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Reclaiming the Mandate: A Contextual Examination of Mark 16:15-16 and its Implications for Evangelism in Ogbomoso Anglican Diocese

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

The mandate in Mark 16:15-16 is a primary focus of the Church. This study examined the biblical mandate of evangelism in Mark 16:15–16, focusing on its contextual implications for evangelistic engagement within the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso. It addressed the problem of declining enthusiasm for evangelism among clergy and laity, despite the clarity of Christ's commission. The aim was to look at the theological depth of the passage, evaluate existing evangelistic efforts, and propose contextually relevant strategies. The study is premised on Missio Dei (Mission of God), a theoretical framework popularised by David J. Bosch, which frames mission as rooted in God's nature and initiative rather than as solely a Church-led activity. The research adopted a qualitative method. Primary sources included exegetical analysis of biblical texts and unstructured interviews with clergy and laity of the Diocese; secondary sources comprised books, journal articles, diocesan reports, and Church documents. Findings indicated strong theological awareness of the Great Commission but a lack of consistent practice, hindered by limited training, poor planning, and resource constraints. Respondents stressed the need for culturally informed approaches. The study concluded that reclaiming the evangelistic mandate demands theological renewal, practical training, and strategic diocesan initiatives. Recommendations included capacity-building programmes, integration of evangelism into worship life, and leadership-driven missional planning.

Keywords: Evangelism, Missio Dei, Contextual Theology, Great Commission.

INTRODUCTION

Evangelism is a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith and a core function of the Church. At its heart lies the Great Commission, the final instruction of Jesus Christ to His disciples, recorded in all four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. In Mark 16:15-16, Christ commands: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." This passage succinctly captures the urgency, universality, and salvific centrality of the Christian mission. Yet, despite its clarity and emphasis, evangelism in many contemporary Christian settings, particularly within mainline denominations such as the Anglican Communion, has become passive or sporadic.

Historically, the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) grew rapidly due to early missionary efforts, with evangelism playing a pivotal role in church planting and discipleship. However, as institutional structures developed and formalised worship became routine, many Anglican Dioceses, including the Diocese of Ogbomoso, began to shift focus from active outreach to maintenance of congregational structures. Evangelism, though still preached, became less practised, often confined to certain liturgical seasons or left to a few appointed individuals or groups within the church.

Recent studies have highlighted this trend across several mainline denominations in Africa. For instance, Olufemi Adeniyi observed that "the mission of the Church in Nigeria has become heavily institutionalised, losing its original evangelical dynamism."[1] Similarly, Abiodun Akintola remarked that "evangelistic passion in Anglican parishes has waned due to overdependence on inherited traditions and liturgical formalism."[2] In contexts like Ogbomoso, where socio-cultural dynamics are shifting rapidly due to urbanisation, migration, and youth disengagement, the Church faces the risk of stagnation unless it renews its commitment to contextual evangelism.

This study arises from the growing concern that, although evangelism remains theologically central in Anglican ecclesiology, its practice is often disconnected from the realities of the community. Mark 16:15-16, though

frequently cited, and has not been adequately used in terms of its contextual implications for diocesan mission planning and implementation. The text contains both a command and a conditional consequence, emphasizing the gravity of the gospel message and the necessity of intentional proclamation. As such, reclaiming this mandate is not optional but essential for the ongoing witness and growth of the Church in places like Ogbomoso.

Several contemporary theologians have advocated for a return to mission-focused ecclesiology. Stanley John, in his 2020 work, Global Evangelism and Local Mission, asserts that "the future of the Church lies not in preservation of tradition but in its ability to engage contextually with the Gospel mandate."[3]This aligns with the call for a practical theology of evangelism that is biblically rooted, culturally sensitive, and strategically intentional. In particular, for dioceses like Ogbomoso, where Anglican identity is strong but missionary zeal is dwindling, there is a pressing need to return to the Scriptures to recover the vision and urgency of the early Church.

Despite the centrality of evangelism in biblical theology and Anglican ecclesiology, there remains a significant disconnect between the theological affirmation of evangelism and its practical implementation within the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso. Although the Diocese acknowledges the importance of the Great Commission as contained in Mark 16:15-16; evangelism is often relegated to an occasional or departmental activity rather than being integrated into the core identity and mission of the Church.

The research problem stems from this disconnect: while the biblical mandate is clear and urgent, its contextual application remains largely underdeveloped, unstructured, and under-resourced. There is little evidence of consistent theological reflection on the passage within local ministry strategies, and current evangelistic activities are often reactive rather than proactive, lacking contextual depth or sustainable frameworks. As Olayinka Balogun points out, "there is a critical need for diocesan evangelism that is not only biblically grounded but also contextually responsive to the spiritual and socio-cultural needs of its people."[4]

This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining Mark 16:15-16 from both an exegetical and contextual perspective, with the goal of reclaiming the evangelistic mandate in the Diocese. The research is premised on the conviction that a proper understanding and application of this mandate can lead to a renewed, strategic, and Spirit-led engagement in evangelism that reflects both biblical faithfulness and contextual relevance.

The discourse surrounding evangelism, particularly within ecclesial contexts, has undergone significant theological and missiological developments in recent decades. From its roots in the early Church, where the apostles responded to Christ's command to preach the Gospel across diverse cultures, evangelism has evolved into a complex and multifaceted field involving biblical exegesis, practical theology, missiology, and contextual theology. The modern Christian Church is increasingly challenged to balance the purity of the biblical message with its relevance to local cultures, languages, and socio-political realities. This tension is especially evident in many parts of Africa, where rapid cultural change, religious pluralism, and social instability demand a dynamic and responsive evangelistic approach.

A growing body of scholarship emphasises that effective evangelism must not only be rooted in Scripture but also engage contextually with the lived experiences of local communities. For example, in his recent work, Evangelism in a Changing Africa, James Emmanuel argues that "the future of Christian witness in Africa lies in its capacity to speak meaningfully to its environment without compromising the Gospel's integrity."[5] This aligns with the shift in mission theology from a Eurocentric, colonial framework to the paradigm of Missio Dei, the Mission of God, where the Church is seen as a participant in God's redemptive activity in the world.[6] The Missio Dei model acknowledges that mission does not originate with the Church but with God, who sends the Church into the world to bear witness in word and deed.

The Anglican Communion, known for its liturgical depth and theological richness, is increasingly being called to re-imagine its evangelistic identity in light of global and local shifts. Within the Church of Nigeria, the challenge is even more pronounced. Although there are diocesan evangelism departments and periodic mission outreaches, these efforts often lack theological depth, strategic continuity, or contextual sensitivity. The Diocese of Ogbomoso, located in a region historically shaped by early missionary endeavours, now finds itself in a changing cultural landscape. Traditional communal structures are giving way to more individualistic lifestyles, especially among the youth, while the rise of Pentecostalism and other faith movements adds pressure to maintain relevance.

Evangelism is very important in the Church, especially in the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso, where Mark 16:15-16 clearly commands believers to share the gospel. However, many members and leaders have not fully put this command into action. Evangelism is often seen as a special event or the job of a few people, rather than the responsibility of everyone. There is little training or planning to help church members share their faith regularly and effectively.

Another problem is that evangelism in the Diocese does not always fit well with the local culture and changing society. Many people, especially young ones, are influenced by other religions or are less interested in the Church. The Diocese also lacks strong leadership and clear plans to support ongoing evangelistic work. Without changes, the Church's growth and witness may weaken. This study aims to explore these problems and find ways to bring back a strong, practical focus on evangelism in the Diocese.

The purpose of this research is to explore and reclaim the evangelistic mandate as given in Mark 16:15-16, with a specific focus on its relevance and application within the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso. The study aims to deepen understanding of the biblical commission to evangelise and assess how effectively this mandate is being fulfilled in the Diocese's current ministry practices.

Furthermore, the research seeks to identify the challenges

hindering active evangelism and propose practical, contextually appropriate strategies that can renew commitment to gospel outreach among clergy and laity. Ultimately, the study intends to provide theological insights and actionable recommendations to strengthen evangelistic efforts, ensuring they are biblically grounded, culturally sensitive, and missionally effective in the Diocese.

This study employed a qualitative research approach, combining both primary and secondary sources to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The primary data included an exegetical analysis of Mark 16:15-16 and related biblical texts to uncover the theological foundation of the evangelistic mandate. Additionally, interviews were conducted with selected clergy and laity within the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso to gain insights into their perceptions, experiences, and practices regarding evangelism.

Secondary sources comprised relevant books, journal articles, diocesan records, and official Church documents. These materials provided historical context, theological reflections, and practical perspectives on evangelism within Anglican and Nigerian church settings. The qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of both the biblical mandate and its contextual application, enabling the study to draw meaningful conclusions and recommendations tailored to the Diocese's specific needs.

Exegetical Analysis of Mark 16:15-16

Mark 16:15-16 stands as a central text for Christian mission, often referred to as the Great Commission. This passage succinctly encapsulates the Church's divine mandate to proclaim the gospel universally. A detailed, verse-by-verse examination provides critical insights into its theological meaning and missional implications, forming the bedrock for reclaiming evangelism in any context, including the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso.

The opening imperative in the passage, "Go into all the world"*εἰς τὸν κόσμον ὅλον* signals the universal scope of the mission. The Greek term kosmos here refers to the entire inhabited world, emphasizing that the gospel message is not limited by geography, ethnicity, or social boundaries. This universal mission reflects God's redemptive plan for all humanity, echoing Old Testament themes of blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6). Scholars such as James R. Edwards note that this global commission "underscores the expansive nature of the Church's mission, which transcends local or national confines and embraces the whole human family."[7]

The next command, "preach the gospel" *κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον*, reveals the nature of the task. The verb *kēryssō* (to preach or proclaim) conveys more than mere announcement; it implies authoritative proclamation of the good news about Jesus Christ: His life, death, resurrection, and lordship. This proclamation is not optional but essential for the Church's identity and purpose. According to Christopher J.H. Wright, the gospel proclamation is "the core activity of the people of God, rooted in obedience to Christ's authority and driven by the power of the Holy Spirit."[8]

The phrase "to every creature" *παντὶ τῷ κτίσματι* expands the audience of the proclamation to all creation, encompassing all peoples without discrimination. This reflects the inclusiveness of the gospel call, consistent with Jesus' teaching elsewhere that the kingdom of God is open to all (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:47). It also aligns with the early Church's missionary expansion beyond Jewish boundaries into Gentile regions.

Verse 16 further highlights the response required: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Faith (*pistis)* is foundational; salvation comes through trusting in Jesus Christ. Baptism signifies entry into the community of believers, symbolizing identification with Christ's death and resurrection. This dual requirement points to both personal transformation and communal belonging. Yet, the warning, "he who does not believe will be condemned," stresses the urgency and seriousness of the gospel message and the consequences of rejection.

Exegetically, this passage asserts that evangelism is both a command and a calling, rooted in the authority of Christ and empowered by the Spirit (Mark 16:20). It establishes the Church's mission as a holistic enterprise: proclaiming, inviting, and integrating believers into the faith community. Its theological implications include the universality of salvation, the necessity of faith, and the communal nature of Christian identity.

In sum, Mark 16:15-16 provides a clear, comprehensive, and urgent mandate for evangelism that challenges contemporary churches to embrace mission as integral to their identity and purpose. For the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso, this passage demands a renewed commitment to proclaiming the gospel to all people in ways that are faithful to Scripture and responsive to the local context.

Theological Foundations and Missiological Framework

The concept of *Missio Dei*, Latin for "the sending of God" has become foundational in contemporary missiology, reshaping how mission and evangelism are understood within the Church. This theological framework emerged prominently in the mid-20th century, particularly through the work of Karl Hartenstein and later popularised by David J. Bosch.[9] Missio Dei emphasises that mission originates not from the Church or human initiative but from the very nature and action of God. This means that the Church participates in God's ongoing mission to restore and reconcile all creation through Jesus Christ.

Within this paradigm, evangelism is not merely a programme or activity organised by the Church; it is a divine mandate rooted in the character and purpose of God Himself. Bosch articulates this well, stating, "Mission is the result of the triune God's love, sending the Son and the Spirit into the world, and sending the Church in continuation of that divine mission."[10] This shifts the understanding of evangelism from a church-centric enterprise to a God-centred calling, where the Church acts as an instrument in God's redemptive mission.

The Anglican tradition embraces this theology of mission in its ecclesiology and practice. Anglicanism, with its historic emphasis on scripture, tradition, and reason, understands the Church as both a community called to worship and a missionary body sent into the world. The 1984 Anglican Consultative Council formalised this by defining mission as "the whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world."[11] Anglican missiology stresses that evangelism flows from the Church's identity as the Body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit and guided by sacramental life.

Moreover, Anglican evangelism often seeks to balance proclamation with pastoral care, liturgy, and social justice, reflecting the holistic nature of the gospel. The Church's mission is therefore not limited to verbal witness but encompasses discipleship, community transformation, and advocacy. The concept of Missio Dei undergirds this integrative approach, encouraging Anglicans to see evangelism as participation in God's comprehensive work of renewal.

In the context of the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso, these theological and missiological foundations challenge church leaders and members to move beyond seeing evangelism as an optional ministry. Instead, it is a continuous, Spirit-led engagement rooted in God's initiative, calling the Diocese to embody and proclaim the gospel in culturally relevant and sustainable ways.

Evangelistic Practices and Challenges in the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso

The Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso has a longstanding history of evangelistic activity rooted in its Anglican heritage, yet contemporary observations reveal both commendable strengths and notable challenges affecting its mission effectiveness. Interviews with clergy and laity indicate that there is a general awareness of the importance of evangelism, with many members recognising it as central to the Church's purpose. Evangelistic efforts often take the form of organised crusades, Sunday outreach programmes, and seasonal evangelistic campaigns, which have historically attracted new converts and sustained church growth.[12]

However, despite these positive initiatives, several challenges undermine consistent and effective evangelism. One key issue identified is the inadequate theological training for clergy and church workers concerning contemporary evangelistic methods. Many respondents highlighted a gap between biblical knowledge and practical evangelism skills, leading to reliance on traditional approaches that may not resonate with younger generations or the increasingly pluralistic society in Ogbomoso.[13]

Cultural and social factors also present significant hurdles. The Diocese operates within a context marked by religious diversity, including a growing Pentecostal presence and rising secular influences. These realities require contextualised evangelistic strategies that engage local customs, language, and worldviews. However, many evangelistic programmes remain largely generic and fail to adequately address these dynamics, limiting their impact.[14]

Institutionally, the Diocese faces challenges such as limited resources, lack of coordinated mission planning, and insufficient leadership focus on evangelism as a continuous priority rather than an occasional event. Many parishes lack dedicated mission teams or clear strategies, leading to fragmented efforts. This institutional gap often results in missed opportunities for sustained outreach and discipleship.[15]

In sum, while the Diocese of Ogbomoso maintains an evangelistic presence, these internal and external challenges hinder its full potential. Addressing these issues requires theological reorientation, strategic capacity-building and context-sensitive approaches to reclaim the evangelistic mandate effectively.

Strategies for Reclaiming and Revitalising the Evangelistic Mandate in the Diocese

To effectively reclaim and revitalise the evangelistic mandate in the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso, it is essential to adopt practical strategies that address the theological, cultural, and institutional challenges identified. First and foremost, enhancing theological training is critical. Clergy and lay leaders need ongoing education that integrates biblical foundations with contemporary evangelistic methods. This training should equip them to engage meaningfully with diverse groups, including youth and urban populations, fostering confidence and competence in gospel proclamation.[16] Seminaries and diocesan training centres must prioritise courses on contextual evangelism, missiology, and discipleship strategies to build a well-prepared evangelistic workforce.

Secondly, contextualised evangelistic approaches must be developed and implemented. Given the unique socio-cultural landscape of Ogbomoso, evangelism cannot rely solely on traditional methods. Efforts should incorporate local languages, cultural symbols, and relevant communication styles that resonate with the community's lived experiences. Utilising storytelling, drama, and media tailored to local sensibilities can enhance engagement. Furthermore, outreach initiatives should address social issues such as poverty, education, and health, demonstrating the gospel's holistic power to transform lives.[17]

Thirdly, mobilising effective leadership is vital. Diocesan leadership must explicitly prioritise evangelism as a core mission, establishing dedicated mission committees and departments with clear mandates and resources. Leaders should foster a culture of evangelistic enthusiasm by encouraging accountability, recognising successful initiatives, and promoting collaboration among parishes. This leadership focus can inspire sustained commitment and innovation in outreach programmes.[18]

Finally, sustainable mission programmes should be institutionalised. The Diocese needs to develop long-term evangelism plans that include measurable goals, resource allocation, and continuous evaluation. Partnerships with other churches, NGOs, and community groups can expand reach and impact. Creating support systems for new converts through discipleship and integration into church

life ensures that evangelism leads to lasting spiritual growth and community transformation.[19]

Together, these strategies offer a comprehensive framework for the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso to reclaim its evangelistic mandate in ways that are biblically faithful, culturally sensitive, and missionally effective.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the biblical and contextual basis for reclaiming the evangelistic mandate within the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso, using Mark 16:15-16 as a theological anchor. The passage highlights Christ's universal call to proclaim the gospel, a call that remains binding on the Church across all generations and cultures. Through an exegetical and theological exploration of the text, supported by the missiological framework of Missio Dei, the study established that evangelism is not simply a church activity but a divine command rooted in God's redemptive mission.

The research findings revealed that while evangelism is recognised as important within the Diocese, its implementation faces significant challenges. These include limited theological training, lack of contextual engagement, inadequate leadership support, and insufficient strategic planning. Despite these obstacles, the study identified a strong desire among church leaders and members to see evangelism revitalised in a way that speaks to the realities of the Ogbomoso context.

In response, the study recommended a set of practical strategies such as improving theological education, developing context-specific evangelistic methods, mobilising mission-focused leadership, and establishing sustainable outreach programmes. These recommendations are aimed at equipping the Diocese to engage more effectively in the Great Commission, fostering a renewed commitment to mission and discipleship.

Ultimately, the Church in Ogbomoso must see evangelism not as an occasional effort but as a continuous lifestyle and ecclesial responsibility, one that flows from the very heart of God.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and theological reflections of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to help the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso effectively reclaim and revitalise its evangelistic mandate:

i. The Diocese should develop and implement regular training programmes for clergy, church workers, and lay evangelists, focusing on biblical theology, missiology, and practical evangelism. Such training must be contextual and relevant, helping ministers interpret scripture accurately while applying it effectively in contemporary society.

ii. The Diocese should create or strengthen mission boards and evangelism committees at both diocesan and parish levels. These bodies must be empowered with clear mandates, resources, and regular opportunities for collaboration and review. Diocesan leadership should visibly prioritise evangelism in policy and liturgical programming.

iii. The Diocese should integrate evangelism into the life of the Church through ongoing programmes such as house fellowships, discipleship classes, and mission partnerships. Clear monitoring and evaluation systems should be set in place to track growth and impact.

iv. Special efforts should be made to train, equip, and involve young people and laity in evangelistic activities. Youth-focused mission initiatives, school outreach, and digital evangelism platforms should be developed to engage emerging generations meaningfully.

v. Collaboration with other neighbouring dioceses, missionary agencies, and Christian organisations can enhance resource sharing, strategy development, and broader impact. These partnerships can offer fresh insights and support for sustainable gospel outreach.

By implementing these recommendations, the Anglican Diocese of Ogbomoso can renew its evangelistic vision and become a dynamic witness to the gospel in its local and regional context.

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