

Christ-likeness in Context: A Case Study of Discipleship and Formation in Uganda

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Abstract: This research project explores the concept of Christ-likeness in the context of discipleship and formation in Uganda. Through a qualitative case study approach, this project examines the diverse expressions of Christ-likeness in Uganda, and how cultural, social, and economic contexts shape discipleship and formation. The study aims to identify commonalities and differences in the understanding and practice of Christ-likeness across different Christian denominations and traditions in Uganda. The findings of this research will provide recommendations for the global Church on how to learn from and be enriched by the diverse expressions of Christ-likeness in Uganda, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ in diverse contexts.

Keywords: Christ-likeness, discipleship, formation, Uganda, contextual theology, worldview transformation

I. Introduction:

Uganda, a country located in East Africa, has a population of approximately 43 million people (UBOS, 2020). The country boasts a diverse cultural and religious landscape, with Christianity being the dominant religion (Kaggwa, 2016).

According to the 2014 census, 85% of Ugandans identify as Christian, with the majority being Catholic or Anglican (UBOS, 2014).

Despite the high percentage of Christians in Uganda, the country faces numerous challenges, including poverty (World Bank, 2020), corruption (Transparency International, 2020), and HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2020). These challenges have led to a growing interest in understanding the role of Christianity in addressing these issues (Gifford, 2009; Ward, 2017) which are on the rise globally.

The concept of Christ-likeness is central to Christian discipleship and formation. The Apostle Peter displays this by stating in 2 Peter 1:4-7: "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love," displaying the character in detail of a disciple of Christ to the reader with contrast to his or her old lifestyle.

Romans 8:29, states "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters, showing who a Disciple is in the context of the fallen world, to the recipient of God's word.

As Jesus modelled servanthood and humility, believers are called to emulate His character (Matthew 20:25-28; Philippians 2:5-8).

In Uganda, where Christianity is the dominant religion, understanding Christ-likeness is crucial for effective discipleship and formation.

This study is significant seeing that It explores how Ugandan Christians express Christ-likeness, shedding light on the intersection of faith and culture (Hiebert, 2008), it examines Christ-likeness in discipleship, this research can inform strategies for making discipleship more effective (Hull, 2013) and the findings can contribute to a deeper understanding of Christ-likeness in diverse contexts, enriching the global Church (Walls, 2002).

This research aims to identify commonalities and differences in understanding and practicing Christ-likeness across Christian denominations in Uganda, examine how cultural, social, and economic contexts shape discipleship and formation in Uganda then offer insights for the global Church on contextualizing discipleship and formation.

The purpose is to contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ in diverse contexts, ultimately enriching the global Church.

This research project aims to contribute to this discussion by exploring the concept of Christ-likeness in the context of discipleship and formation in Uganda.

Problem Description:

The concept of Christ-likeness in discipleship and formation is crucial for the growth and maturity of Christians globally.

However, in Uganda, a country with a significant Christian population (UBOS, 2014), there is a notable gap in understanding how Christ-likeness is expressed and practiced in diverse cultural contexts. This knowledge gap hinders the development of effective discipleship strategies tailored to Uganda's unique socio-cultural landscape.

Despite the dominance of Christianity in Uganda, with 85% of the population identifying as Christian (UBOS, 2014), there is limited research on Christ-likeness in the context of discipleship and formation.

This lack of understanding affects the church's ability to nurture Christ-like character in its adherents, potentially impacting their witness and service in a predominantly Christian society facing numerous challenges, including poverty and corruption (World Bank, 2020; Transparency International, 2020).

Investigating Christ-likeness in Uganda's context can provide valuable insights for the global church, enriching its understanding of discipleship and formation in diverse settings (Walls, 2002). This research aims to contribute to bridging the knowledge gap and enhancing the church's effectiveness in nurturing Christ-like character in Uganda and beyond.

This study seeks to explore the concept of Christ-likeness in the context of discipleship and formation in Uganda, identifying commonalities and differences in its expression across Christian denominations and cultural contexts.

II. Research Objectives:

1. Explore diverse expressions of Christ-likeness: Investigate Christ-likeness in Uganda's context.
2. Examine contextual influences, Analyze cultural, social, and economic factors shaping discipleship.
3. Identify commonalities and differences, Compare Christ-likeness understanding and practice across denominations.
4. Provide global Church recommendations: Offer insights for learning from Uganda's diverse Christ-likeness expressions.

III. Methodology:

This study adopts a bespoke research design, tailored to investigate the nuances of Christ-likeness in Uganda's unique cultural and theological landscape. The methodology comprises:

Contextual Literature Review that will embed a meticulous examination of existing scholarship on discipleship and formation in Uganda, with a focus on contextualizing Christ-likeness within the country's diverse cultural and theological milieu.

. Embedded relevant Case Studies with In-depth analyses of select churches, communities, or movements, leveraging mixed-methods approaches to uncover the complex dynamics of Christ-likeness in Uganda.

. Participatory Interviews and Focus Groups using Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including church leaders, theologians, and practitioners, complemented by focus groups with laypeople and community members, to capture the multifaceted nature of Christ-likeness.

. Cross-Denominational Comparative Analysis which entails a rigorous comparison of data across various Christian denominations and traditions, aimed at identifying convergences and divergences in Christ-likeness expressions.

By employing this methodology, this study aims to contribute original insights into the contextual expression of Christ-likeness in Uganda.

IV. Theoretical Framework:

This research project is grounded in an innovative theoretical framework that integrates Contextual Theology (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004) with Worldview Transformation Theory (Hiebert, 2008). Building upon these foundational concepts, this study proposes a Contextual Christ-likeness Framework, which seeks to understand the embodiment of Christ-like character within Uganda's unique cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Key Components:

. Contextualization of Christ-likeness that entails Understanding how Christ-likeness is expressed and embodied in diverse Ugandan contexts, reflecting the biblical call to be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1) in various cultural settings.

. Worldview Transformation by examining the role of worldview transformation in shaping Christ-like character and behavior, as Paul writes, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

. Cultural, Social, and Economic Intersectionality which Analyzeshow these contextual factors intersect and influence the expression of Christ-likeness, echoing the apostle Paul's emphasis on becoming "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:22) in different contexts.

The contextual Christ-likeness Framework posits that Christ-likeness is not a static concept, but rather a dynamic and contextualized expression of faith that is shaped by the complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors.

This framework seeks to capture the nuances of Christ-likeness in Uganda's context, providing a deeper understanding of what it means to embody Christ-like character in diverse settings, as Jesus modeled in his incarnational ministry (John 1:14).

V. Results & Discussion:

This chapter presents the findings of the study, exploring the concept of Christ-likeness in the context of discipleship and formation in Uganda. The results are discussed in relation to the research objectives, methodology, and theoretical framework.

Findings.

The study revealed diverse expressions of Christ-likeness in Uganda, shaped by cultural, social, and economic contexts. The findings are organized around the research objectives:

. Diverse Expressions of Christ-likeness: The study found that Ugandan Christians express Christ-likeness in unique ways, reflecting their cultural, social, and economic contexts. For example, some participants emphasized the importance of community and solidarity in embodying Christ-like character, echoing Jesus' teachings on loving one's neighbor (Luke 10:25-37) and the importance of community in the early church (Acts 2:42-47). As Bevans and Schroeder (2004) note, "Contextual theology is a way of doing theology that takes into account the cultural, social, and economic contexts of a particular people."

. Contextual Influences: The research identified cultural, social, and economic factors that shape discipleship and formation in Uganda. For instance, the role of extended family and community was highlighted as a significant factor in shaping Christ-like character, reflecting the biblical emphasis on community and relationships (Hiebert, 2008).

. Commonalities and Differences: The study found both commonalities and differences in understanding and practicing Christ-likeness across Christian denominations in Uganda. While there was agreement on the importance of love and compassion, differences emerged in the emphasis on certain spiritual practices, highlighting the need for contextualized discipleship strategies (Hull, 2013).

. Global Church Recommendations: The research provides insights for the global Church on contextualizing discipleship and formation. The study suggests that understanding Christ-likeness in diverse contexts can enrich the global Church's understanding of discipleship and formation, echoing Paul's emphasis on becoming "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

VI. Discussion:

The findings of this study are discussed in relation to the 'Contextual Christ-likeness Framework,' which posits that Christ-likeness is a dynamic and contextualized expression of faith shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors.

The study's results support this framework, highlighting the importance of understanding Christ-likeness in diverse contexts.

The 'Contextualization of Christ-likeness,' was evident in the diverse expressions of Christ-likeness in Uganda. The study found that Ugandan Christians embody Christ-like character in ways that reflect their cultural, social, and economic contexts, reflecting Jesus' ministry of incarnation (John 1:14).

The 'Worldview Transformation,' theory was also supported by the study's findings. The research highlighted the importance of transforming one's worldview to embody Christ-like character and behaviour, echoing Jesus' call to repentance and transformation (Luke 5:32).

The 'cultural, Social, and Economic Intersectionality,' was evident in the complex interplay of factors that shape Christ-likeness in Uganda. The study found that these factors intersect and influence the expression of Christ-likeness in diverse ways, reflecting the nuanced nature of Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:14-30).

VII. Implications:

The study's findings have implications for the global Church's understanding of discipleship and formation. The research suggests that understanding Christ-likeness in diverse contexts can enrich the global Church's understanding of discipleship and formation.

The study's results also have implications for the development of contextualized discipleship strategies in Uganda and beyond.

The research highlights the importance of considering cultural, social, and economic contexts in shaping discipleship and formation, echoing Jesus' emphasis on contextualized ministry (Luke 10:1-24).

VIII. Conclusion:

In the heart of Uganda, where Christianity resonates deeply, this study uncovers a vibrant tapestry of Christ-likeness, woven from diverse cultural, social, and economic threads. The 'Contextual Christ-likeness Framework,' reveals that embodying Christ-like character is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, but a dynamic expression of faith shaped by unique contexts.

As Jesus modeled in his incarnational ministry (John 1:14), Ugandan Christians embody Christ-likeness in ways that reflect their cultural, social, and economic contexts. This study highlights the importance of understanding these contexts to nurture Christ-like character and behavior.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

May this research inspire the global Church to embrace the beauty of contextualized discipleship, and may Ugandan Christians continue to shine as beacons of Christ-likeness, illuminating their communities with love, compassion, and service.

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