



## **Social Welfare for Older Persons in Biblical Scripture: An Analysis Through a Modern Social Work Lens**

---

**Gbeminiyi Mujaheed Adegbola**

Department of Sociological Studies  
Tai Solarin University of Education  
[adegbolagm@tasued.edu.ng](mailto:adegbolagm@tasued.edu.ng), 08163881377

**Olatubosun Tope Omotayo**

Department of Adult and Development Education  
Tai Solarin University of Education  
[omotayoot@tasued.edu.ng](mailto:omotayoot@tasued.edu.ng); 08060486168

### **Abstract**

This article explores the biblical foundation for the social welfare of older persons, drawing exclusively from scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. Through thematic analysis of key passages, the study identifies core principles concerning the dignity, caregiving, justice, and community responsibility owed to the elderly. Scripture presents a holistic model of elder care that includes familial obligation, community-based support, and social justice imperatives. The article examines commandments such as "honor your father and your mother," gleaning laws, prophetic calls to defend widows, and the early church's structured care for ageing widows, revealing a moral framework deeply concerned with the well-being of older adults. Parallels are drawn between these biblical teachings and modern social work values particularly respect for human dignity, intergenerational solidarity, advocacy for vulnerable populations, and inclusion of older persons as active contributors to society. The analysis demonstrates that the Bible not only prescribes compassionate elder care but positions it as a sacred duty and societal cornerstone. These insights provide a theological foundation that can enrich contemporary gerontological practice and inform faith-based approaches to elder welfare in policy and caregiving.

**Keywords:** Older persons, Social welfare, Biblical scripture, Social work, Elder care.



## **Introduction**

The ethical treatment and care of older persons is a central concern in contemporary social welfare and social work practice. Interestingly, this concern is not new as the Bible, across both the Old and New Testaments, contains numerous teachings on the dignity, care, and justice due to the elderly. In ancient Israel and the early Christian church, there were no formal state pensions or structured social care systems; instead, responsibility for the welfare of older adults rested on families, religious institutions, and the broader community. Biblical scripture reflects a culture that highly valued its elders, viewing longevity as a blessing and expecting society to honor and provide for those of advanced age. As McKinney and Hill (2017) note, biblical perspectives reveal that “honour and care of the elderly is an integral part of the Christian vision of life” (p. 59).

This article explores key biblical passages related to social welfare for older persons and analyzes them thematically through the lens of contemporary social work principles. The themes addressed include the dignity and respect accorded to elders, family responsibility and caregiving for ageing parents, community support systems for the elderly, justice and protection of vulnerable older adults, and the inclusion and participation of elders in society. Each section will cite scripture from both the Old and New Testaments, interpret the passages in context, and draw parallels to current social work values and practices.

Practically focusing exclusively on biblical scripture, we aim to understand how care for older persons is both mandated and modeled in Judeo-Christian texts, and how these ancient principles align with or inform today’s approaches to elder care. The analysis will demonstrate that many core values in contemporary gerontological social work such as promoting dignity, ensuring social justice for vulnerable elders, strengthening family and community support, and fostering active ageing, strongly resonate with biblical teachings written millennia ago. This congruence underscores the enduring wisdom of biblical ethics regarding the elderly. We begin with the biblical call to honor the dignity of older persons.



## **Dignity and Respect for the Elderly in Scripture**

One of the most apparent biblical themes regarding older persons is the call to treat them with honor, respect, and dignity. The Bible explicitly commands reverence for the elderly as a demonstration of reverence for God. In the Old Testament, for example, the Law of Moses states: *“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord”* (Leviticus 19:32, New International Version [NIV], 2011). This injunction links respect for older people with piety toward God, implying that honoring the elderly is a sacred duty. The imagery of rising in the presence of the aged suggests a cultural norm of deference, akin to how one might stand for a judge or a king. In other words, the elderly are to be treated with a high degree of esteem. This principle affirms the inherent dignity of older individuals. From a modern social work perspective, this resonates with the core value of respect for the dignity and worth of the person, a foundational principle in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 2021). Social workers today combat ageism by promoting positive views of ageing and advocating that older clients be treated with respect. Biblical law anticipated this value by discouraging disdain or neglect toward the elderly.

Ancient wisdom literature further reinforces the honor due to old age. Proverbs 16:31 declares: *“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness”* (NIV, 2011). In Israelite culture, gray hair, often symbolic of advanced age, was regarded not as a liability, but as a “crown of glory.” Similarly, Proverbs 20:29 states: *“The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old”* (NIV, 2011). These proverbs poetically affirm that long life and the wisdom presumed to come with it are honorable. Rather than glorifying youth and productivity alone, the Bible elevates the dignity and contribution of older adults. This view challenges modern societies, which often prize youth, to also value the contributions and insights of elders. In contemporary practice, social workers embrace strengths-based approaches with older adults, recognizing their life experience, resilience, and wisdom as assets to families and communities. The biblical exaltation of gray hair as a “crown”



parallels this strengths-based model, emphasizing that a person's worth is often enhanced and not diminished by age.

In the New Testament, the ethos of respect for elders continues within the early Christian community. The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy, a young church leader, on how to relate to older congregants: *"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father... Treat older women as mothers"* (1 Timothy 5:1–2, NIV, 2011). While given in a church leadership context, this guidance reflects a broader principle of treating elders with familial respect and gentleness. Even when correction is necessary, younger persons are instructed to approach older men as they would a father, with humility and deference and to regard older women with the care accorded to one's own mother. Such instructions reinforce the norm of dignity in communication and interaction with elders. This approach aligns closely with contemporary person-centered care, which emphasizes respectful interaction, empowerment, and relational dignity when working with older clients.

Beyond direct commands, Scripture provides narrative examples that highlight respect for the elderly. A poignant instance occurs at the crucifixion of Jesus, where even amid his suffering, he ensures that his mother Mary will be cared for. Observing her and the disciple John, Jesus says, *"Woman, here is your son,"* and to John, *"Here is your mother"* (John 19:26–27, NIV, 2011). From that hour, the disciple took her into his home. In this scene, Jesus honours his mother by entrusting her to a faithful friend, ensuring that Mary will not be left alone or vulnerable in her old age. The implicit message is that older persons deserve care, security, and familial love. Jesus' action exemplifies the fifth commandment: *"Honor your father and your mother"* (Exodus 20:12, NIV, 2011) in practice. For contemporary social workers, this story illustrates the principle of filial responsibility and respect. Across many cultures, caregiving for ageing parents is seen as a moral and sometimes legal duty, and social workers often support families in fulfilling this obligation. The dignity accorded to Mary reflects a broader biblical ethic in which older women and men are recognized as deserving of honour and protection. Taken



together, these scriptures affirm a coherent biblical ethic: to respect, honour, and care for the elderly is a sacred duty, one that aligns with the core social work values of dignity, compassion, and justice.

### **Family Responsibility and Caregiving for Aged Parents**

Biblical scripture places the primary responsibility for the care of older adults on their families, particularly their children. This is most clearly rooted in the Ten Commandments, which enjoin, *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12, New International Version [NIV], 2011). While “honor” certainly includes respect, it also has very practical implications: adult children are expected to support and care for their parents in old age. The promise of longevity attached to this commandment suggests that a society in which the young honor the old is one marked by continuity and stability.

In ancient Israel, there was a strong expectation of reciprocity between generations: just as parents cared for and raised their children, adult children were morally obligated to support their parents as they aged. This reciprocal responsibility is explicitly described in the New Testament: *“If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God”* (1 Timothy 5:4, NIV, 2011). Here, caregiving is framed as a form of repayment, an act of justice and duty as much as one of love. The notion of filial piety is thus deeply rooted in both testaments, establishing a spiritual and ethical foundation for intergenerational care.

The New Testament continues to reinforce this ethic. Paul writes, *“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Timothy 5:8, NIV, 2011). This strong condemnation reflects the seriousness with which the early Christian community viewed familial caregiving. Failure to support ageing relatives was not only a moral lapse but a spiritual failing. Even non-Christians, the text suggests, understood the inherent duty to care for one’s family. In modern social work, this ethic is echoed in the assumption that families are the primary caregivers for older adults. While governments and institutions offer supplemental services, policies often presume that families,



when available, will bear much of the financial, emotional, and physical responsibility of elder care (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). Social workers help support these caregivers through counseling, respite services, and practical resources. Paul's writings align with this model, advocating for concrete family involvement in elder support and condemning its absence.

Jesus Christ also upheld the commandment of honoring one's parents, and He criticized those who tried to evade this responsibility. In the Gospel of Mark, He exposes a loophole used by some religious leaders who would declare their wealth "Corban" (dedicated to God) to avoid using it to support their parents. He rebukes them: *"But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'Corban'... then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition"* (Mark 7:10–13, NIV, 2011). By labeling this behaviour as a nullification of God's law, Jesus underscores that caring for ageing parents is not an optional act of generosity but a divine mandate. From a social work perspective, this passage could be seen as a critique of cultural, legal, or religious rationalizations used to justify elder neglect. The principle Jesus affirms is clear: no pretext whatsoever, religious, financial, or otherwise can excuse failure to care for ageing parents.

While family support is prioritized, the early church also created safety nets for elderly individuals who had no relatives. In 1 Timothy 5:16, Paul advises, *"If any believing woman has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need"* (NIV, 2011). The phrase "widows who are really in need" likely refers to older women without family or social support. Paul's counsel suggests a structured approach: family care first, community care when family is absent. This balance reflects an ordered ethic, where personal responsibility precedes communal obligation. Social workers apply similar logic today, for instance, exploring family-based caregiving options before organizing institutional or state-based services. The concept of prioritizing those "really in need" remains essential in triaging care and allocating limited social resources.



Biblical narratives also provide illustrative examples of familial caregiving. In Genesis 47:11–12, during a time of famine, Joseph by then a high-ranking official in Egypt, provides generously for his father Jacob and extended family, ensuring that Jacob’s final years are lived in dignity and comfort. In the Book of Ruth, a striking example of filial commitment is found in Ruth’s relationship with her ageing mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth not only returns with Naomi to Bethlehem but works tirelessly to support her. She famously declares: “*Where you go, I will go... your people will be my people and your God my God*” (Ruth 1:16–18, NIV, 2011). Ultimately, Ruth’s son Obed becomes Naomi’s grandson and caregiver, as the women of the village proclaim that he “*will renew your life and sustain you in your old age*” (Ruth 4:15, NIV, 2011). These stories depict intergenerational solidarity not only as duty but as devotion motivated by love, loyalty, and divine guidance (McKenzie, 1999).

In sum, Scripture strongly promotes family-based caregiving as a cornerstone of social responsibility. This theme is consistent with contemporary social welfare principles that view the family as the primary unit of support in old age. While modern interventions have expanded to include professional and governmental care, the ethical framework provided by the Bible affirms that family caregiving is a foundational and sacred expression of social justice and moral responsibility.

### **Community and Religious Support Systems for the Elderly**

While the family holds primary responsibility for elder care in biblical teaching, the broader community is also called upon to establish support systems especially for those who are widowed, poor, or without family. Ancient Israelite society maintained a form of social welfare embedded in religious law, designed to ensure subsistence for its most vulnerable members. Among the key provisions were the gleaning laws, which required farmers to leave the edges of their fields and any overlooked sheaves for the needy. “*When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands*” (Deuteronomy 24:19, New International



Version [NIV], 2011). In this context, “the widow” often referred to older women who lacked male financial support, and therefore stood among society’s most vulnerable.

The placement of widows alongside orphans and foreigners in Israel’s legal codes (Deuteronomy 26:12) indicates that elderly women were viewed as a protected category deserving of ongoing material support. The triennial tithe, for example, was to be shared with “*the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow*” so they might “eat in your towns and be satisfied” (Deuteronomy 26:12, NIV, 2011). From a modern lens, such measures resemble food assistance programs and community food banks designed to meet the nutritional needs of those who are socially or economically isolated. Social work institutions today mirror these ancient structures through food security initiatives, community-based nutrition programs, and faith-based charity services.

In the New Testament, this communal ethos of elder care is further institutionalized. Acts 6:1 records one of the first major administrative challenges of the early church: a dispute over the distribution of food to widows. “*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food*” (Acts 6:1, NIV, 2011). The apostles responded by appointing seven men commonly viewed as the first deacons to manage the food program, ensuring fair and equitable service delivery (Acts 6:2–3). These “widows,” likely older women without spousal support, became early beneficiaries of structured church-based care.

The appointment of culturally representative leaders (e.g., Greek-named deacons) to resolve a service equity concern reflects principles found in modern culturally competent social work (McKinney & Hill, 2017). What began as an unmet need within a marginalized group led to a practical, programmatic response that addressed hunger and upheld community cohesion. This biblical narrative parallels the roles that today’s religious institutions and nonprofits play in community development particularly as partners with social service agencies addressing elder hunger, poverty, and isolation.



Moreover, the early church established eligibility criteria for continued support. In 1 Timothy 5:9–10, Paul outlines that only widows over sixty years of age, known for good works and without family support, should be “put on the list” for church aid (NIV, 2011). This closely resembles modern public welfare eligibility models that prioritize aid based on need, age, and absence of familial resources. Sixty years of age, in antiquity, marked a significant threshold, as average life expectancy at that time was far lower. Scholars suggest the age qualification reflected an acknowledgment of diminished capacity for employment or remarriage (Tamas et al., 2016). Thus, the church assumed a surrogate family role for older women, offering both sustenance and inclusion.

The Epistle of James adds a theological imperative to such care: “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...*” (James 1:27, NIV, 2011). Through elevating care for widows as a measure of authentic religious practice, James underscores a spiritual and moral obligation to care for society’s most vulnerable. In social work ethics, similar emphasis is placed on the notion that how a society treats its elderly and marginalized members is a test of its moral standing.

Acts 4:34–35 further demonstrates a communal pooling of resources: “*There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money... and it was distributed to anyone who had need*” (NIV, 2011). Though not limited to older adults, such generosity undoubtedly supported elderly members, especially those widowed or infirm. These texts echo principles found in cooperative housing models, benevolence funds, and mutual aid societies that address elder housing and subsistence in contemporary contexts.

This model of community and religious care for the elderly has had historical resonance. Monasteries, convents, and religious charities throughout Christian history established almshouses and shelters for the elderly poor. Today, many faith-based organizations continue this legacy by operating nursing homes, senior centers, and charitable foundations. Social workers frequently collaborate with these groups to deliver culturally and spiritually appropriate elder care (Knight, 2014).



Importantly, the tone of biblical elder care is not one of reluctant duty, but of compassionate solidarity. Widows in the early church were not passive recipients of aid but were encouraged to remain spiritually active (1 Timothy 5:5). This reflects modern social work's recognition of older adults as whole persons whose needs include not just material support, but relational, emotional, and spiritual inclusion. Programs such as friendly visiting, intergenerational mentorship, and parish nursing initiatives all echo this holistic approach.

In summary, Scripture presents a proactive, justice-driven vision of community support for the elderly. This tradition finds modern expression in both government programs and the ongoing efforts of community and faith-based organizations to ensure the dignity, welfare, and inclusion of older adults

### **Justice and Protection for Vulnerable Elders**

Beyond the provision of material needs, the Bible emphasizes justice for vulnerable elders and condemns those who exploit or oppress them. Widows often representing older women, are frequently grouped in scripture with marginalized populations such as orphans, foreigners, and the poor, reflecting God's special concern for these groups. In the Mosaic law, God warns: *"Do not mistreat or oppress a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry"* (Exodus 22:22–23, New International Version [NIV], 2011). This strong statement includes divine consequences for those who abuse or neglect the defenseless. Similarly, a curse pronounced at Mount Ebal declares: *"Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow"* (Deuteronomy 27:19, NIV, 2011). These texts portray elderly widows as legally protected persons under divine law, with community members morally and spiritually accountable for ensuring their welfare.

From a modern social work perspective, these verses highlight that elder care is not merely a charitable act but a matter of justice. Contemporary advocacy efforts against elder abuse, healthcare discrimination, or age-related poverty echo these concerns. Social work upholds that safeguarding older adult, particularly those who are isolated or disabled, is not an act of pity but a commitment to their rights and dignity (National Association of



Social Workers [NASW], 2021). The Bible's insistence on justice for widows validates this position, asserting that the mistreatment of elderly persons is both a moral and societal failure.

The biblical prophets frequently call for justice in defense of the vulnerable. Isaiah urges: *"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow"* (Isaiah 1:17, NIV, 2011). The metaphor of "pleading the case" evokes legal advocacy, suggesting that believers should serve as defenders for those unable to represent themselves which is an image consistent with the modern roles of elder rights attorneys, adult protective service agents, and social workers advocating on behalf of older adults. In ancient Israel and many contemporary societies, elderly widows often faced barriers to property ownership, inheritance rights, or legal representation. The prophetic demand for justice echoes the mission of modern advocates working to prevent elder exploitation and to protect their autonomy and access to justice.

Jesus continues this theme in the New Testament, delivering sharp rebukes to religious leaders who prey on the vulnerable. In Luke 20:47, He condemns those who *"devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers,"* promising they will be "punished most severely" (NIV, 2011; cf. Mark 12:40). This statement suggests financial abuse such as taking advantage of widows, perhaps through coercion, fraud, or manipulation under the guise of religious authority. In today's terms, this resembles financial elder abuse, where individuals in trusted positions exploit an older adult's resources. Such scenarios are the subject of intense scrutiny in contemporary elder law and protective services, and Jesus' harsh warning affirms the seriousness of such offenses.

James, too, raises the issue of withheld wages and oppression in a broader justice context: *"The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you"* (James 5:4, NIV, 2011). Though focused on laborers, the sentiment parallels the biblical indictment of those who defraud widows and orphans. As in Malachi 3:5, where God promises to judge those who "oppress the widows and the fatherless," the consistent message is that justice for the vulnerable, including the elderly, is central to God's moral order.



Psalm 68:5 refers to God as a “*father to the fatherless and a defender of widows*” (NIV, 2011), affirming divine identification with those who lack human protection. In modern terms, this can be understood as a theological foundation for creating systems that defend older persons’ rights and welfare through elder law protections, secure pension systems, and anti-discrimination statutes. Tamas et al. (2016) interpret this as a divine endorsement of ontological responsibility for elder welfare, extending beyond individual virtue to collective justice.

Narrative examples further illustrate community-based protection for the elderly. In the Book of Ruth, Boaz publicly redeems Naomi’s land at the city gate (Ruth 4:9–10), restoring her financial security and preserving her late husband’s lineage. This legal action carried out in the communal legal space ensured that Naomi, an elderly widow, would not be left destitute. Similarly, the appointment of deacons in Acts 6 to resolve distribution disparities between Hellenistic and Hebraic widows demonstrates the early church’s commitment to procedural fairness and equity in community services.

From these accounts, a robust biblical ethic emerges: justice for older persons is a collective and moral responsibility. It is not left to private discretion but is a public duty with spiritual consequences. This aligns with modern macro-level social work practices, including elder rights education, policy advocacy, and anti-ageism efforts. Just as biblical prophets and Jesus demanded fairness and condemned exploitation, social workers today continue to advocate for systems that ensure protection, dignity, and justice for all older adults.

### **Inclusion, Contribution, and Dignity in Later Life**

A comprehensive biblical view of the elderly extends beyond seeing them as passive recipients of care; it also emphasizes their ongoing value, participation, and contributions to the community. This outlook resonates with modern gerontological principles such as “active ageing” and “productive ageing,” which highlight social inclusion, engagement, and the empowerment of seniors. The Bible reflects this framework by presenting older individuals as reservoirs of wisdom, spiritual mentors, and moral exemplars.



Job 12:12 affirms the value of lived experience: *“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long-life bring understanding?”* (New International Version [NIV], 2011). Biblical elders often served as leaders and counselors. The term “elders of Israel,” referring to literal older men entrusted with community decisions, appears frequently throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 3:16; Deuteronomy 27:1). In the New Testament, “elders” (Greek: presbyteroi) functioned as both spiritual and administrative leaders in early Christian communities (Acts 14:23). Though it evolved into a formal title, the term originally connoted maturity and moral authority associated with age. This structure affirms the active role of elders in communal governance and spiritual guidance, an ideal that aligns with contemporary social work strategies that promote elder leadership through senior advisory councils, mentoring roles, and volunteerism (Knight, 2014).

In Titus 2:2–5, Paul articulates the mentoring responsibilities of older adults: *“Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent... then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children...”* (NIV, 2011). These verses assign older men and women clear mentoring and teaching roles, fostering moral development in the younger generation. The intergenerational relationships envisioned here mirror Erikson’s psychosocial stage of “generativity versus stagnation,” in which fulfillment in later life is achieved by guiding the next generation (Erikson, 1982). In social work, intergenerational mentorship programs and legacy-sharing initiatives similarly serve to strengthen the well-being and self-worth of elders while enriching youth with life-tested insights.

Scripture further emphasizes that old age is a period of ongoing purpose and vitality. Psalm 92:14 affirms: *“They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green”* (NIV, 2011). The imagery of a flourishing tree suggests continued relevance and productivity, reinforcing the belief that ageing is not synonymous with decline. Psalm 71:18 expresses a similar desire: *“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation.”* This prayer reflects the spiritual vocation of the elderly to instruct, testify,



and inspire. Contemporary gerontological practices such as life review therapy, digital storytelling, and legacy-building echo this biblical view by affirming that ageing adults have valuable knowledge and spiritual insight to pass on (Tamas et al., 2016).

Narratives throughout Scripture reinforce the active participation of older adults. Moses was 80 when he led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 7:7), and Anna, the prophetess in Luke 2:36–38, served as a spiritual witness in the temple despite her advanced age. In 1 Peter 5:5, the younger are exhorted to submit to their elders, indicating mutual respect and intergenerational balance. In many modern cultures, however, older adults are often socially segregated or institutionalized. The early church, by contrast, operated as an intergenerational family, where older and younger believers worshipped and shared meals together (Acts 2:42–47). This model supports today's calls for "ageing in place," community integration, and intergenerational community centers that resist the isolation of elders.

Respect for elders also includes patience and accommodation for their limitations. Leviticus 19:32, which commands believers to "stand up in the presence of the aged," may also suggest practical accommodations such as giving space, showing deference, or assisting frail elders. Paul advises Timothy: "*Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father*" (1 Timothy 5:1, NIV, 2011), highlighting the need for patience, gentleness, and cultural humility. This anticipates modern person-centered care and trauma-informed practice, which emphasize the importance of respectful engagement and autonomy for older clients.

A poignant example of respecting elder autonomy occurs in 2 Samuel 19:33–37, where Barzillai, an 80-year-old man, respectfully declines King David's invitation to live in royal luxury. Citing his age and desire to remain in his hometown, Barzillai's wishes are honored without coercion. This narrative affirms the elder's right to self-determination, a concept central to social work ethics (NASW, 2021). The principle remains: capable older adults must be consulted about their preferences and supported in living independently as long as possible.



In conclusion, the Bible does not present older persons as a burden to society, but as dignified and indispensable members of the community. They are to be included, empowered, and valued for their spiritual depth, life experience, and wisdom. This scriptural ethic aligns with strengths-based social work models, where emphasis is placed not only on addressing deficits, but also on enabling elders to thrive. Contemporary eldercare policies and social work interventions that promote empowerment, intergenerational solidarity, and purposeful ageing are rooted in this timeless biblical vision of inclusion and reverence for older adults.

### **Conclusion**

From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical vision for the care of older persons is clear, consistent, and remarkably comprehensive. The scriptures examined reveal a multifaceted framework for elder welfare that aligns closely with modern social work principles. The Bible calls for: reverence and dignity toward the aged (combating ageism and affirming each person's intrinsic value as an image-bearer of God); family responsibility for caregiving (promoting intergenerational reciprocity and emotional bonds within the household); community and faith-based support systems (ensuring that no elder is neglected, even in the absence of family); justice and protection for vulnerable elders (advocating for the defense of rights and condemnation of abuse); and purposeful inclusion of the elderly (recognizing their wisdom and encouraging their ongoing contributions to community life).

These mandates are not only spiritually grounded but also offer practical insights. Societies that implement such principles create environments where older adults are valued, supported, and empowered. The commandment to "*Honor your father and your mother*" (Exodus 20:12, New International Version [NIV], 2011) finds modern parallels in filial responsibility laws and ethical



expectations for family caregiving. Biblical injunctions to “*plead the case of the widow*” (Isaiah 1:17, NIV, 2011) are echoed in elder abuse prevention laws, social work advocacy, and legal protections for impoverished seniors. The early church’s systematic care for widows through needs assessments, distribution of food, and enrollment for ongoing support, mirrors principles of case management and targeted social service provision. Similarly, the inclusion of elders in communal leadership and teaching (Titus 2:2–5; Psalm 71:18) supports initiatives that engage older adults through volunteerism, mentorship, and public service.

Viewed through a biblical lens, elder care is not merely a matter of practicality or economics, it is a moral and spiritual imperative. James 1:27 declares that “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.*” This positions elder care as a form of sacred responsibility. To neglect or exploit an older person is, biblically speaking, a grave injustice; to care for them is to honor God (McKinney & Hill, 2017). Faith-based practitioners in social work may find renewed purpose in this scriptural foundation, while those in secular settings can still draw upon the Bible’s enduring ethical insight into human dignity, equity, and compassion.

Practically, these biblical values can enrich and strengthen social work interventions. Faith communities can revitalize their historical role in elder care by partnering with social agencies, offering holistic support systems, and advocating for elder justice. Public policy rooted in the biblical concern for the vulnerable may prioritize support for caregivers, secure pensions, equitable healthcare, and robust elder protection laws. Moreover, the emphasis on family and community in



scripture suggests that long-term solutions should avoid isolating or institutionalizing the elderly when alternative, community-rooted models exist.

In conclusion, biblical teachings and modern social work values converge around a shared vision: a society in which elders are protected, honored, and integrated. Both perspectives advocate for systems where older persons experience dignity, justice, and meaningful engagement. As societies face an unprecedented demographic shift toward ageing populations, the biblical vision becomes increasingly relevant. It calls upon families, communities, and leaders to work collaboratively, just as social workers do in multidisciplinary teams, to secure the welfare of older generations.

This ethic is not merely historical; it is a future-oriented call to action. Proverbs 30:17 warns of disgrace for those who mock their elders, while Luke 6:38 reminds us, “*With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*” The moral is simple: a society that honors its elders ensures its own longevity and prosperity. In embracing the biblical call to care for the aged, we affirm not only faith and tradition, but the essence of human solidarity and social justice which is a legacy worth preserving for generations to come.



## References

Erikson, E. H. (1982). *The life cycle completed*. Norton.

Knight, D. A. (2014). Perspectives on ageing and the elderly in the Hebrew Bible. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 68(2), 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964313518179>

McKinney, S. J., & Hill, R. J. (2017). Care for the elderly: Some perspectives from Scripture. *Pastoral Review*, 13(4), 58–63.

National Association of Social Workers. (2021). Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

Tamas, I., Tamas, C., Aginitei-Zbranca, A., & Poroch, V. (2016). Ageing in the Holy Scripture: The human responsibility for the elderly grounded on ontology and bioethics. *Journal of Clinical Research & Bioethics*, 7(5), 283. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2155-9627.1000283>

The Holy Bible, New International Version. (2011). Zondervan.



**REBELLION AND RESTORATION: ANALYZING APOSTASY AMONG LAGOS  
CHRISTIAN YOUTHS THROUGH MOUNT ZION'S MOVIES, *THE PRODIGAL ONES*, AND  
*CORPER'S LODGE***

**By**

**Kehinde G. Coker\***

**C/O Institute of African & Diaspora Studies**

**University of Lagos**

**+234802 269 1649; cokerkehinde1302@gmail.com**

**&**

**Prof. Francis O. Falako**

**Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts,**

**University of Lagos**

**+234803 359 5872; ffalako@unilag.edu.ng**

**Abstract**

*This study examines *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* by Mount Zion Faith Ministries as religious and socio-cultural narratives that confront the phenomenon of apostasy and spiritual restoration among Lagos youths. The films portray the struggles of individuals who abandon their Christian faith in pursuit of personal freedom, materialism, and social acceptance, highlighting the tension between traditional religious values and contemporary youth identities in Nigeria. Guided by four key research questions, the study explores: (1) how the films depict apostasy among Lagos youths, (2) the role of faith-based media in shaping public discourse on apostasy and religious tolerance, (3) the theological alignment of the films with Christian doctrines of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and (4) the broader socio-cultural implications of youth disillusionment with institutional religion. Using thematic analysis, Cultivation theory and audience responses, the research finds that both films function as moral cautionary tales and redemptive narratives. They address pressing issues such as rebellion, peer influence, family breakdown, and the quest for identity and autonomy. The emphasis on repentance and reconciliation reveals how faith-based media can reshape perceptions of apostasy while promoting dialogue on spiritual resilience and religious freedom. By situating these films within Nigeria's theological and cultural landscape, the study underscores their relevance in addressing the evolving role of religion in youth identity formation and moral decision-making.*



Keywords: Apostasy, *The Prodigal Ones*, Mount Zion Faith Ministries (MZFM), Lagos Youths

## **Introduction**

Apostasy, or the abandonment of religious faith, has become an increasing concern among youths in Lagos, Nigeria (Igwe, 2021). As a rapidly urbanizing and cosmopolitan city, Lagos presents a unique socio-cultural landscape where Christian values frequently intersect with other religions and modern influences, such as interfaith marriage, secularism, materialism, and peer pressure. Many young people, in pursuit of personal ambitions and social acceptance, often drift away from their faith, leading to spiritual crises and moral dilemmas. The number of young people leaving their childhood faith has rapidly increased (McClure, 2020). In particular, the influence of social media on the lives of emerging young adults has affected both their identity and their faith (Beckham, 2022). Citing Krause et al. (2021) and Stonestreet & Kunkle (2020), Beckham (2022) notes that teens spent an average of four hours daily on social media in the 1990s, a figure that has now soared to almost nine hours daily (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2023). Social media now occupies more time in a teen's day than traditional media, such as books, magazines, and television (American Psychological Association, 2018). Moreover, young adults are allowing social media influencers to define their identity rather than their faith (Huff, 2022). Christian drama has long served as an effective tool for addressing issues of faith, morality, and redemption, particularly among young audiences. The Mount Zion Film Productions (MZFP), a pioneering Christian film organization in Nigeria, plays a significant role in using faith-based films to engage with contemporary societal issues. Two of its notable productions, *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge*, explore the theme of apostasy, shedding



light on the factors that contribute to spiritual rebellion and the journey toward restoration (Bamiloye, 2023). Inspired by the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32, *The Prodigal Ones* presents a narrative that mirrors the struggles of young Nigerians who, influenced by worldly temptations, wander away from their faith. The film portrays their sources of spiritual confusion, moral compromise, and their eventual realization of the emptiness of a life disconnected from God. More importantly, it emphasizes themes of materialism, divine mercy, repentance, and redemption. Furthermore, the film demonstrates how faith communities and personal conviction play crucial roles in guiding individuals back to spiritual wholeness. This study is anchored in Cultivation Theory, proposed by George Gerbner in the 1970s. Cultivation Theory posits that long-term exposure to media content can shape individuals' perceptions of reality, influencing their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. The theory suggests that the media does not directly change audience opinions but rather cultivates a gradual shaping of worldviews, reinforcing dominant cultural norms and ideologies over time (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Media serves as a powerful agent of socialization, portraying certain social realities and norms that viewers internalize, leading to the cultivation of shared cultural beliefs and values. This is particularly relevant to Christian drama, where repeated exposure to narratives infused with Christian teachings and values can contribute to shaping audiences' perceptions and reinforcing religious ideologies. Relevant to Mount Zion's *The Prodigal Ones* and Corper's *Lodge*, the Cultivation Theory provides a lens to examine how films support Christian ideals and principles. By portraying characters who exemplify Christian virtues, confronting moral dilemmas through a biblical perspective, and illustrating the consequences of both righteous and sinful behaviours, these films cultivate a collective consciousness that aligns with Christian doctrines. Furthermore, the Cultivation Theory helps explain how films promote social transformation by bolstering moral values, encouraging faith-based decision-



making, and fostering an environment where Christian teachings shape individual and communal behaviour. By applying Cultivation Theory to this study, we can assess how Christian films function not just as entertainment but as cultural tools that shape religious and moral consciousness within society. This study analyzes the phenomenon of apostasy among Lagos youths through the lens of *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge*, examining the socio-cultural and psychological factors that often lead to spiritual rebellion. It also explores how Christian drama, as exemplified by *Mount Zion's* storytelling, serves as a reflective, corrective, and redemptive apparatus in faith-based discourse. By offering a compelling portrayal of spiritual struggles, failures, and restoration, *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* not only provide entertainment but also serve as a medium for self-examination, evangelism, and moral realignment.

### **An Overview of *The Prodigal Ones***

Rosy and Bayo were a young couple known for their dedication to the church. They were vibrant, active, and always eager to serve, especially during their years of financial hardship. They prayed earnestly for a breakthrough, and in due time, God answered their prayers. Bayo secured a well-paying job, and Rosy's business flourished. However, as their financial status improved, their commitment to God waned. They became extravagant, attended lavish parties, and neglected their roles in the church. Church programs became an afterthought as their passion faded. Their pastor reached out to them, reminded them of their declining faith and the love they once had for God. Yet, despite his counsel, Rosy and Bayo refused to listen. Soon, their home erupted in turmoil; Bayo and Rosy began to disagree, leading to frequent domestic violence, while their once godly children became disobedient and wayward. The situation escalated when Bayo began to have terrifying dreams of a masquerade flogging



him mercilessly, which manifested in real life as he suffered from partial paralysis. On her part, Rosy's health began to deteriorate just as their child, Teniola, faced the prospect of dropping out of school. It was at this critical moment of desperation that Rosy and Bayo realized how far they had strayed; they turned back to God and repented of their sins. They were restored and united once again, and Rosy and Bayo recommitted themselves to God. Their home found peace, their children were restored, and their faith was rekindled. As their pastor reminded them, "Why have you forgotten the vows you made to Him in the days of your distress?" From that day forward, their testimony became a beacon of hope for others, proving that no matter how far one strays, God's arms are always open for those who return in true repentance.

### **An Overview of Corper's Lodge**

Corper's Lodge is a Nigerian Christian drama series that depicts the lives of five university graduates undergoing the compulsory National Youth Service (NYSC) as they navigate faith, identity, and personal struggles while sharing a lodge. Amaka, a bold content creator, clashes with Femi, a former youth pastor whose past and pride lead to chaos. Alongside them are Emeka, the comedic sidekick; Daniel, a devoted believer struggling to live out his calling; and Clara, the spiritual guide whose quiet strength anchors the group. As secrets unravel and relationships are tested, the characters confront issues such as spiritual complacency, temptation, guilt, and redemption. The movie offers a raw, relatable look at the Christian pilgrimage in today's world, illustrating the challenges of growth, the consequences of poor choices, and the grace that leads to transformation.

### **Methodology**



This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, combining a bibliographic review with empirical data collection through interviews and surveys. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with a total of twenty participants purposively selected from Lagos, Nigeria. The sample comprised seven campus fellowship leaders and officers, five students of Religious Studies, four chaplains, and four fellowship members, all drawn from various Christian denominations within and outside the University of Lagos. Among the 20 participants, there were eleven males and nine females. Data collection took place between April and June 2025, using a structured interview guide to facilitate interviews that lasted no more than 20 minutes, with recordings made using a tape recorder. Most interviews were conducted in English and were held face-to-face, both individually and in groups, while the study also utilized Google Forms to broaden accessibility. A trained research assistant handled transcription, and where permission was granted, names and statuses of participants were reflected in the documentation. The researchers thematically analyzed the data.

### **Research Questions**

The under listed questions guided the study.

1. How do *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* portray apostasy among Lagos youths?
2. To what extent do faith-based media shape public discourse on apostasy and restoration?
3. How do the films align with theological perspectives on repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation?
4. In what ways do these films reflect the broader socio-cultural implications of youths' disillusionment with conventional religions?

### **Discussion of Findings**



*Understanding Apostasy among Lagos Youths.*

Mount Zion's *The Prodigal Ones* and Corper's *Lodge* effectively reflect the spiritual crises facing Lagos youths. These films portray apostasy not just as rebellion, but as a complex and often painful journey shaped by both societal and internal pressures. Peer pressure and materialism are recurring themes in audience reflections. Several respondents pointed out that "peer influence, a flawed parental system," and "worldly pleasures and wayward friends" are significant contributors to the spiritual decline of many youths. The films illustrate how "the fear of what people will say" and "the need to explore" lead young Christians to question or abandon their faith, highlighting the fragility of youthful convictions in a consumerist and status-driven society. The depiction of material success as a factor in spiritual decline is a compelling choice in the films. Sarah noted that "people are usually more spiritual when in need and less spiritual when blessed," while Ayomide elaborated, saying, "when you finally have what you have been asking God for, you become so comfortable... You forget about the source of your wealth." The storyline reveals how the pursuit of wealth can consume one's spiritual discipline, leading to procrastination, laziness, and ultimately apostasy. One respondent succinctly summarized this progression: "You start by forgetting to pray... then forget to go to church... and this kills your spiritual life." In relation to dominant media narratives, the films challenge the glorification of quick wealth and the secular media's portrayal of prosperity as the ultimate goal. One viewer noted, "the media portrays deceit, fraud, and crime as the surest way to make it big," contrasting sharply with the films' Christian ethos of hard work, perseverance, and moral integrity. By doing so, the films present a counter-narrative that urges youths to consider the spiritual costs of negligence and unbridled ambition. Significantly, *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* humanize apostates, portraying them as "complex characters with relatable struggles." The audience is invited into the inner turmoil of the



characters, fostering empathy and helping them avoid similar pitfalls. As one viewer remarked, "the film provides background information on the apostates' past experiences, struggles, and reasons for leaving their faith," which allows the audience to "understand their perspective, relate, and show empathy." The emotional and spiritual journeys of the characters are enhanced through narrative techniques such as dialogue, symbolism, and character arcs. For example, scenes where characters spend lavishly at parties while neglecting their church commitments symbolize spiritual imbalance. One viewer pointed out the symbolism of the masquerade in *The Prodigal Ones*; to her, it "represents darkness," while the church symbolizes "light." These elements create powerful metaphors that help the audience comprehend the gravity of apostasy and the hope of redemption. Character arcs are transformative as well. A protagonist's journey from spiritual fervour to complacency and eventual restoration embodies the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. As another viewer noted, "the journey from wealth and privilege to spiritual crisis and redemption serves as a powerful narrative arc." Ultimately, both films function as tools for spiritual instruction and moral persuasion. They do not simply depict apostasy as an unmitigated failure but as a diversion on a longer path toward repentance and reconciliation. By demonstrating that "apostates are also human... not above temptations," the films create space for compassionate dialogue and encourage the belief that "no matter how far you fall, you can be restored by God."

*Role of Faith-Based Media in Shaping Public Discourse on Apostasy and Leniency toward Apostates.*

Faith-based films like *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* play an increasingly vital role in shaping public discourse on apostasy and religious tolerance in Nigeria, particularly among Christian youths. These films address the often-taboo subject of religious backsliding, making it "a topic that should be discussed in our environment," emphasizing that "we shouldn't shy away from it." By portraying



characters who struggle with faith, the films encourage audiences to reflect on the internal and external factors leading to spiritual decline, as well as on their own personal experiences. Viewers can identify with various scenes and characters, expressing, "me too." Importantly, the films personify apostates, allowing viewers to empathize with them rather than vilify or stigmatize them. One response noted that *The Prodigal Ones* offers "a visual display of the inner struggle every young believer experiences," which in turn "gives hope and assurance that with perseverance, there will ultimately be a happy ending." Through this portrayal, the films contribute to a more compassionate understanding of those who stray from their faith.

At the same time, responses acknowledged the dual nature of the films' influence on leniency toward backsliders. On one hand, they "encourage understanding and compassion," particularly by illustrating that "apostates are human beings too and may not always be right." On the other hand, there were concerns that the films' portrayal of traditional religious elements, such as depicting the Egungun (masquerade) as a sign of calamity, could unintentionally "instigate religious conflict." Additionally, Falako (2024) expressed concerns regarding the persistent negative and retrogressive portrayals of African realities in evangelical films. Despite this tension, the films remain powerful tools for spiritual and moral persuasion. They convey messages through storytelling, reinforcing Christian values like repentance, humility, and perseverance. As one viewer reflected, "Watching a film like this helps us learn the lessons from the story." Another described it as "a tool for steadfastness in Christian faith." These narratives, grounded in everyday struggles, allow viewers to reflect on their own spiritual choices, making the films not only entertaining but also a source of moral guidance for a generation seeking clarity and conviction in their beliefs and daily lives.



*Repentance, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in The Prodigal Ones and Corpers' Lodge.*

Mount Zion's The Prodigal Ones and Corpers' Lodge provide a theologically rich exploration of Christian doctrines such as repentance, divine mercy, spiritual restoration, and reconciliation. Through emotionally charged narratives and spiritually grounded character arcs, the films portray how even the most wayward can find their way back to God through genuine repentance. Many viewers emphasized that "God is always willing to accept us whenever we genuinely repent, regardless of our past sins." This core message is further affirmed by another respondent who stated that "the love of God knows no end, regardless of the weight of sin." This aligns closely with the New Testament's teachings on forgiveness, such as Jesus' instruction to Peter to forgive "seventy times seven" times (Matthew 18:21-22), underscoring the limitless nature of divine mercy. Moreover, the connection between repentance, confession, and vulnerability is one of the film's most notable theological reflections. Viewers observed that confession plays a key role in triggering mercy: "The husband's confession to the pastor" and "the wife pleading for forgiveness while her daughter is in the hospital" were highlighted as pivotal turning points. These moments illustrate that repentance is "not just a feeling but an action", a theme resonant with biblical teachings found throughout the Psalms and Epistles. For example, Psalm 51 captures David's response when confronted by the prophet Nathan: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion, blot out my transgressions." However, such themes can be inadequate in many relationships. Suffering is portrayed as an instrument of divine correction and grace, reflecting biblical views of trials as a means of spiritual refinement. As one viewer summarized, "Spiritual decline brings a lot of baggage, and after restoration, the grace of God abounds." The films depict suffering as a gateway to reflection, humility, and transformation. One



response drew a parallel with Paul's letter to Philemon: "The suffering makes them think about returning to God," similar to how the runaway slave, Onesimus, was sent back not merely as a slave but as a brother in Christ (Philemon 1:10). The concept of grace is intricately woven into the narrative. One viewer eloquently stated, "Grace reunites us with God... it is by grace, through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, that we can be reconciled." This understanding reflects a profound interpretation of grace not as a passive gift but as a dynamic, redemptive power that empowers the believer to return to right standing with God, self, and society. In terms of reconciliation, the films illustrate a multi-layered process: reconciliation with God, within the family, and with the church. Scenes depicting family worship and spiritual confession underscore the home as the primary site of spiritual renewal. "Once you are at peace with God," noted Alozie Esther, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Lagos, "then you are at peace with anything and anyone"(personal communication on 5<sup>th</sup> November,2025). The church, as Christ's family, is also portrayed as a supportive structure that facilitates holistic healing: "The film reveals hidden truths to the church leader and helps him bring back the lost members."

#### *Socio-Cultural Implications of Youth Disillusionment with Conventional Religions.*

In *Corpers' Lodge* and *The Prodigal Ones*, one sees more than just entertainment; these films provide a deep and urgent reflection on how societal and cultural shifts are impacting young people's views of faith. Some participants opined that many Nigerian youths, especially in cities like Lagos, are increasingly disillusioned with institutional Christianity. These films capture that struggle by illustrating Characters in stories that grapple with relatable flaws, often find themselves caught between the expectations of the Church and the demands of the world. Kemi Adebari emphasized, "Peer group



influence plays a major role in the life of an individual... they can either make or mar you." This sentiment resonates strongly through characters like Amanda and Femi. Amanda, a bold and trendy content creator, symbolizes the youth who prioritize digital fame and social validation over spiritual growth. Her narrative illustrates how social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, often replace church attendance for this generation. On the opposite end, Femi embodies another aspect of this crisis: spiritual fatigue. Once a passionate youth pastor, he strayed into worldly pleasures, pursuing "fresh fish" (women of questionable virtue) until he was left with metaphorical "fresh bread" (the Word of God) and a sense of brokenness. His downfall reveals how unchecked ego and the desire for peer validation can undermine even the most promising spiritual callings. The tension between biblical values and modern lifestyles is not merely a dramatic element; it reflects a deeper issue. Funmi Oluwadare (personal communication on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2025) noted, "The love of money and an ungodly social life" often leads to a disconnection from God. This observation underscores how materialism and a pleasure-driven culture are displacing genuine spiritual commitment. Moreover, "The Prodigal Ones" addresses the impact of family and the loss of generational faith. One contributor remarked, "A child can suffer for the sins of the parents. If the parents don't have a relationship with God, the child's journey will be difficult." The film explores how spiritual disconnection does not happen in isolation but is part of a broader process of apostasy, intricately tied to one's roots. Importantly, both films strive to avoid a tone of condemnation and stigmatization; instead, they offer an invitation to reflect. Daniel's unwavering decision to serve in a rural orphanage, despite his family's disapproval, serves as a powerful metaphor: when lived out, purpose can transcend societal noise. His journey reminds us that "every person's purpose is an answer to someone's prayer." Ultimately, these narratives reveal that apostasy among youth is rarely a deliberate rejection of God; rather, it often



results from cultural conflict, digital distractions, and an ongoing search for identity. The Church must acknowledge this reality and respond with grace, relevance, and a genuine willingness to listen. As a bride to nation-builder, the church must invest in massive human right educational programme needed to raise the level of general consciousness in any given area so as to arouse actively the people's initiative and participation in nation building (Oko, 2018)

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Both films vividly depict the silent crises faced by Christian youths as they navigate a landscape filled with cultural trends, peer pressure, and spiritual conviction. These stories illustrate that rebellion often begins slightly but can escalate quickly when purpose, mentorship, and faith are absent. Nevertheless, the films show that restoration is always possible. Daniel's journey in "Corper's Lodge" mirrors the experiences of many young believers today: pressured, tested, but ultimately called back to their purpose. It serves as a reminder that God still calls, even amidst doubt and distraction. To effectively reach this generation, the Church must mentor the youths and have constant honest, relevant, and lovely engagement. Faith must feel real once again.



## References

- Adelola, R. (2021). Movies can influence society positively and negatively. *Punch Newspaper*.  
<https://punchng.com/movies-can-influence-society-positively-negatively-rotimi-adelola/>
- Akin-Otiko, A. (2024). Mount Zion Movies Ministries as a religious infrastructure: Lessons for film producers. *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology*, 14(2), 35–48.  
<https://doi.org/10.4314/gjrt.v14i2.4>
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2023). *Social media and teens* (Fact Sheet No. 100).  
[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Social-Media-and-Teens-100.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Social-Media-and-Teens-100.aspx)
- Beckham, C. L. (2022). *Rethinking connection: Spirituality, social media, and crisis of faith in young adults* (Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University). Liberty University Digital Commons.
- Edo, V. O. (2024). Religion and films: A socio-historical analysis. In A. Akin-Otiko, T. Olokodana-James, F. O. Falako, & F. E. Nweke (Eds.)62–71). IADS.
- Falako, F. O. (2024). Semiotic dimensions and filmic projections of African socio-cultural realities in selected Mount Zion films. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjrt.v14i2.2>
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 172–199. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x>
- Huff, S. R. (2022). *Who are you following? Pursuing Jesus in a social media–obsessed world*. Thomas Nelson.
- Igwe, L. (2021). Na scam: Why young people are abandoning religion in Nigeria. *Modern Ghana*.  
<https://www.modernghana.com/>



- Krause, H., Baum, K., Baumann, A., & Krasnova, H. (2019). Unifying the detrimental and beneficial effects of social network site use on self-esteem: A systematic literature review. *Media Psychology*, 24(1), 10–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1656646>
- McClure, P. K. (2020). The buffered technological self: Finding associations between internet use and religiosity. *Social Compass*, 67(3), 461–478. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620922128>
- Ogunbiyi, D. O., Oyebanji, I. T., & Olajugbagbe, O. M. (2025). The sociological impact of youth restiveness on Christianity in Mushin, Lagos State. *African Journal of Religion and Theological Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.62154/ajrts.2025.03.010618>
- Ogunleye, F. (2019). Christian dramas and the Nigerian film industry: A cultural analysis. *African Cinema Review*, 12(3), 67–82.
- Oki, O. J. (2024). Doing Christian drama with Paul’s evangelical approach: Studying Mike Bamiloye’s characterization in *Esin Ajoji* and *Shackles*. *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10820381>
- Oki, O. J., & Adetoro, S. F. (2024). Examining the role of Christian drama in facilitating social transformation: A study of two Mount Zion Film Productions movies. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2024.v06i02.003>
- Oko, A. E. (2018). The Place of the Church towards Peace Process for Sustainable Development. *Akwa Ibom University Journal of Arts. AKSUJA*. Maiden edition. 29-42.
- Olayiwola, E. (2019). Nigerian evangelical film genres: The spectacle of the spiritual. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32(2), 115–130.



## **DANCE ACROSS GENERATIONS FROM ELDERS TO CHILDREN: THE UNIQUENESS OF AKWAOBIO THEATRE TROUPE IN AKWA IBOM STATE**

**EKAETTE BRIAN EDEM (Ph.D) & NSISONG ASUQUO AKPAN**

**Department of Performing Arts**

**Akwa Ibom State University**

**Obio Akpa Campus, Oruk Anam**

**[ekaettebrian@aksu.edu.ng](mailto:ekaettebrian@aksu.edu.ng)**

### **ABSTRACT**

Beyond its entertainment value and its role as a cultural marker, dance is a force that transcends boundaries and embodies a unifying power. It is a bridge that spans time, space and cultural differences, connecting human to its past and to each other in ways that defy easy categorization. Akwa Ibom State, a region steeped in cultural richness, boasts a wealth of traditional dances and troupes, each with its own distinctive character. Amidst the rapid transformations of modern society, it has become imperative to preserve, promote and document these dances, lest they fade away with time. This paper examines the vital role played by Akwaobio Theatre Troupe in preserving and transmitting Akwa Ibom State's unique dance traditions across generations. In the course of preserving these dances and making the accessible to the youths, Akwaobio Theatre Troupe ensures that the knowledge and skill associated with these art forms remain alive and dynamic. The study also explored importance of intergenerational understanding and the benefits of cultural tourism, highlighting the potential of Akwaobio Theatre Troupe's initiatives in promoting greater appreciation and awareness of Akwa Ibom State's cultural heritage. Beyond mere preservation and promotion, the troupe's initiative foster intergenerational understanding and respect for both young and old. This harmonious collaboration between the different generations nurtures the growth and evolution of Akwa Ibom's dance traditions, ensuring they remain vital and relevant for years to come.



Keywords: Dance, Generations, Uniqueness, Theatre, Troupe

#### Introduction:

Dance is in essence the coordinated and rhythmic movement of the body to music within a defined space. According to Ekaette Edem, “Dance is truly a mirror that reflects the myriad aspects of a culture. Each geographical location, religious belief, political and historical experience, biological, social, and economic factor adds a distinct layer to the depth and richness of a particular dance form” (161). Yet, it is more than just a physical form of expression. At its core, dance is a conduit for conveying ideas, emotions, and stories, leveraging the powerful language of movement and music to speak directly to the hearts and minds of its audience. Through this language, dancers can express a spectrum of human experiences, from love and joy to grief and conflict. They become storytellers, conveying complex narratives and evoking a visceral response in their viewers, forging a connection that transcends verbal communication. Walter Sorell asserts that, dance is “as old as man and his desire



to express himself to communicate his joys and sorrows, morn with the most immediate instrument: his body” (10).

To borrow the words of Sorell, dance, like culture, is as old as humankind itself. Ekaette Edem affirms that “culture in its diversity is distinguished by virtues of its specific historical evolution and its unique characteristics, making each culture structurally unique and original (5). Precisely, the multifaceted nature of culture is a product of its diverse historical trajectory and distinctive features. No two cultures are exactly alike, as each had developed in its unique time, and context. This inherent singularity imbues each culture with its own identity, rooted in customs, traditions, beliefs, languages, artistic expressions, and shared narratives. These elements woven together over time to create a rich pastry of unique characteristics that make each culture one of a kind, worthy of preservation and celebration. As such, dance is an essential part of a society’s way of life, embodying the beliefs, values and traditions of a people in a manner unique to them. This uniqueness is manifested in the movements, music, and costumes associated with the dance form, reflecting the distinctive character and history of the community from which it originates. Further, this cultural significance lends an inherent value to dance beyond its aesthetic appeal. It becomes a repository of collective memory and identity, a medium for storytelling, and a conduit for cultural expression and preservation. The essence of a people is captured within the rhythmic beats and the fluid movements of their dances, serving as a source of pride, continuity, and social cohesion.

Beyond its entertainment value and its role as a cultural market, dance is a force that transcends these boundaries and embodies a unifying power. It is a bridge that spans time, space, and cultural differences, connecting us to our past and to each other in ways that defy easy categorisation. Dance is the life blood of human expression, the pulse that drives our cultural revolution. It unites us through