

Strategic Planning and Christian Mission in the Postmodern World

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DOI: 10.56201/ijrcp.v8.no3.2023.pg22.31

Abstract

Postmodernism is a worldview culture entering the society lately. It provides the impression of values such as spirituality, pluralism, relativism, and altruism, which causes significant shifts. It consists of the decline in religious spirituality, disorientation from pluralism, the power to provide information through visuals due to blurred reality and imagination, the emptiness at the core of culture, and a shift in power to a newer state. The Church needs to capture and understand how Culture works. It required reaching a cultural paradigm with the gospel message as well as challenges presently faced by the Church through thorough and exhaustive strategic planning. The paper concluded by recommending that the Church should be unafraid to make truth claims, even when those claims may offend a pluralistic, relativistic culture.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, Strategic Planning, Christian Mission, Culture*

Introduction

The world has continuously experienced the ongoing process of change, which is always preceded and guided by science, also known as the human cognitive domain. It is sourced in the realm of cognitive change, which is preceded by affection to form skills in the form of social attitudes in human culture. Therefore, the cognitive paradigm shift simultaneously gives birth to a significant change in other domains, which forms a new culture called the postmodern era. The main ideas of postmodernism are clashes, with the rare acceptance and rejection of modifications. Therefore, the church as a community needs to possess sufficient theological and intellectual enlightenment to reposition its mission tailored to meet the current century. There are various positive attributes in the concept of postmodernism, which is closely related to productive, creative, and Christian Culture on fundamental issues.

The beginning of Christianity was the beginning of missionary work. In the command of Christ, “Go ye into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” we have the origin of Christian missions, the scope of Christian missions, and the obligation of Christian missions, imposed on every person who has heard of Christ to disseminate his gospel. The word ‘mission’ is derived from one which means “to send”, and signifies that the thing or person sent has a message to proclaim or a work to perform; and by Christian missions we understand that, as the Father hath sent Christ to save the world, even so Christ sends his believers to fulfill his command, that the will of the Father may be accomplished. However, this is not going to happen on a platter of gold. It is a clarion call for the church to rise to the occasion through intentional and strategic *modus operandi*.

CLARIFYING TERMS

Before discussing the focus of this paper, certain terms need to be clarified for proper understanding. The basic terms that need proper clarification are Christian, Mission, Post-modern, World and strategic planning.

CHRISTIAN: is one who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ (Merriam Webster, 2023)

MISSION: mission properly so called consists in bringing a non-Christian to the faith or in marking some non-Christian reality with the stamp of the Gospel. It is the activity of God’s people, the church, to proclaim and to demonstrate the kingdom of God to the world. The word mission comes from the Latin word *mittere* meaning to send.

POST-MODERN: Coming after and usually in reaction to, modernism in the 20th century, especially in the arts and literature; specifically of or relating to a diffuse cultural and artistic trend or movement (Collins Dictionary, 2023).

WORLD: is the earth, with all its countries, peoples and natural features (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 7th Edition).

STRATEGIC PLANNING: it is a responsive, long-term policy tool based on benchmarks, capabilities, and needs (Muchiri et al.,2022).

Overview of Strategic Planning

The concept of strategy is randomly used in management or administration, from a precisely formulated course of action, positioning in a particular environment, through to the entire personality, the soul, and the existential rationale behind the existence of an organization. It is a concept of ten put forward in the organization as well as business worlds, which in some aspects is complementary while different in others (Ninja, 2022). However, it is a term that causes widespread discussions, especially among theorists, but for this study, the following definitions would be considered:

A notable administrator opined that strategy as what matters for the effectiveness of the organization; from the external point of view, it stresses the relevance of the objectives against the environment and from internal, and it balances the communication between members of the organization and a willingness to contribute towards actions for the achievement of common objectives (Pavlatos & Kostakis, 2021). However, thirty years later, in the same vein, some scholars expressed strategy as a pattern of objectives, purposes, or goals and significant policies

and plans for achieving organization's stated goals (Hiltibran, 2020). Meanwhile, thirty years after, an expert opined that strategy is the theory of the firm on how to compete successfully; in other words, strategy is considered as a factor influencing a successful and satisfactory performance (Pulubuhu et al., 2022).

Invariably, the researcher believes that strategy in an organization such as mission organization is the management or administration's blueprints that guiding the organizational procedures or activities towards satisfactory behavioral performance amongst the mission coordinators and Missionaries in achieving the organization long or short-term goals and objectives. However, every strategy in an organizational way has an appreciable procedure for working out this management or administration's blueprint from one stage to the other within the organization to achieve objectives, leading to exploring strategic planning.

There is always a substantial effort to work out a sensible way to get from one stage to the next in every organizational activity (Gossel, 2022). It informs no standard agreed-upon definition of strategic planning. Though, a management consultant views strategic planning as a process of entrepreneurial and methodical decision making with the full knowledge possible of the future and the assessment of results to targets in a cybernetic feedback process (Fauzi et al., 2021), while another author noted that it is a responsive, long-term policy tool based on benchmarks, capabilities, and needs (Muchiri et al., 2022). The strategic planning refers to as an organizational management activity that prioritizes, focuses energy and resources, strengthens operations, ensures employees and other stakeholders' commitment toward common goals, establishes agreement around intended outcomes, and assess as well as adjusting the organization's direction in response to a changing environment (Franz et al., 2021).

Also, a scholar encourages a need for strategic planning to provide for contingency planning, that will afford the organization with "an explicit self-concept, specific goals, and guidance and consistency in decision making with this rapidly changing technology, increasing competition, and a shortage of well-prepared professionals in the society, It will help leaders understand the present and think about the future, recognizing the signals of the pending change. It will improve vertical and horizontal communication and encourages innovation and change (Vasconcelos, 2022). An author also posits that it will secure the future; provide a roadmap, direction, and focus; set priorities; allocate resources; establish measures; gather impact and ideas; generate commitment; and coordinate actions (Tsui, 2021). Also, a scholar adds that it will increase flexibility, simplify planning by removing specific options, and retain its relevance in good and bad times (Nguyen, 2022). Strategic planning also provides a forum for organization-wide conversations about important decisions (Madanaguli et al., 2022).

The researcher believes that strategic planning is a controlled effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that figure out and guide the organization; it spells out the organization core values, motivations, and benefits to its constituency, focusing on the future. Invariably, effective strategic planning articulates an organization's destination, actions that inform its progress, and the blueprint for success.

Overview of Christian Missions

How do we define mission? A Missiologist once said during an informal discussion in Princeton, “Christian mission is the church crossing frontiers. There must be some crossing of barriers—whether they are linguistic, economic, cultural, or religious—and there must be some communication of the message of Christ” (Bosch, 1991). Like Bosch, it has already been noted that mission involves both sending and the crossing of boundaries of faith or belief, but can we be more specific? Missiologists in recent years have given greater definition to mission, drawing on theological reflection, biblical studies, and the church’s engagement in mission. Before offering my own definition, then, it will be helpful to lay out some of the definitions that are currently being used by major missiologists. A Missionary puts forward his own series of approximations on mission before his in-depth biblical, historical, and theological study of the *missio Dei*. At the end of his book, he says much more directly:

In our mission, we proclaim the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, present among us in the Spirit and taking us into his future as “captives in triumphal procession.” . . . Mission is quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world (Bosch, 1991).

A Theologian, in his book, *What Is Mission?* begins with a definition not of mission but of a related concept, theology of mission:

The theology of mission is a disciplined study which deals with questions that arise when people of faith seek to understand and fulfill God’s purposes in the world, as these are demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a critical reflection on attitudes and actions adopted by Christians in pursuit of the missionary mandate. Its task is to validate, correct, and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission (Kirk, 1998).

In a similar fashion, a Nigerian Roman Catholic, includes numerous dimensions in his definition of worship. He writes of mission as conversion, church planting, inculturation, dialogue, service of God’s reign, ecumenical dialogue, and contextual theologies. In his conclusion, he focuses upon three themes that are central to a definition of Christian mission: proclamation, evangelization, and contextual theologies. He sees these three elements as working together with the clear goal of Christian mission being “evangelization and church formation” (Oborji, 2006). Bevan and Schroeder (2004) commented that “mission takes the church beyond itself into history, into culture, into people’s lives, beckoning it constantly to ‘cross frontiers.’” Regarding the goal of mission, they note that the goal is not the expansion of the church for its own sake, but that people are invited into the church so that they can join a community dedicated to preaching, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign (Bevan & Schroeder, 2004). At the end of their volume, they conclude: “There is one mission: the mission of God that is shared, by God’s grace, by the church. It has two directions, to the church itself (*ad intra*) and to the world (*ad extra*). Mission has a basic three-fold office of word (*kerygma* or proclamation), action (*diakonia* or service), and being (*koinōnia* or *martyria*—community or witness/martyr) (Bevan & Schroeder, 2004).

Doing Mission in a Postmodern World Through Strategic Planning

The Church, as established in the New Testament, has endured thousands of years of upheaval and controversy. From its beginnings, when believers were charged with atheism, savagery, and even cannibalism, to modern accusations of being unintelligent, hostile to change, and superstitious, the Church has been no stranger to controversy. One needs only to look at the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Protestant reformation, and various “Great Awakenings” to see that centuries of conflict have brought the Church to its current position in the world. As an institution, the Church has always held a prominent position in the world and the affairs of men. Even in the Church’s infancy, the Roman world recognized that it had “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Those words, penned early in the first century, have described the Church’s actions for the better part of two thousand years. For better or for worse, the Church has turned the world upside down (Bob, 2021).

As the Church moves into its third millennium, one must understand the scale and the length of the Church’s existence; it has outlasted governments, nations, even entire empires. It has seen the rise and fall of tyrants and kings, and has even participated in many of those very events. At its best, the Church has been a force for good in the world, exercising a profound moral influence over human society. At its worst, the Church has participated in bloodbaths, perpetrated by fallen men who believed they were acting on the words of Christ. Throughout history, the Church has been described in many ways, by many people. However, of all the words, both positive and negative, that could be used to describe the Church, one would be hard pressed to acceptably use the term *irrelevant*. Regardless of one’s opinion of the Church’s actions throughout history, one must concede that Christ’s Church has indeed “turned the world upside down”, as quoted in Acts 17:6 (NASB) (Dwight, 2009).

In the twenty first century, the Church seems to be destined for obscurity and irrelevance. A rapid decline in membership and attendance, as well as the exodus of so many young adults would seem to indicate that the Church has lost its cultural influence. Whereas once the Church was positioned to change the world with the gospel, the Church now seems to occupy the position of a dying social institution. If the Church is dying, one must seek a cause of death. One must seek a reason as to why the Church is hemorrhaging members, leaders, and cultural influence. A number of problems face the modern, western Church, including loss of faith in the Church as an institution, the growing influence of liberal theology and mainline denominations, the cultural shift to postmodern philosophical and religious views, and the rejection of absolute propositional truth. In response to these problems, many scholars, authors, and Church leaders have proposed and sought to enact strategies that demonstrate that the Church is relevant and that its message is true.

Based on the belief that culture has entered a postmodern era, many Churches and religious movements have sought to “post-modernize” the Church (Dwight, 2009). One needs to look no further than the movement known as the ‘emergent Church’ to see an example of the Church seeking to actively engage culture in the wake of a cultural shift toward postmodernism. This “emergent” movement has much to offer the Church as a whole, including an attempt at revitalizing the Church through various means. However, as the Church seeks to engage a postmodern world, it must exercise care to preserve the truth of the Gospel while altering methods of ministry, evangelism, and community.

The church must be careful not to move into syncretism. Syncretism occurs when Christian leaders adapt, either consciously or unconsciously, to the prevailing worldviews of their culture. It is the reshaping of Christian beliefs, and practices through cultural accommodation so that they reflect those of the dominant culture. Thus, syncretism is the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness and speaks with a voice which reflects its culture. According to a church historian, frequently syncretism is birthed from a yearning to make the gospel appear relevant. The church attempts to make its message attractive to outsiders and as these adaptations become regularly assimilated, they become an integral part of the church's life. When significant changes in worldview take place within culture, the church then struggles to separate the terrestrial from the celestial. The Christian community, swept along by the ebb and flow of cultural currents, begins to lose her moorings. So, syncretism takes place when the church opts into the prevailing cultural assumptions of society (Anderson, 1998).

Postmodernism has brought about a fundamental change in culture; a fundamental change in culture necessitates fundamental changes in the way the Church engages culture. While postmodernism espouses many ideas that are directly contrary to Christianity, some of its ideas are more compatible with Christ's teachings than the teachings of modernism ever could have been. In engaging postmodernism, the Church must balance its duty to preserve the integrity of the gospel with its responsibility to reach the world with the gospel. The Church has not been exempted from the gradual cultural shift to postmodernism. The Church has addressed these cultural changes in a number of ways, some of which have already been discussed. Doubtless, many believing Christians have chosen to reject all of postmodernism as a theological and philosophical aberration. They have rightly acknowledged that postmodernism's rejection of transcendent, absolute truth is incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. However, in obeying the Great Commission, the Church must prepare itself to minister in changing cultural contexts, including the context of postmodernism. To that end, some Church leaders, authors, and ministries have sought to "become all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19, NIV) in order to effectively communicate the gospel to postmodern hearers (Aylesworth & Zalta, 2015).

Postmodernism offers an opportunity for the Church and the new evangelization insofar as it represents a transition from the anti-traditional, anti-religious sentiments of the modern project. At the same time, it presents a challenge insofar as the decline of narrative and the proliferation of language games tend towards an implicit nihilism and relativism. Nevertheless, the destabilizing effect of postmodernism on the presuppositions of science and technology makes the postmodern man and woman more receptive to the possibility of the existence of knowledge beyond the scientific method and mere syllogistic reasoning. Finally, it presents an opening through which the Church may emphasize the role of beauty as an unmediated encounter with the truth that transcends the rational demands of the modern project.

We live in a postmodern society where the very concept of objective, absolute truth is perceived not just as antiquated but absurd. Epistemological and ethical fragmentation has led to moral relativism. The search for an apologetic strategy in postmodern society is a formidable challenge for the Christian church. In the postmodern world, reality has been dismembered, meanings have been wrenched out of logical contexts and life has become idiosyncratic. The postmodern mind has a predisposed antipathy to preaching because it understands it to be

authoritarian, absolutist and oppressive. Logic, reason, sequential thought and rules of contradiction are abandoned. It is not difficult to recognize several threats to Christianity in the tenets of postmodernism. The anti-historical nature of postmodernism makes the facts of Scripture quaint, cultural period pieces irrelevant to contemporary life and the traditions of the faith mere tools for shoving a religion down people's throats. Pluralism becomes universalism in a religious context, reducing Christianity to just one of many paths to an ultimate reality that may or may not be.

The denial of objective knowledge and absolute truth makes "doctrine" a dirty word and reduces "faith" to a psychological search followed by an intuitive leap. Deconstruction is several more steps down the path paved by historical criticism and trod by the Jesus Seminar, the path away from taking Scripture seriously, on its own terms. Scholars use the term "meta-narrative" for an overarching story that explains life. The Bible is such a meta-narrative, from creation to the fall, to God's interventions in word and deed in the life of his people, to the incarnation that accomplishes our salvation, and to the culminating event that will be Christ's return. Postmodernism denies this and any meta-narrative claiming to make sense out of life (Carson, 2005).

Against this backdrop, the church must recognize the opportunity for witness that exists in a culture devoid of hope and meaning for life. She must appreciate the opportunity to retell the story-line of Scripture for a society that no longer knows the biblical meta-narrative and has been told there is no such account that makes sense of life. The church must be intentional about missions through strategic planning, retelling the Christian story that offers them a place of belonging, a place for involvement, a place where their lives can be used in service of a purpose that is larger than themselves." HOPE, LOVE, and MEANING are big Christian words that describe equally big avenues to a postmodern generation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Church should be unafraid to make truth claims, even when those claims may offend a pluralistic, relativistic culture. The Church in her evangelistic pursuit, often, seems to equivocate on certain claims of Christianity when they come into conflict with prevailing worldviews. In so doing, they risk simply replacing modernist influences with postmodern sensibilities, rather than simply letting Christianity stand on its own as it did in the early days of the Church. An understanding of the Emergent Church phenomenon should be tempered with the understanding that Emergent authors write from a postmodern perspective and may therefore often hold ideas which are more influenced by the postmodern culture around them than they are by the Bible. In evaluating the postmodern trend and the implications on Christian missions, Christians should exercise discernment in which ideas they accept and which they reject. If no discernment and strategic planning are practiced, the Church will not end up any better; rather it will simply trade one worldly influence for another which will negatively impact the church pursuit of the Great Commission.

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