

**Impact of Ogbomoso Journal of
Theology on Developmental Works in Africa and Beyond**

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ABSTRACT

This paper was designed to discuss the contribution of Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT) to educational developmental work and civilisation of Africans. The paper is a desk research and a review of the OJOT activities in the African continent with concentration on how missionary education contributed to human development on the continent. The study reveals that OJOT has made significant impact to developmental works through theological education and scholarly contribution in Africa and beyond, especially in the areas of poverty alleviation, holistic healing and health awareness, and prevention or reduction of societal ills through ministrations.

KEY WORDS: *contextualisation; Imasogie; African Christian Theology; Charismatics; Pentecostalism; glossolalia; Thomas Jefferson Bowen*

I. INTRODUCTION

Missionary enterprise in Africa spans over two hundred years. Ajayi (2014) remarks that the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries in Africa dates back to 1858 when Thomas Jefferson Bowen arrived in Badagry, Nigeria. Ajayi (2014) further asserts that since then,

production of Christian literature has contributed appreciably to the effective mission efforts of the Baptists. Ajayi submits that, in these two centuries of missionary endeavour, missiological, theological and biblical articles in foreign and indigenous journals have served as critical tools, among several others, in widening the space of Christianity. Ajayi (2014) observes that some of these publications have contributed to the contextualisation of Christianity among the Africanse by entrenching the faith. One instance of such media in Nigeria is the *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* (OJOT), a study cum indigenous journal of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTSO), Ogbomoso. This seminary was founded by the Southern Baptist Convention missionaries in 1898.

For many years, the seminary was affiliated to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, USA. Currently, it is under the proprietorship of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. OJOT seeks to fulfil and project the need for contextualised Christianity in Africa through academic cross-fertilization of ideas. It treats faith-based themes, cognizant of the African context, though designed for inclusive interface and impact.

This paper locates OJOT in the categories of international periodicals through identification and a graphic portrayal of its character. Through a review of the articles contributed focusing on a variety of themes overtime, the methodology and impact of the journal are accentuated, with some spotlight on its transcontinental networks. The paper employs an eclectic blend of the historical and analytical methods in establishing the intent, content and the extent of OJOT as an indigenous study journal with missiological proclivity.

II. Birth and Development of Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)

a. The Beginnings of OJOT

According to Imasogie (1986:1), the maiden edition of OJOT was published in January 1986, with the primary aims of “contributing to on-going theological development in Africa and providing theological resources for alumni in the seminary as well as alumni of other theological institutions.” The publication of OJOT was a response to the relentless yearning of the immediate academic community for a scholarly forum for cross-fertilization of ideas and advance of intellectual capacity of members. The pioneer editor of the journal was the first indigenous principal of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTSO), Osadolor Imasogie. Imasogie set the ultimate goal of producing a journal that is "theologically relevant and does not compromise the core of Christianity". Imasogie (1991) explains that the two-fold purpose was the thrust of the journal whose maiden issue focused on contextualisation, a recurring and contemporary yearning with unremitting conversation in theological scholarship.

The logo of the journal, which was designed by Williams Oyekan in consonance to the ideals of the Seminary and the ideas of what an academic/scholarly journal represents, has subsisted in view of its import to the realization of the objectives for which OJOT was originally published. The logo comprises a globe, which “represents the journal’s ecumenical character;” the Christian cross, which reflects “its evangelical commitment;” the church tower, which portrays its commitment “to be a servant of the church;” and the square academic cap, which “symbolizes commitment to sound scholarship” (OJOT, Copyright page). This may explain why ensuing issues have continued to focus on diverse relevant national, international and ecumenical subjects. The responsibilities of the Church and theological institutions in training ministers for community and national development,

especially through the instrumentality of missions and evangelistic efforts, are markedly underscored in the papers accepted for publication. Ilori (2014) underscores the fact that the journal increasingly sought to suggest pragmatic solutions to ecclesiastical, theological, socio-political, global and ecumenical challenges beyond mere theories and presuppositions.

This commitment is evident in recent debate by Adetunji (2015) that stakeholders in Nigeria are asking for the need to improve the quality of higher education in Nigeria through active research involvement. In another paper by Adetunji (2015a), he explains that academic and higher institutions in Nigeria were research-oriented at the commencement of tertiary education in the country, an approach that enhanced educational rating.

Furthermore, the first edition focused on contextualisation and contained five articles. It was produced in 1986 with Osadolor Imasogie (now Emeritus Professor) as editor. Contributors to this issue included S.O. Abogunrin, F.W. Dillistone, Yusufu Ameh Obaje, Wayne Ward, and Gerald Wright. The issue featured four book reviews by Amba Oduyoye, Yusufu Ameh Obaje, and G. D. Wright, who contributed two reviews. Osadolor Imasogie was the Editor-in-chief, Yusufu Ameh Obaje and Gerald Wright were Co-Editors, Samuel Ola Fadeji (now late) was the Review Editor, Edgar Burks served as Business Manager while Paul H. Miller (also late) was a member of the Editorial Committee. The articles and reviews addressed contextualisation and related elements in 'African Christian Theology,' with a view to constructing a relevant and meaningful theology for the African context.

Over time, there have been thirty-two editions of the journal produced in twenty volumes between 1986 and 2014. From 1986 to 1994, the journal was produced in a single volume annually and had a small number of contributors. After the 1994 edition, there was a ten-year break during which the journal was not published. No wonder Adetunji (2014) upheld the view that there is a gradual decline in the provision of quality education in Nigeria higher education due to shortcoming noted between late 80's and early 90's. However, it was resuscitated in 2004 and has been published regularly till 2015. Ilori (2004) noted that apart from the first two editions of the journal focusing on *Contextualisation and Models of the Church in an African Context*, successive editions had no explicit theme until 2004 when publication resumed with explicit focus. Nihinlola (2013, 2013a) reports that at the time of its resuscitation, the editorial board comprised of J. A. Ilori, Editor-in-Chief; Emiola Nihinlola, Editor; John Eyinnaya, Book Review Editor; and D. J. Ogunrombi and E. A. Bamigboye, who were members. The consulting editors included Osadolor Imasogie, P. H. Miller (USA) and G. R. Beasley-Murray (Europe).

Consequent to the journal's extensive recognition within Nigeria and the West African sub-region, the journal became a biannual publication in the year 2008. As it gained wider international acceptance in scholarly and missionary/religious circles, its production was increased to three-a-year, beginning in 2011. This momentum has been maintained till 2015.

In pursuance of its objectives, OJOT has focused on four prime areas: ecumenism, ministry/service, evangelism/mission and scholarship in relation to church and theological education. Articles have been contributed by scholars from varied persuasions and perspectives, institutions and continents. Currently, the editorial board is made up of Emiola

Ezekiel Nihinlola, Olusayo B. Oladejo and Simon Adewuyi

Ishola. Its overseas representative and consultant is Margaret Tarpley of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA; and its consulting editors consist of eminent scholars including Caleb Oladipo of Baptist Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia; Peter McGrail of Liverpool Hope University, United Kingdom; and Mike Glerup of the Centre for Early African Christianity, Eastern University, USA.

The collection of articles and book reviews published between 1986 and 1990 is quite revealing. The materials did not only meet the measure of an academic/scholarly journal, but were also germane to the goals and objectives of OJOT. This, among other factors, was responsible for the indexing of the journal in *Religion Index One*, which began with the sixth edition in 1991. Subsequently, the periodicals and index to the book reviews are being made available at *Religion, Religious and Theological Abstracts and Southern Baptist Periodical Index*. This status of OJOT was later reinforced by ATLA database indexing in 2007. The journal currently serves as a valuable resource for sustained theological education, and a platform for presenting African perspectives in the continued endeavour to interface international academia.

b. Review of the Intent and Extent of OJOT

Diverse kinds of journals have particular and primary objectives. Bonk, et al. (2013) postulate that study journals, for instance, generally seek to inform, report and make available original research and new findings in specific areas of study. From an aggregation of diverse missiological titles compiled by Bonk, et al. (2013), they expressed that the objectives of missiological journals encompass the provision of a forum for missionaries, mission trainers

and mission leaders for exchanging ideas, sharing reports and discussing issues relating to mission praxis. Such journals provide resources for mission, ministry, and theological growth for mission practitioners in order to bring theological and missional insights to bear on the practice of ministry. They further present a holistic and objective analysis of Christian world mission that fosters critical and creative missiological reflection in dialogue with global trends and developments (Nihinlola, 2012a, 2014).

Consequently, missiological journals inform, report and make accessible imaginative research and innovative findings in the field of Christian mission and showcase how these interrelate with events and happenings globally. The blanket of missiological journals spread covers the history, spread of Christian mission and mission bodies and their impact on various people-groups across the globe.

OJOT is a study and indigenous journal with missionary flavour. Its stated intent, as contained in the first inner page of every issue, is “to contribute to (the) ongoing theological development in Africa and to provide theological resources for alumni of the seminary as well as alumni of other institutions.” according to Ilori (2004), this was recently reviewed to include providing theological resources for “departments of religious studies in the universities”. Thus, the journal is for the alumni of the Seminary and other theological institutions, but is also currently available in libraries of leading universities in Nigeria, having secured considerable contributions of scholars in religious studies and related fields. Nonetheless, it continues to serve as a handy tool for both undergraduate and postgraduate students of Seminaries in Africa and beyond, having featured articles from distinguished scholars like Andrew Walls, Bill Houston, Allan Anderson and Jacob Beate.

The validation of OJOT as an academic/scholarly journal, flavoured with missiological elements, is situated within its primary aims and the construal of its cover logo and in the contexts of the editorial comments in its maiden edition. This also serves to ascertain the extent to which those extant objectives have been fulfilled. Thus, it is apt to note here that the journal has sought to publish articles and book reviews that are theologically relevant and intellectually penetrating. It has concurrently sought to remain faithful to biblical revelation. This character of the journal makes it fitting for theological education and mission development in Africa. OJOT also accomplished these through creating missions awareness for the local, national and continental Church. It is the opinion of this writer that OJOT has continued to facilitate and promote ecumenical interactions, advancing deliberate cross-fertilization of ideas in related fields of global academia.

c. An Illustrative Synopsis of the Contents of OJOT: 2004-2014

This section surveys the themes developed by OJOT between 2004 and 2014. The period witnessed unique contributions from commissioned writers and peer-reviewed papers presented by participants at the International Theological Education Conference organized annually by the NBTSO, Ogbomoso. The conference has supplied about 70 to 80 percent of publications in the journal since 2008. The perspectives of the contributors remain varied, and do not essentially embody those of its editors, the NBTSO or the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC). The themes employ diverse, albeit harmonized, theological, missiological, ethical, historical and biblical/exegetical approaches and methodologies.

At its resuscitation in 2004, OJOT addressed the issue of *Theological Education and Nation Building*. Ilori (2004) asserts that the journal examined, from sundry perspectives, the nature of theological education from an African viewpoint and its bearing to the role of the Church in nation building, Christian mission, and interfaith dialogue. Despite their varied backgrounds and positions, the contributors agreed that theological education and educators occupy a critical position in nation building and should rise to play their roles.

Year 2005 focused on *Globalization and Theological Education in the 21st Century*. In Ilori's (2005) words, the edition examined "some of the implications and challenges of ... globalization for missions and theological formations". Issues treated included poverty, biblical interpretation, influence of African cultural elements, theological education, Pentecostalism, Christian hymnody and ministry. The responsibility of the Nigerian and African Church in addressing societal ills was underscored as a critical need requiring adequate attention of an indigenous-scholarly journal like OJOT.

The theme for 2006 issue of OJOT was *The Church and Society*.

Challenges of sex education, deplorable state of education and the need for political transformation in Africa were part of the subjects therein. Contributors included eminent scholars such as Timothy Agboluaje, Olusegun Olawoyin and Matthews Ojo, among others. The first two writers addressed the theme from biblical perspective, while others wrote from standpoints of Christian music, religious education, Christian philosophy, eschatology, and politics. The underpinning thesis of the authors was that the Church should have responsibility of empowering her members for conscientious citizenry.

In the 2007 edition titled *The Kingdom of God and Theological Education in Contemporary Africa*, Houston (2007) argued that the doctrine of the kingdom of God deserves a critical place in the curriculum of evangelical seminaries. Consequently, he suggested essential components of such curriculum, setting a direction for other articles on kingdom parable, spiritual warfare, missiological task of the kingdom, theocracy, kingdom lifestyle and an exegetical analysis of the concept of God's kingdom. This edition also featured a review of Beasley-Murray's *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* by Oladejo (2013). The discourse was approached from exegetical, hermeneutical, ecological and missiological viewpoints, highlighting the cultural plurality of the concept and practical implications of the Kingdom of God for the African context in particular, and the global community generally.

The year 2008 was a historical watershed in the history of OJOT as it marked the birth of the journal as a bi-annual publication. Audi (2008) notes that the two issues of this 13th volume present assorted perspectives on *Pentecostalism, The Charismatics and African Initiatives in Christianity*. Some of the issues discussed in the editions include historical developments of

charismatic movements, the challenge of *glossolalia*, cross-cultural and trans-national missions, African Initiated Churches and spirituality, the role of Pentecostal practises on leadership and governance as well as Pentecostal hermeneutics and preaching. The contributors individually and collectively made it manifest that the history, theology and mission of Pentecostalism, as well as the challenges confronting it, have considerable impact on and implications for Christianity globally.

Poverty is a perennial phenomenon requiring attention and action due to its incidence in many parts of the world, especially impoverished Africa. Thus, the 2009 publications focused on poverty. The first issue was titled, *Poverty: Prevalence, Theories and Issues*. Ayegboyin (2009; 2009a) indicates that this issue contains articles dealing with matters relating to the prevalence of poverty in Africa, with illustrative attention on Nigeria. The second issue, *Poverty: Propositions, Reduction and Eradication*, addressed the role of the Church in ministering to the poor and combating poverty. The twenty-four articles and two book reviews in this two-series volume underscore the need for Christians to practically apply their faith in real-life situations as they seek to understand biblical teaching about poverty and the implications of Christians being salt and light in their particular constituencies.

The place of missions education in the development of Africa cannot be underestimated. This was the focal point of the 2010 edition, whose first and second parts focused on establishing a nexus between theological education and mission in the 21st century. Audi (2010) highlights the fact that the two numbers addressed *World Christianity* and *African Christianity* respectively. With contributions from the likes of Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, Kwabena

Asamoah-Gyadu and Dietrich Werner, among others, this volume presents a passionate range of credible solutions to the challenges confronting mission enterprise in the 21st Century.

The year 2011 marked another epoch in the publication of OJOT as it became a thrice-a-year journal. Audi (2011) states that, in the three sub-volumes, spirituality, as it affects the Church in Africa and theological education worldwide, was mainly considered. Misconceptions were clarified and corrected and new paradigms of spirituality presented to situate it as a catalyst and crucial component of theological education.

In the 2012 edition, focus was on the necessity for continuing interface of the *Church, Gospel and Culture*. Therein, John S. Pobee calls for African Christian initiatives to forge models of Church that propagate a gospel that is germane, evocative and indigenous. This was complemented by articles relating to Christ and culture, prosperity and holistic gospel. The interchange and impact of culture on the gospel, as well as indigenization and mission initiatives within Yoruba culture were illustratively explored. Moreover, adequate reflection was given to women and children in the effective presentation of the gospel message using cultural categories and elements.

The 2013 volume of OJOT examined the role of the Church and the place of medicine in healing and healthy living, providing an assorted specialized scholarly study. Oladejo (2013) emphasizes the consensus of the contributors that healing is a scriptural component of the ministry of Jesus Christ and His Church, both local and global. Specific approaches to healing by indigenous churches, the contributions of mass evangelistic crusades and perspective of Christian educators in relation to biblical healing in the African context were

also discussed. It was underscored that all forms and means of healing, orthodox, alternative and spiritual, which are biblical and helpful should be employed by the Church to ensure holistic healing and health of members.

The 2014 issue, which is the last under review here, is with the theme *The Church, Justice and Peace*. This relates directly generally to situations in Africa, and the Nigerian context in particular. Ishola (2014) underscores the fact that the contributors identified scriptural and theological bases for justice and peace and decried the unbridled injustice and corruption in the society and underscore the responsibilities of the Church in curbing the menace. The role of the Church in developing her members, political leaders and children as agents of peace and justice, was also highlighted. The articles bear potentials for constructive impact with regards to advance of good governance, peace and equity in Africa, and the world at large.

It is noteworthy that 20 volumes of OJOT published between 2004 and 2014 are reviewed in this paper. The total number of articles is 220. Out of these, 108 articles (representing 49 percent) were contributed by faculty, postgraduate students and academic staff of affiliated institutions of the NBTS. 66 articles came from scholars in other institutions in Nigeria. This amounts to 30 percent of the articles under review. There were 24 articles from distinguished scholars from other institutions in Africa while international scholars of repute outside Africa contributed 20 articles within the period. These represent approximately 11 percent and 10 percent respectively. This 21 percent international contribution also attests to the international acceptance/recognition of OJOT.

III. Impact of OJOT on Developmental Efforts in Africa and Beyond

The contributions of OJOT to developmental works are noticeable

both in the Christian community and larger societal settings. Its impact is being felt in the immediate intellectual community of theological institutions, both nationally and internationally. It helps in furthering the mission activities of the parent denomination, and in contributing to the extension of knowledge in Nigeria, the West African sub-region, Africa and beyond. The journal currently enjoys global recognition through indexing in ATLA.

In the intellectual community, OJOT has vastly contributed to the sharpening of the academic and writing skills of members of staff of the NBTSO. Similarly, it affords graduate students opportunity of engaging the ongoing paradigm shift in missions and theological education. Furthermore, the annual International Theological Education Conference papers eventually furnish majority of published articles. The conference has matured into an international platform for scholars of diverse racial, academic and denominational backgrounds to meet and cross-fertilize ideas and opinions. This has continued to markedly impact the intellectual capacity-building of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, the academic staff, and the post-graduate school. OJOT publications have somewhat become primary resource material for students and scholars alike researching in different fields of theological and missiological studies.

The commitment of the publishers of OJOT to sound theological education, nurturing of academic ideas and promotion of scholarly contributions to current and global issues is evident in the perennially relevant themes featured. Over the years, themes such as nation building, globalization, poverty, tackling societal ills, healing and health, scripture and culture, as well as peace and justice, have proven pertinent for all time.

OJOT publications have not only enriched the library of NBTSO and its affiliated institutions but have been invaluable resources for researchers in other theological institutions and universities. This may not be unconnected to the contributions of professors from renowned universities like the University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. These include Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, Joseph Kenny (now late), Matthews A. Ojo, Femi Adedeji and Chris Manus. Occasionally, some articles are co-authored to provide robust explanation of concepts. This helps contributors to develop skills in academic writing and foster team spirit for collaborative work.

Furthermore, OJOT has had substantial impact on the furtherance of the mission enterprise of the parent denomination, the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Quite a number of the editions were dedicated to mission enterprise and African Initiated Churches. There were articles on the Great Commission, mission of the Church, and such related issues. These include *A Theological Concept of Poverty and Prospect of Mission in Africa*, *Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions*, *Pentecostalism and Cross-cultural Mission in the 21st Century Nigeria*, and *Christian Mission and Nation Building: The Nigerian Experience*. The prospects, strategies and challenges of missions discussed in some of the editions are helpful in preparing Baptist pastors-in-training for life and ministry in both local and global contexts. They also advance the mission activities and efforts of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Notable among such contributions is the Vajko's Church planting principles (in addition to recommendations by other contributors), which many Baptist congregations currently employ.

In the West African sub-region and beyond, the impact of OJOT

is discernible mainly in the light of the themes the journal has featured. For instance, the 2011 theme, *Spirituality: Themes and the Church in Africa*, addressed critical issues relating to spirituality and its impact on the Church in the African continent. In this issue, scholars across the globe, (Asia, Europe, America and Africa) deliberated variously on the different and multiple impact of spirituality on the Church in their localities and continents.

Additionally, the impact of OJOT is not limited to the African continent. Its global impact is underscored by its listing as a full-text journal included in the American Theological Library Association's (ATLA) Religion Database. This listing alongside other reputable and renowned scholarly journals in the ATLA Serials is a testimony to its unique impact on global scholarship. Wildcat database listing shows that 182 libraries around the world list OJOT as a resource material. Such libraries include Vanderbilt University, Christian Brothers University, Rhodes College, Union University and Samford University in different locations of the United States. Ebscohost, an electronic journal discovery service, provides the links to some editions of OJOT and articles in its academic database –as highlighted above.

IV. Appraisal and Prospects of OJOT

Ogbomoso Journal of Theology is an indigenous-scholarly journal with significant missiological flavour and focus. Its objective would appear similar to that of the foremost missiological journal, *International Review of Mission*, which “has sought to advance learning about mission strategy, methods of evangelization and mission theology.” OJOT also seems to approximate the objectives and expectations of academic/scholarly journals which incorporate methodology, analysis, history and research in their lengthy articles. The array of contributors includes professors, scholars

and researchers who employ specialised technical and academic language to interface other professionals in their related fields of discourse.

References of sources consulted by OJOT contributors are presented using endnotes, bibliographical and parenthetical citations. The purpose of academic/scholarly journal is to inform, report and make available findings from original research, which would later be subjected to peer-review for approval and improvement before they are published for the scholarly informed audience. This is also reflected in OJOT albeit with emphasis on the African context, identifying its indigenous nature.

Moreover, while the primary aims of OJOT were initially provincial and restricted, current issues have appreciably transcended the early intents. A critical reflection on the logo of the journal would reveal that it portrays a wide-ranging purpose. Consequently, the primary aims are being reworked to reflect present status of OJOT, especially in view of the symbolic construal of the logo. The journal is no longer just for the alumni of the Seminary or other theological institutions. It is now available in several libraries of leading universities in Nigeria.

One of the deficits of OJOT, which NBTSOO is currently addressing, is its non-availability on any online platform. Though listed in several libraries' catalogues, it is not yet available in downloadable format on the internet. This has limited its circulation and accessibility as people in other climes cannot yet access it directly online from the comfort of their homes, studies or classrooms. In this regards, the plan to make pdf and

electronic copies of the journal available on seminary website

(www.nbts.edu.ng) is at advance stage. Hopefully, this will be realised in the next few months.

Also, whereas the journal had an all-green cover page from inception till 2010, beginning with the 2011 edition, there have been colour mixes. Different shades of colours have been introduced, apparently for purposes of appeal. Yet, each edition has retained the green colour with minimal transformation. Since the cover colour of a journal is one of its trademarks, OJOT hopes to retain the green colour, especially because it is often construed as life, and knowledge is life-giving. Efforts are also being made to sustain a definite colour blend with each colour adequately depicting definite aspects of the objectives of the journal.

V. Conclusion

OJOT, as a periodical, started as an indigenous journal for the purpose of academic study and theological education. It has however metamorphosed into a standard academic/scholarly journal with missiological flavour. It is unique in its focus on issues that impact developmental tasks in Africa and beyond. These include poverty alleviation, holistic healing and health awareness, and prevention or reduction of societal ills. Its accent on the Great Commission makes it a missiological journal, focusing not only on theory but also on practical/proactive dimensions of Christian mission. Its transcontinental network covers seminaries, departments of religious studies in universities within Africa and beyond. The impact of OJOT on developmental works through theological education and scholarly contribution are progressively evolving.

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