

## Academic Engagement of Yoruba Oral Pentecostal Christology and Its Implications for Academic Theologians

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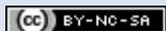
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### ABSTRACT

Yoruba academic theologians, by not fully maximising oral theology, deprive themselves the immense opportunity to positively influence the theology of fellow Christians who are mostly not interested in their academic writings. This negatively affects these theologians' effectiveness and the spiritual vitality of the church. The researcher considers the engagement of Yoruba oral Pentecostal Christology in academic publications as evidence of the importance of oral theology for Yorubas and thus seeks to motivate Yoruba academic theologians to utilise orality to theologise others. The researcher primarily utilised a desk-based approach for this study and secondarily employs an online survey to collect data for a few sections of this study. The study highlighted the prominent position occupied by Yoruba Christians, academic theological institutions situated in Yorubaland, and Yoruba academic theologians, in the grand scheme of Nigerian Christianity, and argued that Yoruba academic theologians have a role to play in oral theologising of their people beyond the four walls of their classrooms. This position is undergirded by the effectiveness of oral theology in their context and their access to ministry among the lay people. This paper argued that when Yoruba academic theologians engage Yoruba Christians orally and not just restrict themselves to academic writings and contexts, the Christian faith will be better for it. It justified the need for Yoruba academic theologians to not restrict themselves to academic publications but rather involve themselves more in oral theologising of Yorubas and demonstrated how they can go about this oral theologising.

**Keywords:** *Christology, Christianity, Africa(n), Yoruba, Pentecostal(ism)*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Christology is the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ and his significance for doctrine and life (Bediako 2005, 1; also Ames 1983, 1; Vanhoozer 2015, 11; Gener 2015, 77), while orality refers to “the preferred use of spoken or sung words to convey and receive information, including the extra-verbal performative aspects of gesture, movement, and facial expression” (Fubara-Manuel and Fretheim 2023, 3). Human beings, all over the world, are said to be storytelling animals whose need for telling stories, whether through writings, speeches, images, actions, symbols, or any other sign system, is core to their existence. In the past, oral communication was “the most legitimate form of communication” until print media overtook it as the conventional source of truth (Kanyoro 2002, 11). Even in the modern world, most humans (above 80%), irrespective of their level of literacy, prefer oral communication because it gives them greater ease and connection (Lausanne Movement 2025). This attests to the pervasiveness and primacy of oral communication in our world.

In Yorubaland, and most African societies, Christology (and theology in general) is mostly done orally through sermons, Sunday school, and Bible study classes, songs, hymns, drama, poetry, and other verbal, spontaneous presentations. This is because Yoruba, just like most African societies, is an oral-based society where oral communication is a key medium of conveying ideas (see Boaheng 2024, 23–24). Therefore, orality is and will continue to be a key factor in the formulation and articulation of Christian theology in Africa and among Yorubas. However, the evolution in what is considered as a valid source of information in today’s world, unfortunately, marginalises a great number of oral interlocutors, especially those who cannot write (Kanyoro 2002, 11). This unfair marginalisation is reversed by African contextual theology as it incorporates oral theology in its academic Christological discourses (as in Bediako 1993; 2004, 9–14; Schreiter, ed. 2005; Ezigbo 2008; 2010; 2015; Boaheng 2024), of which Yoruba oral Christology is not left out (see Dada 2003; Babalola 2019; Kwiyani and Ola 2021).

However, there is a lesser oral theologising of Yoruba Christians by Yoruba theological educators (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>), probably because these theological educators do not see the potential of oral theologising. This paper, therefore, makes the incorporation of Yoruba oral Pentecostal Christology in academic theological discourses as a basis for Yoruba academic theologians to engage in oral vernacular theologising of their tribesmen and women, both home and in diaspora. Yoruba academic theologians need to engage more in oral vernacular theologising because of the significant position they occupy when it comes to theologising in the country and beyond, as will be demonstrated in this study. This study thus argues that Yoruba theological educators should be more intentional in orally theologising ordinary Christian<sup>1</sup> (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>) with whom they regularly interface, especially in local churches where they worship together.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

This paper combines empirical and non-empirical research approaches. The non-empirical component includes a historical-critical discussion of oral theology among Yoruba Christians, in light of the fact that orality is a non-negotiable reality for Yorubas and in academic theology. It also includes a historical analysis of the place of Yorubas in Nigerian Christianity and a theological appraisal of Yoruba Pentecostals’ Christology. The empirical component elicits information using two online questionnaires designed through Google Docs, one for Yoruba academic theologians and one for Yoruba Christians generally. The respondents, selected from Yorubas living in Yorubaland (southwestern part of Nigeria) include twenty-eight (28) academic theologians for the first online questionnaire and one hundred and six (106) Christians who are not academic theologians for the

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<sup>1</sup> This study uses the term “ordinary Christians”, borrowing from Christie’s (2005; 2012) nomenclature, to refer to such Christians, irrespective of their position in the church, who are not theologically trained and/or are not involved in academic theology.

second online questionnaire. Responses from both questionnaires are analysed using simple percentage and used to engage the arguments for utilising oral theology by Yoruba academic theologians.

### **3.0 THE ORALITY OF THE YORUBAS**

The African context, especially in its religious expressions, has a greater preference for oral communication (Finnegan 2012, 165). Similarly, orality is a core aspect of Yoruba culture and it had long served as a tool of education before the advent of writing materials (books and the likes), television, computers, internet, and other technological innovations, which are now used for communication. And, even in the face of these inventions, oral communication still continues to exert massive influence on the people. Gossips in the neighbourhood, physical and virtual chit-chats between relatives and friends, discussions on radios and TVs, videos and audio-visual interactions on social media networks, live spaces on X (formerly twitter) and other such online platforms, remain consistent and popular means of communication in this age of civilisation. In fact, based on personal observations and interactions, most Yorubas prefer audio-visual communication to reading. Most young people spend more time watching videos and listening to songs than they spend reading. In fact, they prefer chatting through voice notes than texting (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AGgF12WR1>). The older ones also prefer listening to the news on the radio or TV to reading a newspaper or magazine. They also prefer watching videos to reading lengthy write-ups. While this is due to the level of literacy for some, many who do this are literate but they find oral communication more effective for them. This shows the significance of oral communication in today's world.

Spoken words in oral-based contexts, like Yoruba, are considered “an inherently powerful and efficacious event” that serves as a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds (Ong 2002, 32; Fubara-Manuel and Fretheim 2023, 4). This is evident in the traditional religious reliance on incantations, oaths, and fear of curses, which modernisation and civilisation have not obliterated. Not only that, many Yoruba Christians believe that incantations and curses can affect them (see Adeboye 2023, 93–130), underscoring the assumed potency of spoken words.

The belief in the potency of spoken words also manifests in how they recite Bible verses, especially the Psalms, during prayers for different purposes such as protection from malevolent attacks, dedication of persons/objects, and other requests from God. They also repeatedly call on Jesus' name (see Ayegboyin 2005b) when danger is imminent or something scary occurs. It is also evident in how they reject negative spoken words, reverse such words with positive spoken words, and verbally claim promises that are in the Bible, often irrespective of their contextual meanings. The popularity of “name-it-claim-it” theology, “decree and declare” prayer methodology, and repeating claims after the preacher, among Yoruba Christians lends credence to the importance Yorubas attach to spoken words.

### **4.0 THE SIGNIFICANT STATUS OF YORUBA PENTECOSTALISM IN NIGERIA**

At the risk of sounding ethnocentric, the researcher considers Yoruba Christianity as the “home” of Nigerian Christianity, the starting point of Christianity's enduring presence in the country after a failed attempt by Portuguese Catholic missionaries between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Galadima and Turaki 2001, 91–92; Ibrahim and Ehrhardt 2012, 4). It started with the Methodists coming in through Abeokuta, Ogun State, followed by the Anglicans who arrived in Lagos, and later the Baptists, among others, all of whom started their missionary and church planting activities in Yorubaland before going to other parts of the then Niger Area. Today, Yoruba Christians form a vibrant community of believers not only in Nigeria but also in modern sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, Yoruba Christians are among the most zealous Nigerians who propagate their faith to the farthest horizons they could reach since the days of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first black and African Bishop. The claim that Yoruba Christians are among the most zealous Nigerians when it comes to evangelism is confirmed by the past and present records of popular Yoruba preachers. To start with, the earliest missionary-established denominations like the Methodist Church Nigeria, Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), and Nigerian Baptist Convention, not only began in Yorubaland but also owe

their spread and vitality in their early years to the efforts of Yorubas to some extent. These churches, in their early days, had Yoruba Christians working assiduously as interpreters for the missionaries, local preachers and evangelists, church planters, and later as leaders occupying strategic positions.

Just as Nigerian Christianity has its home in Yorubaland, Nigerian Pentecostalism also finds its home in Yorubaland. Pentecostalism is a Christian movement that emphasises the Pentecost experience of Acts 2 and its impacts on the early church's ministry as a norm for Christian conversion experience, whereby Christians are spiritually empowered for life, ministry, and missions (Asamoah-Gyadu 2018, 626; Ayegboyin and Ishola 2013, 7). It emphasises the power, gifts, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit during corporate worship services (Anderson 1993, 26; Akhilomen 2004, 171). Though Pentecostals are traditionally grouped into three, namely the classical Pentecostals, the charismatics, and the neocharismatics, due to the differences in their emphases, composition, and denominational affiliations (Ma 2018, 624; Adeboye 2020, 119–121), they all emphasise the performing of miracles, signs and wonders just as it was in the New Testament church (cf. 1 Cor 12:12; Acts 3–16), as confirmation of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the church today (Wilson 1999, 110; cf. Öhlmann, Gräß, and Frost 2020, 7; Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 27). This emphasis, which makes Pentecostalism the fastest growing religious movement in the world (Anderson 2004, 1; Chitando and Biri 2016; Haynes 2015; Hollenweger 1997; van Wyk 2014; Gukurume 2018), has shifted the centre of Christianity from the western world to the southern hemisphere [Africa included] (Barrett and Johnson 2000; Martin 2002).

Pentecostalism easily finds a home in the Yoruba (and, by extension, African) worldview and cultural expressions so it is the most common and popular expression of the Christian faith in Yorubaland. Its approach to spirituality, view of the universe (as spiritually ordered), spontaneous mode of worship, and emphasis on a spiritual response to existential needs, makes it appealing to Yorubas (Galgalo 2015, 7). In fact, Pentecostalism in Nigeria, which in this study includes the African Initiated/Indigenous Churches (AICs), historically emerged from within Yorubaland through the *Aladura* (prayer group) and from there spread throughout Nigeria until the *Aladura* became a global Christian movement that it is now. Five of the seven major historical Christian leaders in Nigeria listed in Olupona's (2018, 593) encyclopaedia entry on Christianity in Nigeria are Yoruba Pentecostals.<sup>2</sup> While this may suggest some bias on the part of Olupona as a Yoruba man, it actually reveals the significant position Yoruba Pentecostals occupy in the history of Christianity in Nigeria. In the current Nigerian Christian landscape, there seems to be more Yoruba Pentecostals among the popular preachers than there are from other ethnic groups. In fact, most of the major denominations have their headquarters and/or campgrounds (or places of international meetings) situated in Yorubaland. All this is not to underrate or undercut the noble efforts of Christians from other Nigerian tribes; rather, it is to establish the dominant position Yoruba Christianity occupies in Nigerian Christianity.

Yoruba Pentecostalism is thus the mother of Nigerian Pentecostalism as seen in the fact that the majority of the popular indigenous Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria started in Yorubaland and/or by Yorubas. The global spread of the ministries and churches founded and led by Yoruba Pentecostals like Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Church of the Lord (*Aladura*), Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church (a.k.a., Winners' Chapel), Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, and Deeper Life Bible Church, among others that are less popular, attests to the significant status Yoruba Pentecostals occupy in the grand scheme of Nigerian Pentecostalism. Not only that, many of the popular Pentecostal preachers are

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<sup>2</sup> These leaders include: Moses Orimolade Tunolase of the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim; Joseph Babalola of the Christ Apostolic Church; Christiana Abiodun Emanuel of the Cherubim and Seraphim; Samuel J. Bilewu Oshoffa of the Celestial Church of Christ; Olumba Olumba Obu of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star; Cardinal Francis Arinze of the Roman Catholic Church; and, Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

Yorubas<sup>3</sup> and this is also true of gospel creatives. Yoruba Pentecostal Christians are duly represented in the Nigerian Christian music<sup>4</sup> and drama ministries<sup>5</sup> as popular faces and they have ministered in different countries in Africa and around the world. As of today, virtually all the non-Pentecostal mainline denominations (e.g., Baptist, ECWA, Anglican, and Catholic) in Yorubaland have incorporated Pentecostal praxis and methodology in order to retain their relevance. This shows the pervasive influence of indigenous Yoruba Pentecostalism and its latter modern offshoot that has also become a global phenomenon. All these put Yoruba Pentecostalism in a leading position within the context of Nigerian Pentecostalism. This highly placed status occupied by Yoruba Christians and Yoruba Pentecostalism proves the need for Yoruba theologians to engage their people, who are theologically unlearned (both clergy and laity), as this study posits.

## **5.0 ORAL THEOLOGY AS AN AFRICAN REALITY**

In his discussion on the types of theology in Africa, Mbiti (1979, 84) mentioned three types, namely: the written theology of theologians and literate Christians, the oral theology of non-literate Christians, and the symbolic theology expressed through arts and crafts. African oral theology, which is theology done through oral expressions like “songs, prayers, stories, and other oral forms” (Boaheng 2024, 24), shares some affinity with African narrative theology, a theological framework put forward by Healey and Syberts (Bongmba 2012, 247), in their book *Toward an African Narrative Theology* (Healey and Sybertz 1996), where they analysed African oral reflections such as songs, proverbs, maxims, riddles, stories, myths, and plays, and how they connect with biblical teachings on Christ, church, missions, hospitality, healing, and death and resurrection. While African narrative theology connects traditional African oral reflections with biblical teaching, African oral theology engages African oral reflections on biblical teachings.

Oral theology in Africa, as noted above, is expressed in sermons, teachings, prayers, songs, conversations and proverbs (Dada 2003, 260–261; Onaiyekan 1990, 102; Walls 2008, 192–193). These day-to-day theological formulations by ordinary Christians are given several tags such as grassroots<sup>6</sup>, oral<sup>7</sup>, and spontaneous<sup>8</sup> theology (Bediako 2004, 8; 1993). Oral theology thus constitutes “much of the theological activity in Christian Africa” emanating “from the living experiences of Christians” and expressed “in the open, from the pulpit, in the market-place, in the home as people pray or read and discuss the scriptures” (Mbiti 1986, 229; cf. Kwiyani and Ola 2021, 56). In other words, it “comes from where the faith lives, in the life-situation of the community of faith” so it “is an abiding element of all theology, and therefore, one that is essential for academic theology to be in touch with, to listen to, to share in, and to learn from, but never to replace” (Bediako 2004, 17; 1993). In fact, academic theology cannot replace oral theology; rather, they complement each other. This explains why Onaiyekan (1990, 102) advised theologians to listen to what [ordinary] Africans are saying about Christ in their songs, sermons, and proverbs. And, to their credit, African theologians keep doing this before and after Onaiyekan gave this advice. Therefore, African oral Christology refers to what Africans believe about Jesus Christ, his person and works, and express through their sermons, songs,

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<sup>3</sup> The likes of J. A. Babalola of Christ Apostolic Church, M. T. Orimolade of Cherubim and Seraphim Church, J. B. Oshoffa of Celestial Church of Christ, E. A. Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God, David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church, W. F. Kumuyi of Deeper Life Bible Church, and D. K. Olukoya of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, readily come to mind.

<sup>4</sup> ECWA Choir, C&S Movement Church Choir, CAC Good Women Choir, Yinka Ayefele, Dunsin Oyekan, Tope Alabi, Bola Are, Niyi Adedokun, Ojo Ade, J. A. Adelokun, Lara George, Bukola Akinade, are some noteworthy Yoruba Christian musicians.

<sup>5</sup> Here, Mike Bamiloje and his Mount Zion Film Ministries, and Sola Mike Agboola and his EVOM Drama Ministry, readily comes to mind.

<sup>6</sup> This is because it comes from and belongs to the grassroots (common, ordinary) section of the African theological community.

<sup>7</sup> This is because it is expressed through words of mouth rather than in written format(s).

<sup>8</sup> This is because it often happens at the spur-of-the-moment and is sometimes unstructured.

prayers, counsels, and statements. In the African context, oral Christology comprises the views of ordinary Christians about Christ so it is a contextual theology as it is the attempt of these African Christians to understand the Christian faith in terms of their context.<sup>9</sup>

## **6.0 THE ORAL CHRISTOLOGY OF YORUBA PENTECOSTALS**

Yoruba Pentecostals largely acquire their theology from what they hear (from preachers, in movies, on radio, in interpersonal interactions, and other oral conversations) than they acquire from written sources of theological information. Similarly, their Christology derives from oral elucidations provided via sermons, catechesis (Bible Study, Sunday School, and vernacular Bible School classes), songs, dramas and movies, prayers, and other such oral articulations of who Jesus is to them, what he does for them, and/or what he can/will do for them. The oral Christology of some Yoruba Pentecostals is seen in how they call on the name of Jesus (Christ) for a particular number of times before and/or while ending their prayers hoping that it makes their prayer more effective and that it makes God respond to their prayer speedily. This evokes the traditional religious invocation of a deity's name for a number of times in order to get the desired response. Yoruba Pentecostals' oral Christology is also evident in how they invoke Jesus's blood against malevolent forces that may hinder their total well-being (Ayeboyin 2005a, 50). The foregoing confirms that Yoruba Pentecostals, as Clarke (2005) says of AICs, have "an implicit and enacted Christology that draws upon the wellsprings of oral tradition," which makes it an oral Christology.<sup>10</sup>

Mbiti (1972, 54) notes that the most popular portrayal of Christ among ordinary Christians is *Christus victor*, deriving from Africans' intense mindfulness of spirits and powers in the world which can obstruct their total well-being and their great need for a powerful protector in such a world (Bediako 2004, 22; 1990; Agyarko 2017, 10, 26). Pentecostal theology also, generally, emphasises the *Christus victor* motif, whereby the Holy Spirit empowers people to live triumphantly over the various threats to their well-being, especially demonic attacks and health challenges (Ngong 2014, 16; Gener 2015, 76; Ma 2007). Unsurprisingly, Pentecostalism in Africa places greater emphasis on these existential salvific benefits in and through Jesus Christ, through healing and deliverance activities (Darko 2020, 190; Asamoah-Gyadu 2007). This is true of Yoruba Pentecostals as they confess their faith in Jesus's sovereign power and unparalleled mediation in their prayers to him, their songs to and about him, and their appellations of him (Ayeboyin 2005b, 17; Aigbadumah 2011).

Yoruba Pentecostals, in light of the traditional hierarchical view of spiritual powers, acknowledge the existence and existential influence of evil powers, but they believe that Jesus Christ is superior to all such powers. They thus think of Jesus as their mediator (*onilaja/oniduro*) with God, who thus guarantees their total well-being as their *onisegun/ohuwosan* (healer), *olugbeja* (defender), *olusegun/olubori* (conqueror), *oludande* (liberator/deliverer), *olugbala* (saviour), *olurapada* (redeemer), *olufihan* (revealer), among others (see Ayeboyin 2005b; Babalola 2019). All these descriptions of Jesus tally with what obtains in academic Christological discussions on who Jesus is to Africans, of whom Yorubas are a part, and they evince an emphasis on the *Christus victor* motif in their oral depictions of Jesus (Hood 1990, 38). These oral depictions of Jesus Christ as healer, king, priest-mediator, strong protector and deliverer, among others, are similar to what obtains in other African Pentecostal circles. Consequently, some theologians have utilised these oral depictions of Christ in their Christological engagements, seeking to portray Christ for Africans as sufficient to meet their existential needs and thus eschew syncretistic activities.

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<sup>9</sup> This is how Bevans (2002, 3) defines contextual theology. Not only Bevans believes that all theology is contextual so African contextual theology is a valid one (see also Oduyoye and Vroom, eds. 2003, 4).

<sup>10</sup> The prevalence of oral Christology, among Africans of whom Yorubas are a significant part, is confirmed by other theologians (cf. Brinkman 2009, xi; Stinton 2004, 108).

## **7.0 THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF YORUBA ORAL CHRISTOLOGY TO AFRICAN THEOLOGY**

Undeniably, oral Christology predates academic Christological discourses in Africa seeing that the latter only came into prominence in the eighties (Fick 2013, 329), so academic theological writings on the subject of Christology only comes behind to study oral Christology retrospectively and understand it (Mbiti 1986, 229). Like the African academic Christological discourses, African oral Christology expresses Africans' understanding of the relevance of Christ's person and work for them in their contexts in their vernacular (Abogunrin 2003a, 1; 2003b; Keck 1986, 362; Ukpong 1994, 41; Nwaoru 2003, 70; Nwigwe 2003, 215) This understanding influences their beliefs, worldview, and actions, as they seek to explore Christ's significance for all aspects of their life (Dada 2003, 259). However, unlike the African academic Christological discourses which remain largely circulated within the academic settings, African oral theology is and continues to be the "popular theology that takes root in the heart of the people of Africa and the "theology that truly counts" (Shaw, Tienou, and Ngewa, eds. 1998, 7). This is true of African oral Christology and shows the priority of oral Christology in the African context, which is naturally an oral-based society where the people live their lives based more on what they hear than what they read.<sup>11</sup> As a pastor and a seminary lecturer, the researcher has met many preachers whose doctrines and sermons derive primarily from what they have heard over the years (from other preachers or life's events or while watching movies) rather than what they have read from the Bible themselves. This is to show the pervasive influence of oral theology in Africa, of which Yoruba Christians are not left out, and why oral Christology should be a key informing resource in African Christological discussions (Schreiter, ed. 2005, ix; Ezigbo 2015, 37).

A few Yoruba academic theologians have engaged Yoruba oral theology as a key informing resource in writing. While Matthews Ojo (1998) and Joseph Ola (see Kwiyani and Ola 2021) analysed the theology of some Yoruba songs, they did not engage them from a Christological perspective. Adekunle Dada (2003) helpfully gives a Christological colouration in his theological engagement of selected Yoruba songs by reflecting on Christological themes and features in selected Yoruba songs but he does not engage other expressions of Yoruba oral Christology such as sermons, prayers, and dramas. A more detailed examination of Yoruba Christological titles, derived from their oral theology, is provided by Babalola (2019) who used the *Aladura* as his case study. Babalola's study is more inclusive as it is not restricted to just one oral expression of Yoruba perception of Christ as is the case with Dada's study of only songs and, though it focuses on the *Aladura* movement, its survey of Yoruba Christological titles applies to other Yoruba Pentecostals who use same titles even when English is their language of expression. All this highlights the contribution of oral Christology to African theology by Yoruba Pentecostals and this is true of other studies that utilise African oral Christological titles.

## **8.0 YORUBA THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS' INCORPORATION OF ORAL THEOLOGY**

In this study, theological educators refer to teaching faculty members of a theological seminary and a seminary is any Christian institution established primarily for the training of ministers for the church and other church-related or church-allied or parachurch ministries and organisations, such as missionary societies, chaplaincy ministries, academic religious education, businessmen/women fellowships, etc. The researcher argues that Yoruba theological educators occupy a significant position when it comes to theologising in the country and beyond, not only because Yorubaland is currently home to some of the foremost and best citadels of theological education in Nigeria and even those of

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is often said sarcastically that if you want to hide something from an African (or a black man), keep it in a book.

global repute,<sup>12</sup> but also because there is a sizable number of Yoruba theological educators of repute in Nigeria and beyond, past and present, and there is at least one Yoruba lecturer in almost every popular theological institution in Nigeria.

The researcher argues that the word “seminary” already reveals a bias in the objectives of a seminary, even in the face of objectivity and non-bias required by academic standards, when we look at its meaning. The word “seminary” literally means a seedbed where plants are nurtured before they are transplanted (Wiktionary 2025), having originated from a sixteenth-century Middle English word meaning “seedbed,” or “nursery,” which is also derived from the Latin *seminarium*, a word from *semin-* [semen, seed] (Merriam-Webster 2025). This means that seminaries are “temporary soils” meant for the nurturing of tender plants (ministers-in-training) so they can grow into mature plants by the time they are transplanted (upon graduation) into local churches. This means that being a theological educator is a biased assignment that calls for a positive bias for the gospel and the church. This resonates with Busenitz’s (2005, chap. 7) stance that theological educators are not only to be pastorally trained but also to be pastorally “brained,” such that they “bleed pastoral ministries and missions in their classrooms, in their own local church ministries, and in their relationships.” Busenitz asserts that the impact of such approach to theological education will be phenomenal and the researcher agrees to this.

However, not all Yoruba theological educators “bleed pastoral ministries and missions... in their own local church ministries, and in their relationships.” Though about 80% of Yoruba theological educators sampled for this study claim that they are involved in local church ministries using the Yoruba language, about 35% claim that they only know of 50% or more of theological educators who do this (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>). This means that while most respondents who are Yoruba theological educators claim to minister within their local church contexts, most of them still believe that there are not up to half of Yoruba theological educators who do this. This paradoxical position only confirms the aloofness of many theological educators from local church ministries. More than 90% of non-theological educators who responded to the survey say that less than 40% of the full-time Yoruba theological educators are involved in local church ministries and Yoruba catechism of Christians (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>). All these reveal a gap between theological educators and ordinary Christians in Yorubaland and this gap needs to be bridged for effective theological education ministry. This gap between Yoruba theological educators and ordinary Christians is not unconnected to the fact that many academic theologians limit their ministries to the classrooms, academic conferences, and academic publications.

In a sense, theological educators cannot entirely be blamed for this gap. First, they either “publish or perish,” so they need to constantly publish to retain their relevance in the academia and get their deserved promotion in the institution where they work. Second, they do not have a research assistant who can help them bear the burden of their research endeavours, as it is the case with their counterparts in advanced climes. Consequently, the inevitable need to constantly converse with their colleagues in academia and publish their findings in reputable journals leaves them with almost no time to extend their ministries beyond academia. Third, the stress of classroom teaching, marking and grading of book reviews, term papers and examination scripts, thesis supervision, administrative duties, conference participation, and publication of meaningful research, takes its toll on the physical and mental health of theological educators. It also leaves them with little energy and time to participate in local church ministries, so they rather excuse themselves from ministerial responsibilities outside

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<sup>12</sup> In the comity of Nigerian theological seminaries, popular schools like Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Kwara State, UMCA Theological College, Ilorin, Kwara State, West African Theological Seminary, Ipaja, Lagos State, LIFE Theological Seminary, Ikorodu, Lagos State, TAC Theological Seminary, Ilesa, Osun State, and CAC Theological Seminary (Main Campus), Ile-Ife, are situated in Yorubaland. This is asides other theological colleges of repute and satellite (and/or extension) campuses of the aforementioned seminaries that are in Yorubaland.

the seminary community in order to have time to rest and be re-energised for their academic responsibilities that seem never to end. Fourth, many theological educators worship in clusters within the seminary's immediate or wider community, while some even prefer to worship in the seminary chapel, where the need for them is lesser compared to other local churches in town. While more than 70% of Yoruba theological educators who responded say that they are part of a local church pastoral team and that they worship in a local church outside the seminary community (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>), less than 20% of non-theological educators who are respondents say that they only know of at least 30% of Yoruba theological educators who are part of a local church pastoral team and less than 50% say that they know of more than 50% of full-time Yoruba theological educators who worship in a local church outside the seminary community (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>). This contradictory data exposes the fact that not all Yoruba theological educators serve on a local church's pastoral team and worship outside the seminary community, a fact well-known to the researcher. This is so that they will not need to be encumbered with local church educational ministries. Fifth, some local church pastors do not allow for the active involvement of theological educators and even theologically educated members in the theological formation of church members due to reasons such as the fear that theological educators' detailed and unbiased explanation of scriptures may make members begin to think low of them as pastors and high of the theological educator(s), or a superiority complex on the part of the theological educator(s) assuming to know more than the pastor, or because the pastor thinks that the theological educator(s) lack(s) pastoral gift (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>).

These valid reasons do not, however, change the fact that the staying away from local church ministries by theological educators negatively affect their effectiveness as educators and the spiritual vitality of Christians with whom they worship and interact in the various local churches they attend, as attested to by 78% of Yoruba theological educators who were sampled for this study (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>). This is also corroborated by the fact that more than 70% of non-theological educators who responded think that the neglect of local church ministries by Yoruba theological educators negatively affects these educators' effectiveness, and almost 90% believe that it negatively affects the spiritual vitality of other Christians (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>). It is, therefore, necessary that Yoruba theological educators take the task of orally theologising Yoruba Christians in Yoruba language more seriously so that their ministry becomes more effective and enhance the spiritual vitality of Yoruba Christians. The next section demonstrates how they can achieve this.

## **9.0 IMPLICATIONS OF YORUBA PENTECOSTAL ORAL CHRISTOLOGY FOR ACADEMIC THEOLOGIAN**

This paper, at this point, argues that the inclusion and discussion of Yoruba Pentecostal oral Christology by academic theologians necessitates a greater use of oral theology by Yoruba academic theologians. Academic deliberations on Yoruba Pentecostal oral Christology point to the fact that oral theology remains a vital avenue to teach and express Christian truths among Yorubas. Therefore, Yoruba academic theologians need to explore orality more as a means of theologising. The truth is that the overemphasis on written theology in African theological studies does not correspond with the African preference for orality (Kimutai 2020, 2), nor does it correspond with modern Yoruba preference for orality. Therefore, Yoruba academic theologians need to develop and promote oral theology in addressing the people's most germane questions about life and promoting the Christian faith in Africa (see Naudé 1996, 23; Boaheng 2024, 23–24). This is to imitate Jesus and his apostles who ministered in a similarly oral-based society (see Blomberg 2016, 37ff.). Jesus and his apostles utilised oral communication as they participated in oral discussions with the *hoi polloi* and not just the educated and elites of their day. According to the book of Acts, Paul, arguably the most educated scholar and theologian of the New Testament church and the author with the highest number of New Testament writings, spent more of his days having oral discussions with the ordinary people than with

fellow apostles, theologians, and his “seminary” students. This shows the importance of oral communication in theologising the ancient world and modern Yoruba society is not left out.

To start with, it will be unfair to say that theological educators in Yorubaland do not engage in oral transmission of knowledge, seeing that they still largely teach their students orally despite the use of written literature and online learning platforms. However, many prefer to only share their knowledge orally within the ivory towers of learning where they are paid and where else they are opportune or invited to speak on one or more occasions. However, though every theological educator has personal, regular interactions with people in the various local churches where they worship, not many of them are part of the church’s teaching ministries, such as the Sunday School, Bible Study, Children and Teenagers’ ministry, among others, where they teach and disciple people regularly. This is seen in the earlier reported data that while about 80% of Yoruba theological educators claim that they are involved in local church ministries using Yoruba language, only about 35% know of at least 50% of Yoruba theological educators who do this (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>) and only less than 30% of non-theological educators who responded do not know up to 50% of theological educators who partake in such local church ministries (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJgqQ6>).

The gulf existing between Yoruba theological educators and Yoruba Christians can be bridged when the former engage more in preaching and teaching the latter using Yoruba language. This will help in the theological formulation of Yoruba Christians such that they are grounded in sound doctrines in a way that students of theological institutions are. Fubara-Manuel and Fritheim (2023, 5) note rightly that “[o]ral theologies necessarily include a significant community aspect, whether as listeners or as active participants.” This means that Yoruba theological educators should be more involved in the community aspect of their various local churches and communities as listeners and active participants. As listeners, they are able to ascertain the people’s theology, the oral theologies of their own people, and then engage such theologies as active participants by correcting whatever needs to be corrected. The active participation of Yoruba theological educators in the formulation of oral theology includes vernacular teaching of the people, composition of hymns and songs in Yoruba language, leading of prayer sessions, writing and editing scripts for dramas and movies, and using mass media and social media to teach theology in Yoruba language.

Songs are the most popular oral expressions of theology among Yoruba Christians as evident in how academic writings focus on them. The significance of songs is seen in how Yoruba Christians allot more of corporate worship time to singing than any other activity. This is because, like most Africans, they love to sing such that they sing during every occasion, pleasant and unpleasant, and to express their emotions, positive and negative (Mbewe 2020, 132). They sing during prayer times and preachers sometimes sing songs during sermons to buttress what they are saying or to elicit response from their hearers. In fact, an excited congregant may start a song in reaction to what the preacher or prayer leader says. What this means for Yoruba theological educators is that they should utilise songs as means to theologise their people. They should synergise with the various choir groups to tweak their song presentations to ensure doctrinal fidelity. Yoruba theological educators who are skilled musicians should help compose and produce songs and hymns that teach sound doctrines while those who are not musically inclined should collaborate with Christian singers and musicians to produce theologically sound songs, hymns, and poems through which Yoruba Christians can learn biblical truths.

Yoruba Christians enjoy singing a lot such that even when tired they become reinvigorated when they hear songs. Similarly, they are willing to learn songs that have to do with their faith no matter how fatigued they are in church whereas they would just sleep off or be dozing if it is a sermon. The researcher sees many Yoruba Christians write down and/or memorise new songs they learn in church and they keep singing such songs long after they have even forgotten what the preacher said. All this shows their undying love for songs, especially melodious and danceable songs. In the past, songs have been used to teach about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, heaven, hell, Christ’s/God’s power and victory over evil powers and life’s problem, among other such significant truths of the

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Christian faith. Yoruba theological educators can help enrich congregational singing with “the richness of the full menu of Christian doctrine and experience” rather than the common songs that are mere “repetition of a few words...with very little variation” devoid of doctrinal truths (Mbewe 2020, 132–133). This also applies to the use of poems, eulogies, and rhymes to teach doctrinal truths.

Songs and poetic compositions by Yoruba Christians are often broadcast through the media, both traditional and social. This attests to the significance of the media as a means through which Yorubas communicate their theology orally. The significance of media is seen in how movies, in Nigeria, display virtually every aspect of life, including religious beliefs and practices (Ukah 2003, 204), so movies often display the religious beliefs and practices of the people. Not only that, the media has an unassuming but great effect on what people do and how they behave (Fafowora and Nyaga 2020, 307). An undeniable proof of this is the imitation of life-view, words, dressing styles, etiquettes, and demeanours, displayed on screens (phones, computers, and TVs) by teenagers and youths. Nigerians love movies and Christian movies are used during church programmes and outreaches to attract more attendees. In Nigeria, Yoruba Christian movie producers and actors/actresses are very popular and the movies they produce have an international audience, which includes even non-Christians. Seeing that movies have such a pervasive influence on Yorubas, Yoruba theological educators should collaborate with Christian scriptwriters and movie producers to create movies that will teach the people the truths of the Christian faith. This is more likely to give them a wider reach of influence than academic writings and lectures will. They should also serve alongside the church’s drama unit to produce theologically sound Christian dramas for the church’s benefit.

Though about 50% of Yoruba theological educators surveyed in this study claim to use mass and social media to teach doctrines of the Christian faith to the general public (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJggQ6>), less than 30% of the non-theological educators who responded say they know about 35% of Yoruba theological educators who use mass and social media to teach Christian doctrines while other non-theological respondents do not even know up to 30% of Yoruba theological educators who do so (<https://forms.gle/5bvSXUyM2t6WJggQ6>). This means that Yoruba theological educators need to enhance their use of the media considering its massive influence on the people. In light of the greater cost of hosting a programme in any on-site radio station, Yoruba theological educators should consider maximising the social media as a tool for oral theologising. Social media, accessed by humans of all genders, strata, and educational level, is a powerful means of disseminating information in this age. Most Yoruba Christians in urban and semi-urban areas and a good number of those in rural areas make use of the various social media channels (such as YouTube, TikTok, X [Twitter], Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and Snapchat, among others). Yoruba theological educators should use these channels to engage the people by posting short reels/videos that are doctrinal and practical. Theological seminaries in Yorubaland can and should have such social media channels for livestreaming sermons from their chapels and sharing engaging theological content. They should use such channels to provide a series of lectures on Christian doctrines and to engage the public by taking questions about the Christian faith from them and providing answers to such questions. They can also create an online radio station on platforms like Mixlr and share theological content regularly with the people.

Aside from the social media and online audio channels, the “traditional” radio remains a significant medium of disseminating information among Yorubas, especially the older generation and residents of villages. Therefore, theological institutions in Yorubaland can start a radio broadcasting station where members of the public can listen to doctrinal teachings and songs that will shape their theology. If they can afford it, they should purchase “airtime” at any nearby radio or TV station and use such period to host their lecturers, one at a time, to speak on germane and trending theological issues, as well as have them respond to questions from the public. As of today, some Yorubas listen to and believe all kinds of preachers on radio, calling them during and after the radio/TV programme as well as going to meet such preachers at their churches, prayer centres, or mountains, as the case may be. If Yoruba theological educators, with the sponsorship of their institutions, can have such an

interface with Yorubas, using Yoruba language as the medium of communication, the researcher believes that Christianity in Yorubaland will be better for it. This, however, does not preclude having such engagements in English language, the lingua franca of the nation, and this might mean presenting such programmes in a bilingual format whereby someone speaks in either Yoruba or English while a translator repeats what is said in the other language.

While audio-visual mediums are powerful tools of oral theologising, they are not to replace hands-on catechetical impartation of Christian doctrines through oral communication. Therefore, Yoruba theological educators are to be part of the teaching ministries of the various local churches where they worship. Apart from preaching, which is often an irregular feature of their ministries in their local churches, theological educators can assist pastors in teaching Bible Study classes if the pastors allow them. Even when pastors do not invite them to preach or teach Bible Study, they can and should get involved in Sunday School preparatory classes so they can help Sunday School teachers get an accurate understanding of the Sunday School lessons and assist in teaching Sunday School classes. They can and should also work with other teaching ministries in the local church, such as the children/juvenile classes, teenagers' classes, students/youths/singles' fellowships, Boys' and Girls' Brigades or their equivalents, men and women fellowships, and other such avenues of orally teaching Christian truths. They can and should also work with the local church's evangelistic, mission, and/or outreach unit, whereby they help share the gospel message with unbelievers and answer questions about the Christian faith. They can go out individually or as a group to preach the gospel and teach certain biblical truths at strategic places within and outside the city or town where the seminary is located. Such public preaching has a way of influencing the theology of others.

## **10.0 CONCLUSION**

The precedence of orality over writing by Yorubas is not likely to change in the near future. Therefore, Yoruba theological educators cannot continue ignoring orality when it has a lot of potential for them to contribute to the doctrinal nurturing of their people and to influence their lifestyles. This might affect their career progress in the academic world, but it will definitely enhance their effectiveness as educators and their influence on Yoruba Christians. Yoruba theological educators must maximise the various avenues and opportunities available to them through the local church, social media, and mass media, to theologise their people, especially using the Yoruba language. This helps them to engage the worldviews and beliefs of other Christians and positively influence them. It also extends their impact and influence beyond their various ivory towers of learning and academic communities.

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