

Chapter 12

Phenomenological Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–Day Saints as Christians or Not: A Case Study of Uyo, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Generally, in Africa and Uyo, Nigeria in particular, religion is not only a social phenomenon but an overriding force to reckon with. Therefore, when religious devotees of different religions do not comprehend the subject, their actions breed social misunderstanding and conflict among religions in society. Phenomenological study of religions is aimed at bringing the essence of religion to the doorpost of its practitioners. The methodology adopted in this chapter was historical and analytical. The methods exposed the researcher to both primary and secondary information about the work. Findings show that there is a misunderstanding of the essence of religion by some adherents of both the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and Christianity; each believes that his/her religion is the best in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The work concludes that when religious culture vis-à-vis the essence of religion is properly understood, love for each other will be realized.

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INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology of religion is the discipline that involves a personal participation of a religious scholar in a particular religion in which he/she desires to study. Here, the researcher is motivated to understand the meaning or essence and religious indicators of the religion. The researcher while participating actively in the religion engages himself/herself in the suspension of preconceived judgement and opinion held about the religion. The researcher is therefore expected to take a neutral stance from both the observers and practitioners of the religion in order to make a valid, objective and unbiased. Applying phenomenology as a concept to a particular religious tradition such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to make an open declaration as much as possible about the religion by the researcher. Such open declaration must be validly testified by any observer of the same religion from any inertia reference point.

Moreover, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints which has existed for 191 years now, boasting of about millions adherents globally and the same religious tradition in Uyo-Nigerian influence of the religious organization is the focus of this study. The purpose of this work is to attempt an analytical study of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints at large, relating it with other world religions such as Christianity. On the basis of relationship, the doctrines, beliefs and the practices of the church in study is reviewed in juxtaposition with the aforementioned world religions indicating their differences as well as highlighting their similarities. Likewise, an objective and unbiased scholarly work of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in Uyo is the focus of study. In the same area of study, phenomenology of religion requires that this research should not defend the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints particular religious philosophy. Also, it should not use the religion as a yardstick for measuring or comparing other religions. This is premised on the fact that adherents of any religion are conditioned by their background and teachings to believe that their religion is the best, but absolutely, this is not the point of view of phenomenology of religion. Therefore, as a phenomenological study, this chapter is poised to be very scientific in its approach. This scientific methodology is supported by the fact that one must not study of religion with a preconceived notion. In other words, pious dogmatism should not be espoused in a scientific study of religion as it is wounding to the study of religion phenomenologically.

BIOGRAPHY THE FOUNDER (JOSEPH SMITH JR.)

Joseph Smith Jr. (December 23, 1805 – June 27, 1844) was an American religious leader and the founder of the Latter Day Saint movement. Smith was born in Sharon,

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