Barret, *Schism and Renewal*, 182.

More importantly, the reality of life for Africans and indeed Nigerians was that polygamy was an acceptable practice. Traditionally, Africans believe that the ultimate purpose of marriage is for procreation. In that wise, the more wives a man has the more children he is likely to have. Mbiti observed that the more children a man has the longer his legacy will remain on earth.<sup>34</sup> The point for the African man as Mbiti enunciated is that a man with many wives will “have many descendants through whom the power of immortality will be manifested in the family.”<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the issue of maintaining a large family, scholars have identified several other factors as being responsible for the practice of polygamy in Africa. First is the problem of barrenness or failure of a woman to produce children. Unfortunately, African men always feel that failure to produce children is always the fault of the woman. Even though this is not always so, it should be noted that the reality in the African worldview is that when a woman fails to produce a child it is her fault and a ground on which a man can take another wife, since procreation is the chief end of any marriage in the African worldview. Similarly, if a woman gives birth to only females without a male child, it is almost automatic that the man will take another wife.

Another reality of life for Africans for engaging in the practice of polygamy is economic. In this situation, it will be realized that traditional African societies were agrarian in nature. In line with this they needed many people to work on the farm in order to boost the level of production. In this situation when a man produced many children, he is able to assign them to different functions on the farm. Wives and children worked on the fields, which led to increase in productivity, while young men looked after the cattle and the father oversaw all the work force.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J. S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1969), 142.

<sup>35</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 142.

<sup>36</sup> J. Yego, “Polygamy and the African Church: A Survey,” *East Africa Journal of Africa Evangelical Theology* 3, 1984, 63.

Furthermore, Africans practice polygamy because of the need to take care of widows. Brothers or close relatives who die and leave their wives behind are acquired by such people in order to take care of them. This is reality for Africans and an acceptable thing within the African traditional set up. Mpolo noted that this was necessary as a means of preserving the lineage of the deceased. Indeed African scholars such as Mpolo, Mbiti and Idowu have argued that this is in line with the practice of levirate marriage as provided in the Levitical law (Deut. 25: 5). The examples of Tamar and Ruth have been cited as to support this type of marriage by scholars.<sup>37</sup> Apart from the factors already pointed out above, the search for prestige among African men, the fact that women abstain from sex as soon as they were pregnant in many parts of Africa as research has indicated drove many men to the practice of polygamy; all serve as realities or situations in life that imbue the practice of polygamy in Africa, which indeed have also been motivating factors for Nigerian men who found themselves within the ambit of the NBC.

Walter Trobisch, in his book, *My Wife Made me a Polygamist* corroborates Mpolo's view that the search for prestige is an important reason why Africans practice polygamy. Trobisch noted that in his conversation with a polygamist who was removed from fellowship in the Lutheran Church in Cameroun, he realized that it was the wife who mocked the man and chided him to be a poor man because he had only one wife. The wife, herself, looked for another woman for him and they were all happy to live in that condition. Nevertheless, the church rejected the man, but accepted the first wife. This made the man to resent the church that advised him to divorce his second wife. The reality for the man is that there is nothing wrong in his tradition and culture in being a polygamist, but he felt that it is even worse to divorce his second wife since the Bible actually frowns at divorce, but not at polygamy. For the man, the church wanted him to take the wrong action and he preferred to stay away from the church than to

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<sup>37</sup> M. Mpolo ed. *Families in Transition*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987, 101.

divorce his second wife.<sup>38</sup> What can be gathered from the foregoing is that while polygamy may not be the ideal form of marriage, it is clear that polygamists might not have done so out of total disrespect for the church or for God. Such actions are often propelled by the differences between ideals and circumstances or realities that humankind is confronted with as we continue on life pilgrimages. Some may be as a result of human foibles, some out of selfish desires and some just a matter of life situation. Most importantly, it brings us to the important aspect of culture in mission. It should always be remembered that the original recipients of the mercy of God and His revelation came out of a particular culture. God did not totally supplant those cultures, but allowed them to receive His revelation and also continued to abide by his laws within that set culture. Jesus Christ, in his ministry, never condemned the Jewish culture and Law, but he upheld them and still showed them God's revelation. In that wise, the NBC, ought not to set aside the culture of Nigerians as though they are savage and there is nothing good in them especially those ones that are not directly condemned by Scriptures. Rather, they should, with much care and prayer seek for ways and means to integrate them, showing them the true way in prayer until such a time that they come to the realities of Scripture and are moved by the Spirit of God to act in ways that God Himself has impressed upon their hearts.

## **Conclusion**

At issue here is the thorny problem of polygamy within the churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, the position of the church and its treatment of polygamists. The position adopted by the church in 2001 is an attempt to ameliorate the situation, but even then, the problem is far from being resolved. The position of the convention is an attempt to stay committed to its view on the interpretation of scriptures and biblical provisions as seen in Genesis 2: 24 and other New Testament passages already mentioned earlier in this paper. Nevertheless, such interpretations and stance adopted by the NBC

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<sup>38</sup> See W. Trobisch, *My Wife Made me a Polygamist*, 9-11.

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except until recently has paid little attention to the social and cultural environments in which it operated. The NBC's position has failed to a large extent to consider such situations in life that might make a man prone to polygamy so that it can help such people rather than just throw them out of fellowship. This is more so, that the Bible is not explicit in its position against polygamy. This is more so that scholars such as A. Hastings and E. Schillebeeckx have argued strongly that the Bible does not openly condemn polygamy. Hastings actually noted that it will be an extremely high price to pay to divorce than to remain a polygamist.<sup>39</sup> In the present it may not be out of place to conclude with the words of the Anglican bishop of Malawi, which he said in 1960 on the issue of polygamy as follows:

I came to this diocese from a country where Christianity had been planted largely by Christian wives of polygamous husbands, and their courage and resourcefulness in living a Christian life... and bringing up their children as practicing members of the church, won my admiration. It was with profound shock that I learned here that none of them would have been admitted into holy baptism, not because they had the misfortune to be brought up in a society where polygamy was the rule. After discussion with the clergy, changes are coming, and baptism will no longer be refused to a woman who was married to a polygamist before her baptism.

The point then is that the NBC's approach to the issue of polygamy has been done with harsh treatment in some situations to those polygamists who converted to Christianity without proper consideration of the socio-cultural context in which they found themselves. This has created much pain for the members as well as the church. It therefore, becomes necessary for the NBC to have a rethink on its policy on polygamy.

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<sup>39</sup> See A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1973), 74; E. Schillebeeckx, *Marriage, Secular Reality and Saving Mystery*, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 139-40.

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# **Efficacy of Prayer in the Age of Scientific Advancement**

**Prof Helen A Labeodan and Godwin Adeboye**

## **Abstract**

One major view concerning science-faith relationship in philosophy of religion is the view that science and faith are in inevitable conflict and that as science advances; there will not be need for religion in human affairs any longer. One cardinal example of this thesis is that since science and technology are advancing and some human problems which were solved from the purview of religion are taken care by science, there is not any need to take recourse to religion and its practices (such as prayer) in the pursuit of answer to human questions. While this approach to science-faith relationship is apparently and theoretically plausible, it raises some questions: has science solved all human problems in such that there would not be need for prayer again? Are there not some human questions that science alone cannot answer? What is the place of people's experience in this issue? In view of this, using Alvin Plantinga's science-faith integration hypothesis as the theoretical framework and qualitative field research to gather information concerning people experience, this paper shall examine these questions and the veracity of the claim that scientific advancement will soon overtake the relevance of religious practices such as prayer. The paper shall be concluded by examining the feasibility and efficacy of prayer in the light of integration of science-faith relationship.

## **a) Introduction**

There can be no doubt about the fact that ever since the rise of modern science, many people have claimed that, given the findings of science, the rational stance to take towards some religious practices is to either abandon it or drastically reform it. This stance is represented in the New Testament scholar Rudolph Bultmann's statement that:

It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirit and miracle. We may think we can manage it in our own lives, but to expect others to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world<sup>1</sup>.

This shows that modern scientific outlook has shown that the biblical picture of the world is false and there may not be premium on religious practices such as prayer in an age where scientific advancement has apparently solved all human puzzles. And that it is “impossible for a modern, scientific mind to believe in God.”<sup>2</sup> According to Butmann, the religious standpoint on practices such as prayer and fasting were superstitious which modern science has shown to be false. This philosophical standpoint has given birth to a new perspective on science and faith, and faith and reason in the contemporary time. Some are of the opinion nowadays that if we want to maintain some forms of Christian faith and practices, we had better revise it and remove everything that offends the contemporary modern outlook.<sup>3</sup> Some in both scientific and religious communities have become dogmatic in their belief of how reconcilable is the concept of faith and reason in the affairs of man. As far as they are concerned, science and faith, reason and faith are mortal enemies. This paper argues that a claim as this depends on fundamental misunderstandings both of the biblical material and of the scientific theories of our day.

The interaction of science and faith as viewed by some involve asking some questions such as do science and faith have grounds for mutual

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, 2007. *Theology of the New Testament*, USA: Baylor University Press, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Godwin O. Adeboye, 2014. “Science and Faith: Enemies or Friends?” in John Clayton, (ed.) *Pluralism in Astronomy*, Volume 41, number 1. USA: Does God Exist Publication, 8.

<sup>3</sup> John. Collins, 2003. *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 215.

agreement that can take strength from their broad philosophical commonalities without splintering over their one essential difference? The debate over the enmity or friendship of science and faith has been carried on for a long time. Many theologians react vociferously, fearful that science encroaching on their domain. Warfare between science and faith continues today in many fields of enquiry, especially where basic moral values<sup>4</sup> or religious practices such as prayers are held to be at stake. New scientific discoveries and technological advances both affect our lives in many ways, and they raise some questions. One of the obvious advancements is in the area of modern medicine. In recent time, modern medicine has advanced to the extent that some of the human challenges that were solved religiously before are simply tackled from medical point of view. The question is, has this scientific advancement undermined the efficacy of prayer? This question constitutes the hub of this work.

**b) Theoretical Framework: Plantinga's science-faith integration approach**

Alvin Plantinga is a John A. O'Brien Professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. He is widely known for his work in epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of religion. He is credited for some advancement in the field of philosophy of religion: his freewill defence, modal ontological argument, and reformed epistemology. Besides, Plantinga<sup>5</sup> has also made a giant stride in his approach to science and faith relationship. In his prestigious Gifford Lectures titled "*Science and Religion: Conflict or Concord*," Plantinga developed his science-faith integration thesis" His integration

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Kurtz, 2003. "An Overview of Issues" in Paul Kurtz (ed.) *Science and Religion: Are they Compatible*, New York: Prometheus Books, 15.

<sup>5</sup> As stated in the opening statement of his article "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and The Bible," *Christian Scholars' Review*, he is concerned with the question of how shall we deal apparent conflicts between faith and reason, between what we know as Christians and what we know about science" See Alvin Plantina, 1991. "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and The Bible," *Christian Scholars' Review*, XXI:1, 8-33.

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approach to science-faith relationship takes seriously both the conflict that exists between science and faith on the one hand and the unique role of each domain on the other. Plantinga discusses four areas of engagement between science and religion: fields where there is no conflict at all, but only the illusion of conflict; fields where there is genuine, but superficial and easily resolved, conflict; fields where science and religion are in pleasant concord; and finally a case where there is deep and irresolvable conflict between contemporary science (evolutionary biology) and religion (naturalism).<sup>6</sup> The most viable and appropriate science-faith relationship, according to Plantinga, is integration interaction. Alvin Plantinga science-faith integration approach offers exciting prospects for developing new ways of relating science and faith.

According to Plantinga, the two domains seem to overlap in significant areas, and advancing the dialogue will require recognition of the important role of each domain in human life.<sup>7</sup> His argument is that the major point of the matter is that there is no conflict between science and faith but where the conflict lies is between the theologians and atheistic scientists. According to him, he who rightly understands science and faith will see that these fields ought to be comprised by concord, and anyone who thinks otherwise merely shows that he has not properly understood these disciplines or their implications. The central Plantinga's thesis is that while there is a genuine conflict between religion and science, but that conflicts lies, not between theistic religion and science but between the religion of naturalism and science. This form of integration thesis served as the theoretical framework that guided the course of this research.

### **c) Research Method and Data Sources**

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<sup>6</sup> John. Collins, 2003. *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Chad Meister, 2007. *Introducing Philosophy of Religion*, Abingdon: Routledge, 153.

This section briefly describes the methodology involved in obtaining the relevant results presented in the next sections. It must be stated that the nature of a study determines the research design to be used and documents to be consulted. This research involved a small scaled, semi-structured in-depth interview in which a questions-schedule consisting of five parts was utilized. In order to get accurate information about the subject matter of this research, some experienced medical practitioners and religious practitioners were randomly sampled for interview within the city of Ibadan. A total number of 11 people were interviewed over a period of three weeks. 8 medical experts were selected while only three religious men were chosen. In selecting the interview respondents, age-factor was considered as the questions posted to them require some experience which comes with age. Ibadan and Ilorin cities were used as the locations of the interview because of the availability of medical and prayer centers. Seven questions were asked from each of the respondents, and these are:

- a) What does the saying 'man cures: God heals' mean?
- b) In patients' response to medical treatment, do they feel better if they know that they are being prayed for?
- c) Can modern medicine solve all human medical predicaments?
- d) Have there been occasions when modern medicine could not solve your patients' medical ills and you did not have option than to suggest religious options such as prayer?
- e) Do religious practices such as prayer help in medical process?
- f) In some occasions, modern medical test may not be able to diagnose the medical ills of some patients, what can account for this?
- g) Do you believe that religious faith and practices (e.g prayer) and modern science (e.g medicine) can be used hand in hand to help solve human medical predicaments?

The findings revealed that, of the 10 respondents, 100% agreed that the integration of science and faith is possible in the experience

of people, and that science cannot solve all human puzzles neither can faith solve. The two are to work together in a mutual way towards the development of man. The findings therein are fresh insights and further analysis of the aspect of how the religious experience of people can be used as a substance in some debates in the field of philosophy of religion. The researcher interviewed some medical and religious men at random sampling in Ibadan and Ilorin cities. Some of the qualitative data gathered from the study were subjected to data analysis. The qualitative data is used in the discussion that followed this section of the paper.

#### **h) Prayer as a religious solution to human Questions**

In its simplest and most primitive form, prayer is the expression of a desire cast in the form of a request to influence some forces or power conceived as supernatural. Apart from its modern usage, which connotes spiritual communion, it is usually understood to imply reverent entreaty<sup>8</sup>. Prayer is not necessarily a petition or the asking of a benefit. According to John and Oforibika, any intercourse of human soul with higher power may rightly be termed prayer. This communion is not necessarily an inward consciousness of spirituality with God. Prayer may take several forms: corporate or personal utilizing various forms and techniques. Prayer is an essential element of any religion. It expresses a desire on the part of man to enter into contact with the sacred<sup>9</sup>. It should be noted that the recourse to prayer itself is explained by a motivation deeper than affective elements. As such, the course and occasion of prayer should not be confused. Besides, prayer is an expression of one's personal fear, love and attraction to the divine. Such experiences may be in speech, which may be falter or in a holy silence<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> John Odili and Adokiye Oforibika, "Prayer" in Wotogbe Weneka (ed.) *Themes in Comparative Religion*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> John Odili and Adokiye Oforibika, "Prayer" in Wotogbe Weneka (ed.) *Themes in Comparative Religion*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> John Odili and Adokiye Oforibika, "Prayer" in Wotogbe Weneka (ed.) *Themes in Comparative Religion*, 40.

The question of what is the origin of prayer has been attempted from several fronts. For examples, some scholars opined that the origin of prayer is magic, others think that the origin of prayer is psychological, sociological and others. Prayer is of different types, though to neatly classify prayer into their categories may be difficult. There are six common types: petition, confession, intercession, praise and thanksgiving, adoration and unitative-mystical union or ecstasy.

What does 'prayer' mean to different people? To an African indigenous religious adherent, there is an in-depth awareness of man's dependence in relation to supra-sensible world. In African traditional religion, prayer is addressed to the Supreme Being, divinities, natural elements and ancestors. It may be spontaneous without any precise formulation. It may be liturgical and pragmatic. It may involve with sacrifices, ritual and magic. In African religion, prayer may be offered communally or individually. It may be in form of adoration, petition, confession, praise and intercession. It is tailored to worldly boons. In Hinduism, prayer is of two types: *dhyana* (meditation) and *stotra* (praise). The latter occurs in a variety of sub-forms opening with an invocation, a sort of litany of the 1,008 titles of *Vishnu* or *Siva* (8)<sup>11</sup>. Hindu mystics give great importance to spoken prayer which leads to ecstasy. In Judaism, prayer occupies an important position. It is an inseparable accompaniment of sacrifice and it is significant in the religious lives of the individual and the nation at large. Judaizer's has various types of prayer: prayer of thanksgiving, praise, intercession and confession. The temple is a house of prayer. The major prayer formula in Judaism is found in *Shama*. In Christianity, prayer has both the theological and liturgical approaches. The Christian scripture is full with exhortation to prayer that it may be affirmed positively that to doubt the efficacy of prayer is to shake the very foundation of Christianity. Christian prayer can be offered in any place or in any occasion. It can offered in silence or in a loud voice. Christian prayer

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<sup>11</sup> John Odili and Adokiye Oforibika, "Prayer" in Wotogbe Weneka (ed.) *Themes in Comparative Religion*, 40.

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is to be made in Christ's name. fasting<sup>12</sup> can be attached to it but it is not usually taken to be a must in most of the occasions. In Islam, prayer (*salat*) is one of the pillars. It is the most important part of the Islamic liturgy. *Salat* is directed to Allah in submission and requisition for aid. The concept of prayer in Islam involves a sort of compulsion. It is prescribed for a Muslim to pray five times a day; before sunrise, between mid-day and afternoon, in the afternoon, immediately after sunset, between the time when twilight is over and just before dawn. It is accompanied by different body movements and ablution<sup>13</sup>.

One can see from the above analysis that prayer is found in almost all the world major religions. The essence of prayer is the same: to commune and to be at one with the sacred. It is a means to an end. Prayer is seen in religion as means of coping with life tragedies and soliciting the intervention of the divine. But as one would expect some of human problems which were tackled from the angle of religious option such as prayers are now taken care by science. And there is a philosophical standpoint that as science advances, there may not be any need for prayer. But can science solve all human puzzles? This is the next topic of our discussion.

### **i) Can Science solve all Human Questions?**

Findings made from the qualitative field work shows that science has not been able to solve all human problems. Medical experts pointed out that there are still some medical problems that are puzzling to the medical experts themselves. For example a respondent argue that some medical predicaments do not even respond to medical treatment and they even defer it. For examples Cancers, Diabetics, HIV/AIDS, etc. In fact, according to an experienced medical doctor, there will always be medical challenges till the end of the age. This is because human beings are limited and cannot be 100% perfect. There are

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Omoregbe, 2002. *Comparative Religion: Christianity and other World Religions in Dialogue*, Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Ninian Smart, 1984. *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, California: Chales and Seribner's Sons.

medical conditions whose treatments are just conservative or palliative because their actual cure has not been discovered.

To make this work critical enough, the medical experts were asked if there have occasions when medicine could not solve their patients' medical conditions and they did not have options than to suggest religious options such as prayer. In response to this question, all the respondents answered that there have several occasions where patients' conditions needed religious alternative "because some diseases cannot be treated by modern medicine alone."<sup>14</sup> A respondent gave an instance where a patient has been diagnosed but the condition cannot be known, but he had to join prayer option with his medical effort to help the patient.<sup>15</sup> Some human issues are beyond the reach of the scientific method<sup>16</sup>. According to Michael Wilkinson and Hugh Campbell, one of the biggest changes in modern science in the years to come will be through nanobiotechnology. Modern science will probably advance to the extent of redefining what it means to be human, but even at this, science cannot be able to explain everything about man. This is because consciousness is more than mere brain activity<sup>17</sup>. Human consciousness is not exclusively material or scientific.

The findings made from the field work show that modern science operates within the sphere of the physical and it cannot fully grasp both the physical and metaphysical planes. Man is made up of both physical and metaphysical aspects. Science can only deal with the physical it cannot do anything about the metaphysical aspect of human problems. That is why some medical problems are termed idiopathic,

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<sup>14</sup> Oral Interview Respondent, a Medical Doctor at ECWA Clinic, Kwara state.

<sup>15</sup> Oral Interview Respondent, a Medical Doctor at University College Hospital, Ibadan, Oyo state.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Horage Barnes, 2010. *Understanding Religion and Science, Introducing the Debate*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Wilkinson and Hugh Campbell, 2010. *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 208.

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because modern medicine cannot even diagnosed them properly<sup>18</sup>. Some medical problems are not physical, science, no matter how advance, cannot tackle such medical problems. It is hasty to estimate spiritual significance purely on the basis of physical size<sup>19</sup>. This is the place where religious options such as prayer come in.

This shows that it should be uncontroversial, however, that there are many things we know without science in any way being involved in its production or warrant. The contention is that irreducibly extra-scientific knowledge marks a limit of science: ‘there is knowledge that we have that cannot be obtained through or receive warrant from science.’<sup>20</sup> This paper suggests that Christian faith gives us knowledge of divine things – knowledge that science cannot give us and for which it cannot provide the warrant<sup>21</sup>.

#### **j) Efficacy of Prayer in the light of science-faith integration approach**

It was gathered from the field work that in spite of the fact that modern science has advanced, religious practices such as prayer is still very useful in solving the puzzles of man. According to the interview respondents, the common saying ‘man cures; God heals’ portrays this position. Accordingly, the fact that man can help himself by through scientific provision such as medicine, the possibility of total wholeness is as God wills it”<sup>22</sup> One of the respondents who have practiced full time medicine for more than 20 years opined that what modern medicine can do is to try and care but the absolute healing

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<sup>18</sup> Oral Interview Respondent, a medical doctor, University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Evans and Zachary Manis, 2009. *Philosophy of Religion, Thinking about Faith*, Downers Grove: IVP, 144.

<sup>20</sup> Rene van Woudenberg, 2008. “Religious Belief and The Limits of Science” *The Plantinga Fellow Lecture*, University of Notre Dame, 8-9

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Rescher, 1984. *The Limits of Science*, Berkeley: University of California, 209-210.

<sup>22</sup> Oral Interview Respondent, a Medical Doctor at University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Kwara state.

desired is divine and prayer can be very useful in that regard. According to a respondent:

We do not know how healing takes place really. Man only tries; God is the one that knows everything and that perfects everything. While man should not fold his arms and so nothing, man should know that it is God that will make the medical effort yield fruit. Otherwise, the labour will be in vain.<sup>23</sup>

It is found out that man is limited in nature and since modern medicine falls within the activity of man, it cannot promise to solve all human problems. To make this research empirical, the researcher asked the medical experts that “in patients’ response to medical treatment, do they feel better if they know that they are being prayed for? The responses given from the experience of the people show that prayer is still efficacious and even needed in this age of medical advancement. A respondent argued that if the patients know that someone is praying for them, they will respond positively to treatment because the knowledge of the fact that they are being prayed for will influence the psychological response to the illness and likewise the medical treatment and this is possible because prayer has been very effective in the experience of almost every man. Another respondent argued that patients respond to medical treatment positively if they know that someone is praying for them because patients believe that prayer and medical treatment can complement each other. In fact, he argued that some patients pray over medical drug before they swallow it because they believe that both prayer and medicine are needed in solving their medical ills. A respondent, who is a deliverance minister, argued that he has been to hospitals, on invitation, to pray for members of his churches, because they request that both prayer and modern medical treatment should be applied on them. However, 40% of the respondents pointed out that the efficacy of prayer in medical process

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<sup>23</sup> Oral Interview Respondent, a Medical Doctor at a private Hospital, Ilorin, Kwara state.

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depends on the belief system of the patients. If the patients believe that prayer will strengthen the effort of the medical doctors, then it will do. While modern medicine has limit, divine help through prayer is not limited.

Finally, finding made through the oral interview show that prayer is very needed and useful in healing process in the present modern medicine. Man is not just a physical being. Man has many sides, some of the sides are the spiritual side, physical side, psychological side etc. Only one tool cannot take care of the need of a total man. modern medicine cannot give all the needs to a man. If a man is sick, the cause may not be physical exclusively, this is where spiritual help through prayer is needed and relevant. The respondents noted that they believe that prayer and medicine can be used hand in hand to help in solving human problems.

This finding is in great consonance with a celebrated study performed at San Francisco General Hospital by Randolph C. Byrd in 1988. Byrd's research found out that patients in a cardiac care unit received statistically significant benefits from intercessory prayers<sup>24</sup>. This Byrd's study has attained special status within the alternative medicine community and has been reprinted as a 'landmark study.'<sup>25</sup>

### **k) Conclusion**

Religious experience is central to religious faith and practice. It often serves as evidence of belief, it contributes to the development of doctrine. Faith is not a mortal enemy of reason. In fact, science and faith are compatible, especially concerning the importance of some religious practices such as prayer in the age of scientific

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<sup>24</sup> Irwin Tessman and Jack Tessman, 2003. "Efficacy of Prayers" in Paul Kurtz, (ed.) *Science and Religion, Are they Compatible?* New York: Prometheus Books, 257.

<sup>25</sup> Irwin Tessman and Jack Tessman, 2003. "Efficacy of Prayers" in Paul Kurtz, (ed.) *Science and Religion, Are they Compatible?* New York: Prometheus Books, 258. Though Byrd's critics have made a confirmation attempt to debunk the veracity of his findings, his findings still make way for possible interaction between science and faith in the experience of people.

*Efficacy of Prayer in the Age of Scientific Advancement* advancement<sup>26</sup>. Religious practices such as prayer has long been an important force in human life and human history, and there is every reason to believe they continue to so throughout the foreseeable future. No matter the level of scientific advancement, human beings would still have to take recourse to religious solutions which are capable of giving at least a cushion effect to human physical and metaphysical problems. Finally, this paper concludes with the Alvin Plantinga's hypothesis that we need a theistic science<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> James M. Lowey, July/August 2012. "Science and Faith: Allies or Enemies?" in John Clayton, *Science and Faith, Does God Exists Journal*, Vol 39, Number 4, 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Alvin Plantina, 1991. "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and The Bible," *Christian Scholars' Review*, XXI:1, 20.

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