

“Moving towards Maturity in the Body of Christ”

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGIES
FOR AFRICA

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to address the topic, “Effective Discipleship Strategies for Africa” in relation to the Theme: “Moving towards Maturity in the Body of Christ”. The emphasis on this material is on the maturity of the Church rather than the individual members, though the two are thinly separable. It is crystal truth that one cannot talk about discipleship without the Church.

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Therefore we need to know what the Church, Discipleship and Effective Discipleship are.

THE CHURCH: The Church is simply the people that have committed their whole life to follow the way of Jesus Christ.

DISCIPLESHIP: The term discipleship refers to the process of making someone (follower) synonymous to the discipler.

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP: It is a perpetual process to make a disciple an excellent outcome. This involves transforming the whole individual including his environment (Culture).

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What has affected Discipleship in Africa today?

- **Nominalism**-Many church members live relatively nominal (So-called) Christian life when compared to the nature of the Christian life and discipleship described by Jesus in the gospels of the New Testament.
- **The influence of Charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity**- Evangelical Christianity is slowly being carried away by the sparkling and emotional Charismatic/ Pentecostal worship forms (miracles, prophecy, prosperity, signs and wonders, projecting prompt answers to all of life problems in society .
- **Persistent poverty**- This does not need to be over-emphasized. Poverty constantly influences church members, especially young Christians to believe that their wellbeing could as well be addressed alternatively by hard work, cultism and the like.
- **Religious Syncretism** - The church is gradually becoming a “folk” , an ordinary group whose members and society are virtually synonymous.
- **Socio-Political Instability**- Wars, Natural disasters, civil unrests and other factors have all at one point in time or another disturbed the church’s programmes of discipleship.
- **Assertive Leadership/None spirit-field leadership**. To a large extent, the contemporary leadership of the church has developed self-confidence so much that it is more political in behavior than being a model of shepherd.

Struggling with the influence of secularism

The emerging secularization thesis arising from the African continent itself (Bosco Bangura, 2013)

Whereas Christians and others in the West tell stories of how secularization has affected Christianity and the church, there is currently very little “secularization discourse” happening in Africa, and we are not aware of dominant “secularization stories” that need to be critically analyzed. (Benno Van den Torren, 2015:152)

- (a) Secularization by its nature mounts up political authority and diminishes religious participation of individuals and communities;
- (b) secularization is seen as the factor for the withdrawal of different aspects of life and society from the influence of religion;
- (c) secularization influences the change of ones religious life to a personal choice and commitment

What Then for revigourating discipleship strategies

1. Revisiting the Biblical Mandate for Discipleship
2. Evaluating past and contemporary denominational disciple making strategies
3. Comparing and contrasting these strategies
4. Creating a blue print from the process of 3 above
5. Testing the blue print
6. Re-envisioning Theological education as a tool for disseminating the strategies
7. Launching the project

Biblical Witness to Discipleship (revisiting the Biblical Mandate)

- According to the biblical witness, many who joined this growing faith community made a significant re-orientation of priorities and commitments. They turned from their real and imagined needs to discerning what God was calling them to do and trusting that in the process God will meet their needs (Acts 2:42-47)
- Discipleship as a whole is a concept of action, of doing something that is theologically rich and profound—in order to find its effect and purpose. Discipleship cannot simply be reduced to a set of tasks such as read your Bible, pray, and, if you are really serious, fast. It certainly includes these things; but the issue of spiritual discipline is not to be equated with the concept of discipleship.

The Jesus Model as presented by William Law (2005)

- Discipleship must be a theological concept in order to sustain the transformative call of Jesus Christ. In essence discipleship means -to take up our daily cross, to deny ourselves, to profess the blessedness of mourning, to seek the blessedness of poverty of spirit; to forsake the pride and vanity of riches, to take no thought for the morrow, to live in the profoundest state of humility, to rejoice in worldly sufferings. To reject the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; to bear injustices, to forgive and bless our enemies, and to love mankind as God loves them... give up our whole hearts and affections to God, and strive to enter through the straight gate into a life of eternal glory

The Biblical accounts characterize an expectation of radical change

- Several of the disciples are reported as having left everything to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11, John 1:35-42)
- When some potential followers said they would like to follow Jesus but first they had to take care of other important business, including one potential follower who said to bury his father before he could join, Jesus told them, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

Looking back (evaluating past and present Strategies) Questions requiring answers

1. Did the Missionary Model work for evangelical Christianity?
2. How far has autonomy work well for the discipleship agenda in African churches?
3. Quantity or quality for the African Church?
4. Urban versus the rural church; is there any difference?
5. How far has the social gospel been successful as a discipleship strategy?
6. Can discipleship be taught in a curriculum?
7. How can we avoid stereotypes?
8. Quoting Van Den Torren (2015), Can we compare some existing discipleship programs in terms of their biblical faithfulness, contextual relevance, and general effectiveness?

STRATEGY

- Making plans, setting goals, reviewing progress

AND

- **Serendipity**-Allowing room for the unexpected (the Holy Spirit?)

What Effective discipleship strategies for the Contemporary African church

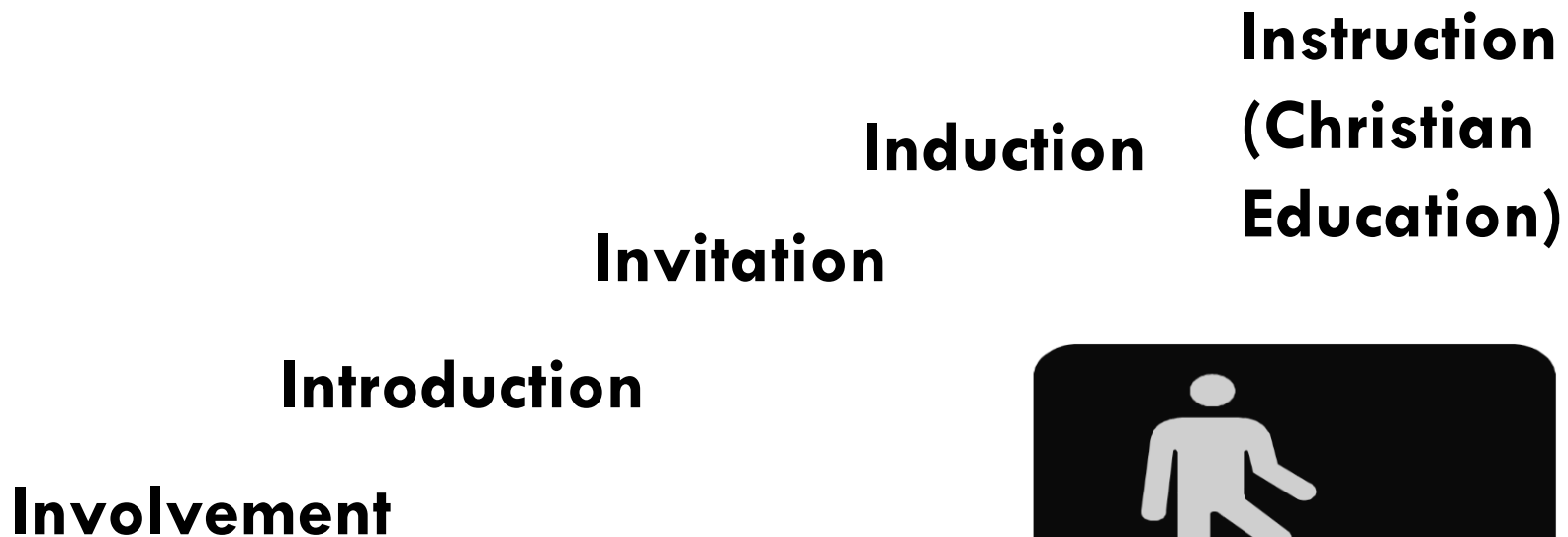
1. **Breeding Transformed Leadership** – Transformational leadership through devoted mentoring measures. The Disciple and the Discipler intimate relationship, open to each other. Breeding transformational leadership may also mean transforming the individuals and his cultural structures (e.g. “Ghettos” to home cells or learning institutions. Shrine or secret society forests to social amenities like school, market, hospital, lorry park etc.
2. **Effective Scripture Use** – Translated scriptures be taken to their respective tribes/ languages/ (communities).
3. **Early Age Engagement** – parents, pastors, counsellors teachers, etc. must capture the kids with the Scripture at early age through camps, story telling, Drama, etc

Strategies continue

4. **Numbers Matter** – The ratio of pastor to the entire church membership must be revisited. Too many people under one discipler may not prove to be effective. Separating the administration of the church apart from its spiritual needs may be an effective strategy (Acts.6:1 ff.)
5. **Appropriate Steps in Discipleship** – Leading potential believers to Christ first before discipling commences.
6. **People and not Program Orientedness** – The African church is too much engaged in programmes most of which are fund raising and focus less on people who must become disciples of the Lord. This mean brain storming on other means of fund raising at the expense of the people.
7. **Self Reproduction** – Disciple makers should consistently follow up their disciples until they are synonymous to each other. The disciples of Jesus were called Christians at Antioch because they resembled Christ.
8. **Reconstruct Administrative structures** - separating members into their respective classes and pastors, Illiterates, literates, children, the old.
9. **Discipleship curriculum** – **Discipleship curriculum be included in learning institution such as Tech-voc, school, College and University**
10. Revisit the Social Gospel Stragy- Work on the defects of the Social Gospel Strategy.



Five steps to faith offered by the church...



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- - ▣ Faithfully Presented by,
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