

Towards a Transformative Church-Mission Strategy: A Reflection of Francis Xavier's Mission's Theology for Cross- Cultural Integration of the Gospel among Muslims in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

To talk about the theology of modern mission with its cross-cultural incorporation without Francis Xavier is like reading the Old Testament without the New. Christian mission activities have succeeded among the poor while the rich have been neglected. The formal approach of the Christian mission understands the language of the new culture. This study adopts a historical analysis of Xavier's mission theology that could help sharpen the church-mission strategy. His theology of mission and approach could provide the modern church with a relevant opportunity of sharing the good news to a nonreceptive culture, people, and religion. The study provides a synopsis of mission policy that offered transformation to Japan, thus opening doors for the Gospel to reach the high class of the society. From the time of mission activities in northern Nigeria, Christian mission has recorded tremendous success among the lower and middle class, with little effort made both by mission bodies and indigenous churches to reach out to the select few elites who determine the affairs of the North. A mission theology of inclusivity is necessary to reach out to these influential groups whose impact is eminent in homes and the general populace. A reflection on Xavier's missiological perspective could provide the contemporary church with the missional conceptual framework.

Keywords: Cross-cultural, Francis Xavier, Mission theology, Muslim, Northern Nigeria, Transformative.

Introduction

The reality of Christianity and its evidence in an ever-changing society is entrenched in its theology of mission because it is the grand evidence of Christian growth. A Christianity that redefines the history of the world makes mission the centerpiece of its theology (Goodhew 34). These realities can describe the passionate approach the Christian church took from the sixteenth century onward to Christianize the world and to expand new frontiers. However, the theology of the Christian mission has undergone numerous paradigmatic shifts throughout Christian history (Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission* 5). In the modern era where truth, biblical authority, and the nature of non-Christian religions operates, the roles of local churches and the place of social justice have evolved dramatically, which has evoked a rethink of mission and its theology (Ott et al. vii). In the modern study of theology, people clamor for biblical clarity and the need for awareness regarding the mission of the church. Nevertheless, the church's missional theology can be better understood from an ecclesiastical and eschatological perspective. Foremost, as the community and product of mission, the church must seek to ascertain its place in establishing the kingdom of God.

Affirmatively, the church is God's instrument to witness the anticipated return of the kingdom of Christ that is already with us and will come in its fullness upon Christ's return. Thus, at the center of Christian theology of mission is the cross, which remains the fulcrum of Christian history. Again, mission theology is founded upon biblical authority and the legacies of Christian heroes. For instance, a theology of mission must value the role of the apostolic era – Paul, Peter, and the church fathers. Also, it builds upon the legacies of mission organizations that contributed immensely towards the establishment of Christianity throughout the centuries, more so that it was the different approaches used by these mission organizations that help shape the Christian church and its zealotry in reaching out to new territories. In this regard, Xavier, who stood out and played a significant role in contemporary Christianity, requires a space in the study of modern theology of mission.

The Choice of Francis Xavier

In the study of modern missions, it is possible to be familiar with people who impacted the Christian church. People, such as William Carey and David Livingston, are adequately foregrounded in missiology. On the contrary, Xavier has remained silent and inconspicuously absent in the stages of mission history. Xavier, whose passion for spreading the Christian faith

among the elite, preached the Gospel in Japan and was successful without really knowing the language of the people (Jennes and Jennes 11). He is a co-founder with Ignatius of Loyola of the Jesuit movement (Kienholz, 176). Xavier was inspired by the counter-reformation and was passionate about spreading Catholicism to China and Japan. Though he died in 1552, waiting for passage to China's forbidden land, his theology and mission activities succeeded in Japan (Davidlianno 29). Livingstone and others assert that Xavier founded the church in Japan that endured through the storm of persecution (Livingstone et al. 217). Indeed, Xavier is known as one of the forerunners of the modern missionary movement (Stroope 320).

Meanwhile, the founding of the society of Jesus recorded a new type of missionary impulse that has never been experienced since the early days of the Christian church (Burke-Sullivan and Burke 43). Europe practically exploded, and Christianity became genuinely global, and it is the followers of Ignatius (the Jesuits) like Xavier who worked hard to make this a reality. Tiplady noted that the Jesuit Order played a significant role in world evangelization, noting that the Roman Catholic church, together with the political powers, led the Christianization process, which modeled the book of Acts (Tiplady 258). Abreast, it is the beginning of modern missions that spread globalization from the Protestant sectors (258).

Noteworthy, Xavier was commissioned as a Portuguese emissary. His mission was to Goa, India, and the Portuguese operation center in the East, which could be described as the start of one of the most significant, wide-ranging, and successful missionary endeavors ("Francis Xavier"). Mulin opines that Xavier and two others who were selected embarked on a thirteen-month journey from Portugal to Goa, a trip that left Xavier seasick (Mullin 159). While he had a tremendous impact in India, especially among Indian children, this study is limited to Xavier's mission to Japan, a mission that began in 1549 to 1552; thus, making him the pioneer of Catholic missions in eastern Asia (Gale Research 48). Importantly, Xavier's contribution earned him the title *Apostle of the East Indies* and the *Patron Saint of all Missions* because of his dynamic approaches to mission and the inspiration he offered to many who labored for the Christian mission (Hall 48). Appropriately, Xavier is acclaimed as one of the greatest missionaries in history (Cornwell and Cornwell 42). Thus, the praise accorded Xavier necessitates an occasioned reflection of his mission theology, which is adequately immersed theologically.

Xavier's Perspective on Mission Theology to Japan

The introduction of the Gospel to a non-Christian society often comes with the problem of how to deal with cultural tradition in which the Gospel is to be shaped and understood (Chung et al. 303). The tension of integrating new faith into existing norms has raised concern because missiologists struggle with what to accept and what not to be in old practices (Ott 51; Cosgrove et al. 205). In many cases, rejecting the traditional practices of people has drawn criticism (Chitakure 46). An example is the indictment of the 18th and 19th centuries mission organizations on condemning the cultural traditions of Africans, considering it primitive, backward, pagan, and barbaric (Dibua 58). These missionaries are accused of not engaging with the people's existing cultures; thus, they are framed as brainwashing the people and imposing a foreign culture on Africans rather than bringing the Bible. For instance, in many parts of Africa, missionaries have been described as aiding colonial imperialism; they are also accused of cultural imperialism and wittingly colonialistic and destroyers of African culture (Klaus 154). What contemporary mission theology proposes is a theology of inculturation that is aimed at religious purity.

Accordingly, what the Christian mission encountered in the time of Xavier in Japan was a religious-cultural confrontation. Miyamoto describes Xavier's way of doing mission as an excellent example of a current inculturation model (37). One significant model that Xavier adopted was his passion for the spread of Christianity among the intellectuals. His theology was two-fold, a historically engaged God and salvation in God incarnate (E. Hastings 335). This theological framework shaped Xavier's theology of inculturation as he worked among the elite class. Xavier held with high esteem the literacy and the Japanese philosophical high culture in which he was determined to reach this class of people with the Gospel. Despite the Japanese bureaucracy, Xavier had a positive impression on the people and considered Japan a fertile ground for missionary activity. The theological framework of Xavier's approach to Japan's mission and his optimism can be summed as the theology of adaptation. Three main areas to explore in this paper are the adaptation of the Japanese culture, the use of their language to preach the Gospel, and the education of the native clergy.

Xavier's Theology of Cultural Adaptation

The term “inculturation” took prominence around the 1970s and has remained a prominent theme in the global South and a feature of world Christianity (Singh and Farr 41). However, Xavier’s cultural adaptation in the mission to Japan has indeed demonstrated true inculturation theology. Harris wrote:

Far from constructing distorted images, Xavier was pragmatic in his vision, and at the same time, he was a prudent man, ready to learn by experience. He was a European, and while he did not renounce his religious certainties, he did not antagonize without reason, preferring to resort to reasoning in a debate. Xavier was a common conqueror but a missionary who acted with the sagacity of a diplomat Soon did he describe the Japanese as people equipped with intelligence and people of great reason (8).

By this assertion on Xavier, he was conscious of Japan’s cultural richness and determined to reach the people in their way of life without expecting or forcing any change (Schroeder 52). He was prudent and respectful to the people’s social setting and sought to present a balanced religion, especially among the Japanese interlocutors in their courts (Banchoff and Casanova 72). Xavier’s balanced approach to inculturation was pragmatic except in matters of Christian morals and doctrines; even at that, he always resolved in dialogue. He also applied some sense of humor in proving his case. Coulter *et al.* aver that their discussion always led to heated arguments in Xavier’s engagement with the *bonzes* (Buddhist monk or clergy). Still, in such moments, Xavier often exhibited calm deportment and was unfailingly humble (Coulter et al. 386). He acknowledged areas of strength in Japanese communal character, especially the peculiarity of rules of Japanese servitude. Atwood accentuates that from the coming of the first mission with Xavier as its head, the Japanese were hesitant and cautious about offering reception. However, with time, their attitude changed, and Christian assemblies were founded (Atwood). This change of attitude was because Xavier respected the people and their culture.

Furthermore, Xavier developed a mission approach of accommodating the Japanese, which led to a vibrant Christian community. For Xavier, his missiological conception is to preach to the local leaders, first using all available means. Bevans and Schroeder assert that to reach the *daimyo* (feudal lords) who were the greatest and influential landholders and the local leaders, Xavier resolved not to dress in the ordinary cotton fabric of the poor but in the silk garments that were acceptable to the leaders (Schroeder 53). Xavier’s missiological framework of reaching the elite is significant to the contemporary Christian mission. According to Jedin and Dolan, Francis directed that future missionaries who seek to win people to Christ must follow their public appearance; among other things, they must observe

the people's etiquette rules (Jedin and Dolan 48). Noteworthy, Christianity made great strides in Japan, with many becoming Christians. Thus, Xavier was able to baptize many converts in less than three years of his missionary activity in Japan, Japanese, and Buddhists inclusive (Roger).

The Use of Native Language

The communal life help in identifying people, and language plays a significant role in that uniqueness. Xavier affirmed the use of the native language in presenting Christianity to the Japanese. Harris submits that Xavier admonished all missionaries to Japan and China to learn the language because it was not difficult, and natives must be interpreters for all future missionaries who arrived in Japan (Harris 13). For most missionaries, the traditional religions of the natives were a little or no value, devilish, and without any genuine theology (Muonwe 34). Therefore, dialogue with such natives was considered pointless and unwarranted. Many tend to sustain the supremacy of Christianity as it was practiced in Europe.

However, Xavier prioritized the people's language and their role in reaching out to their locals. Doak contends that with the help of a native Japanese convert, Xavier was able to translate the Gospel of Matthew, the Creed, cardinal church teachings, and various prayers through the use of a native, Yajiro (Doak ed. 1; Mullins 205). Meanwhile, with that language receptivity, Xavier traveled throughout the country, converting Japanese to the faith. Hence, a successful mission among a people that Christianity seems foreign to them must be communicated in the language they understand individually, a methodology that Xavier admired and promoted in his mission to Japan (Abé 83).

The Theology of Educating Native Clergy

Boxer argues that Japanese children during Xavier's time were naturally more intelligent and attentive than Europe's corresponding age. They could progress in studies faster and even purer in European subjects such as Latin (Boxer 206). Xavier utilized this assertion to insist on the training of native clergy. Accordingly, the few years of Xavier's mission success in Japan could largely be ascribed to the use of native clergy who were experts in the language and through whom Christian works of literature were translated. Lach submits that:

The Japan mission, founded by Xavier, promised to yield an abundant harvest of souls but soon realized that their hope might not be achieved if regular proselytizing practices continued. Therefore, the Jesuits in Japan adopted a policy of promoting association and accommodation with the natives and their practices forthrightly. They

concentrated on the conversion of leaders from all levels of society. This dream's success necessitates the learning of Japanese life, adopting the native dress, studying the native language avidly and intensely. This missiological framework made the Asian region a mighty river for the Gospel that yielded a tremendous harvest (651).

Consequentially, Xavier's approach stirred up a desire for Christianity among the people and their neighborhoods. Moreover, this approach gave Francis a widespread acceptance that he could travel to more than fourteen Japanese villages preaching and promoting the cause of the Christian faith without necessarily having a complete understanding of the language. All these were possible because Xavier had Japanese native clergies around him. More so, it is contended that in the Molucca Islands and Japan, Xavier established the faith, and when he died, he left behind organized stations with an exact blueprint for the mission (Loyola et al. 47). Similarly, this pattern was adopted in the Indian mission. Kajamala accentuated that:

Pope Pius XI, described as "a great missionary Pope" promulgated his encyclical during the inter-war and, at the time, missionaries were facing threats of expulsion from colonial territories of China and Japan. Pious (1927) resolved to promote indigenous churches by ordaining native bishops in China and Japan. He supported indigenous clergy who know the people and language; such were given top priority. Indeed, this missionary zeal was a reassertion of Xavier's legacies after many years of his death (295).

Consequently, the Christian mission must be enculturated adequately through the use of indigenous converts. Such people understand the terrains within society. For instance, the Christian mission in central Nigeria through SIM (Sudan Interior Mission) and SUM (Sudan United Mission) insisted that natives be trained in vernacular. Upon arrival, these mission agencies committed to learning the people's language and teaching natives to reach out to their locals (Kolapo 119). SIM, for instance, insisted that Christian converts remained vernacular and free from being westernized (Cooper 6). As a result, these missionaries built schools and trained natives in their local languages; thus, they could reach rural areas quickly through native clergies.

Therefore, a fruitful theology of missions promotes the good of the existing culture and uses the people's language without compromising biblical standards. It dialogues with the current culture without being judgmental. Magesa supports this view, adding that the church is called upon to dialogue with the people's customs and religious values. Hence, inculturation is possible only through the full-time engagement of experts cross-culturally (Magesa 179).

Christian Mission in Northern Nigeria

The history of the Christian mission in Nigeria has often been strongly emphasized from the perspective of the coastal regions. The narrative on mission activities in Nigeria is based on the different roles that missionaries played in Christianizing the southern part (Nwaneri 297). This study argues that little space is given to the role played by Christian missions in northern Nigeria. Besides, the researcher observes that the story of the Christian mission in northern Nigeria is often presented in a passive form. This passivity could be that academicians who mostly dominate the story of Christian missions in northern Nigeria are from the southern part of the country. Acutely, few historians from the North opt to tell the story of their Christian past and heroes. Meanwhile, it is worthy of note that Christianity was at Nigeria's shores as early as the 15th century (A. Hastings 71). However, central and northern Nigeria were actively under Islam's influence and control with the proliferation of Islamic schools and religious brotherhood.

Meanwhile, the story of northern Nigeria changed from the late 18th and early 19th centuries when Protestant missions like the Sudan Interior Mission, Sudan United Mission, among many others, were determined to reach Africa's hinterland. While Christianity flourished in the Southern and Eastern parts of Nigeria, the North was left in the relentless activities of Islamic emirs against the minority tribes (Umaru 38). Nevertheless, the Maguzawa, for example, among other minority tribes, rejected and fought against Islamic invasion for many decades until the coming of Christian missions (Musa and Domatob 194). Most of the mission organizations focused on rural evangelism for fear of confrontations with local chiefs and emirs. On the other hand, Oliver and Atmore opined that to evangelize the North, Christian missions engaged in aggressive evangelism among minority tribes using a village school network. These schools were known as "bush schools," whereby children of all ages were given simple education (Oliver and Atmore 165). Accordingly, missionaries strategized to reach the Muslims through training, and their main targets were the young adults from the North.

Furthermore, the stiff resistance and close monitoring of new religion (Christianity) in the already Muslim North by the emirs, local chiefs, and the colonialists who enjoyed the dividend of indirect rule economically made it almost impossible to reach the elite class of northern Nigeria (Kesselman et al. 522). Consequently, missionaries strategized their mission

activities towards rural settings. During the early missionaries' activities in the Niger area, the missionaries believed strongly that the children's civilization would culminate in their parents' enlightenment. According to Ozo-mekuri:

The principle that guided many missionary activities in West Africa was literacy, the training of indigenous missionaries to serve as agents and acquisition, and interpreters of the Bible. As a result, the missionaries had to learn and develop themselves in the indigenous languages of the people or train local people in English to help the people understand and read. Thus, many of the missionaries studied the languages of West Africa. Accordingly, they were able to translate the Bible and the Prayer Book into those languages. Consequently, this helped the missionaries to build a pattern of primary education in practically every mission station with the common aim of propagating the ideals of Christianity while teaching literacy and a little arithmetic (107).

By implication, missionaries concentrated on the education of children. Also, northern Nigeria's cultural settings did not provide the opportunity to the missionaries to reach the elite as they were primarily hostile to the missionaries. Again, the North was under colonial suppression as colonialists threatened missionaries not to disturb the core North because they already had a religion (Barnes 412). Interestingly, there was no need to strategize toward evangelizing the northern elite because the North's communal life had little or no urban system (Medine et al.). Hence, these Christian missions concentrated on rural settings and the education of children who were to influence society in the future.

It is important to note that mainline churches face tremendous challenges in contemporary society as they struggle to remain relevant. It seems not to bring anything new to address the evolving spiritual, social, and economic needs of the urban realities (Conradie and Klaasen 86). For mainline missions, they struggle to diversify the Message, more so that the "mission of the church" has replaced "missions." That is, emphasis from these mission-minded organizations has shifted to developing institutional and governmental structures. This could be mainly due to globalization and the rise of pluralism, spiritualism, revivalism, and moralism that influence the church and society. Pierson arguably compared the mainline church missions to the scaffolding used in constructing a building. He submits that these organizations went to new countries and planted churches, after which they decided to dismantle the scaffolds (their mission structures) with the assumption that the churches are already planted (Pierson 35; Escobar). This has left some of these established churches to struggle to put formidable and workable mission programs, especially for the elite.

Admittedly, Christian missions had formidable structures and strategies for the rural mission, but its program for the contemporary urban mission is epileptic. On the other hand, some churches depend on the pattern of their founding missions to approach contemporary issues, which might not adequately meet the need at hand. Many of these mainline churches are not reasoning with the reality of the changing times. Current issues that affect Nigerian society include migration and urbanization (Wusu et al.). While rural migration affects Nigerian society, mainline churches focus on using rural strategies to reach urban settings (Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission* 4). This has made their missions equaled compared to some new mission organizations.

While society is ever-changing because people are searching for greener pastures in new areas, Christian missions and churches must redefine their theology of mission and be erudite in modern global evangelization strategies (Conn 81). Models most not necessarily change, but methods may change to respond to contemporary realities. This missiological conceptualization requires exploring new ways because the Gospel must be repackaged to meet present realities (Skreslet (II.) 58). Notably, it is not wrong to learn from other new mission organizations and churches. As a result, it will make the church relevant in an ever-changing society (Lloyds-Sidle and Lewis, eds; Richardson 35). Thus, due to the lack of an adequate paradigm for urban missions among Christian missions in northern Nigeria, it is imperative to reawaken and instantiate Xavier's theology for urban missions, yet in a dynamic way that speaks to current realities.

Cross-Cultural Integration of Xavier's Theology of Mission in Northern Nigeria

The central purpose of the Christian mission is to advance God's kingdom in the world and bring humanity under the headship of Christ, Eph. 1:10 (Phan 257). While in the time of Xavier, success in the Christian mission was considered by the number of the baptized, authentic evangelization means redeeming people from darkness into the light of Christ through the Gospel. However, the elite's mission seems to be considered unattainable, but Xavier's strategies could be useful in contemporary mission theology. To some extent, the mission to the elite and women in northern Nigeria had been neglected (Harris 135). History contends that the elite class plays a significant role in the affairs of society (Gugler and Flanagan 93). Similarly, the conversion of local leaders to Christianity in northern Nigeria provides an opening for ordinary people to follow.

Meanwhile, Islam has remained a significant barrier to the spread of Christianity in northern Nigeria, either because of Islamic fundamentalism or the aggressive response to mission activities (Ltd 5). To break such barriers requires an evaluative approach, understanding the people's culture and settings, and appreciating the people's cultural values. Thus, it implies adopting an acculturation model (Dyrness and Kärkkäinen 1). The modern missionary enterprise must be incarnational with the ability of Christianity to offer prestige and power to the existing Hausa culture (Gordon 103). Christian missions should seek to reflect the Gospel through the customs of the people. Foremost, understanding and winning the Hausa elite requires building trust, engaging with the elite dialogically, respect for their existing culture and territorial boundaries (Olupona 114). This approach provides the church with a great opportunity of penetrating northern Nigeria.

Unfortunately, many northern Christians work with the assumption that Christianity is only for the poor and is rural. Some are unsure about the spiritual position of the few elites within Christendom. Alas, many Christian organizations emphasize the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21 or the rich man's story asking Jesus what to do to inherit the Kingdom in Mark 10:17-31. Also, many take the response of Jesus on the Carmel entering through an eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God to neglect to reach out to the elite. Such people do not consider Luke 19:8 and the response of rich Zacchaeus or the story of Cornelius in Acts 10, who, though was rich, were praised for their godly decision and service. Meanwhile, people whose status has changed from the lower to the higher class tend to abandon the Christian faith because of the passive perception of many Christians towards the rich, assuming that all hope is lost for them who become wealthy. Correctively, the contemporary church programs and mission organizations should re-strategize to offer a solid ground that the elite can stand and grow in the Christian faith without discrimination.

21st Century Mission Enterprise

The 18th and 19th centuries recorded the confrontation of cultural norms. The world witnessed the global hegemony of Christianity as the Christian church was able to confront and command the cultural authority, which unimaginably tuned the history of the world (Wellman 198). Bianchi avers that the value of the Gospel has a counter-cultural function responsible for assuming a critical position to dominate power; nevertheless, the capacity is active only when the church defines authority not as power but as service (Bianchi). Unfortunately, the contemporary church is left behind with the struggle to find its prophetic

voice amidst the pluralistic culture and religious situation. But suppose the church is genuinely aiming at fulfilling its role; in that case, it must face the reality of the global acculturation process and see it as an effective method of global evangelization.

Christianity is not for the poor as much as it is for the rich. Nevertheless, the vacuum of reaching the wealthy has not been adequately provided for. Foremost, the world is becoming more urbanized than rural with a rising middle class, a conceptual framework for urban settings (Winter and Snodderly 126). The increasing mid and high level in society needs to be reached with the Gospel (Hu 332). Indeed, global migration is increasing, and people's status is changing; therefore, the church must be aware of the ethnographic changes and the demographic restructuring and work towards a realistic alternative and establish an effective mission strategy for the increasing elite and the urbanized (Kim 39).

Conclusion

Imperatively, people want to become Christians without being culturally proselytized. They want to practice Christianity in their cultural, racial, linguistic, and social class. Thus, a contextual Christianity that does not respect the existing custom of the people it meets will, indeed, face resistance. Contextualization of theology is based on the fundamental understanding of Christianity as a religion of revelation through faith in the incarnation of God in Christ (Pears 46). This study affirms that the elite has been neglected in contemporary mission strategies, especially in northern Nigeria. Within society, the elite class has a determining impact on the communal life of the North. A theology of mission must seek to bring people back to God through His Word. Nevertheless, the strategies of actualizing this task require a dialogical approach with the new and existing cultures. This requires a reflection on Francis Xavier's missional approach, which is characterized by cultural adaptation, the use of native language, and promoting the education of the native clergy. Xavier's theology of mission could play a significant role in reaching out to the changing society and the rising class of the elite. These approaches help make Christianity remain cross-culturally relevant and contextual.

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邁向變革性的教會宣教策略：反思方濟·沙勿略的宣教神學以跨文化融合在奈及利亞北部傳福音的穆斯林

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摘要

在沒有方濟·沙勿略的情況下談論現代神學使命以跨文化為主，就像沒有新約聖經的情況下閱讀舊約聖經一樣。基督教宣傳活動在窮人中取得成功，而富人被忽視。而基督教傳教的途徑就是理解新文化的語言。本研究對方濟·沙勿略的宣教神學進行歷史分析，這有助於強化教會宣教策略。這個宣教神學的方法可以為現代教會提供一個相關的機會，對於那些不接受基督教人分享好消息。這個研究為日本帶來政策上的轉變，透過福音打開通往上層社會的大門。從奈及利亞北部宣教活動開始基督教傳教在中下階層取得了巨大成功，宣教機構和土著教會幾乎沒有做出任何努力來接觸決定北方事務的少數精英。包容性的宣教神學是必要的，以接觸這些在家庭和普通民眾中影響顯著的有影響力的群體。方濟·沙勿略的宣教觀點的反思可以為當代教會提供宣教概念框架。

關鍵字：跨文化、方濟·沙勿略、宣教神學、穆斯林、奈及利亞北部、變革性