Hermeneutics and Communications

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Professor

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**Assignment**

**Assignment #3 – Essay on a case study**

1. Write a 5-page paper on a specific event or phenomenon (e.g., a historical event, a

cultural practice, a legal decision), and interpret it from a hermeneutic perspective.

This would involve understanding the event within its context and recognizing the role

of your prejudices in shaping your interpretation.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the hermeneutic issue for this assignment.

1. **Paper Outline**

 a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

 b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

 c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

 d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

 remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

 The egregious nature of COVID-19 spawned the world into a pandemic, and every medical facility worldwide was in its grasp—corporations adapted by offering their employees work-at-home options. Students use Google Chromebooks to log in to class, complete assignments from home, and adapt to the school system. Entities like those mentioned have the budgets to facilitate Change, evolution, and paradigm shifts. What about the post-covid church? Churches in inner-city communities or marginalized and distressed zip codes, such as [a sizable portion of West Louisville churches in Kentucky], were brutally hit. These churches, which often serve as community centers and provide vital services, have struggled to adapt to the new normal. It is crucial now, more than ever, for these churches to receive the support they need from the community. Churches that failed to be socially conscious in their mission would now seek to solicit support from a community foreign to the church.

Before COVID, churches struggled in church growth areas; once the pandemic hit, the issues compounded. Some ministries need reactivation or re-acclimation of spiritual gifts and a refresher course concerning deploying gifts in this post-COVID-19 dispensation. More recently, church growth has received attention with the growing interest in revitalization (DeVries, 2016, p. 1). Churches experienced the loss of members to COVID-19. They felt the impact of online churches. Technology became the new chariot by which the religious enterprise could expand their ministry endeavors. Online giving, virtual classes, and streamed worship services, while of benefit during the pandemic, became a nemesis post-pandemic. People had become accustomed to participating and interacting with their place of worship online in the comfort of their own homes. Pastors struggle to encourage members out of the bedside church and return to in-person worship. This could partly be due to what Dr. H. Beecher Hicks prophesied approximately two generations ago, "Change...revolutionary upheaval...is all about the church. Our problem, it seems to me, is that we have failed to grasp either spiritually or intellectually the sociological and theological changes which the church is destined to endure" (Hicks, 1994). However, the potential of church revitalization could be a beacon of hope for churches in inner cities impacted by the pandemic in marginalized and poor zip codes. Churches that were able to survive post-COVID were restructured and reorganized for growth by their leaders. Wormack (2021, p. 3) states that the epistemological research process shows several non-participating church members and lacks the organization and administration to enact discipleship and evangelism within the community.

Towards the end of the first quarter of 2020, the world experienced a devastating, destructive, and debilitating force known as COVID-19. The virus caused a worldwide pandemic that changed the trajectory of human activity. It shut down or limited places of worship and businesses impacted government and civic operations and changed how people communicated, worked, shopped, and cared for their families. This level of constant closeness, while adaptable at the onset, began to wear down the gears and fibers of households and strain relationships. Being in quarantine with nowhere to go, couped up in residences, wore patience thin, and kept the nerves of those on edge. The pandemic affected how students of all academic genres enrolled, matriculated, studied, and graduated. One researcher said of the pandemic, "I was in the process of conducting an action research study when COVID-19 hit; therefore, I had to adapt my teaching and modify the methods associated with the data collection within the existing methodology of action research (Maya, 2024, p. 10).

Some of what transpired during the study were happenings that might have occurred in a research study that was not interrupted by COVID-19, such as early study excitement and jitters, falling behind in the research schedule, and navigating ethical dilemmas" (Maya, 2024, p. 11). However, it is essential to note that these experiences were underlined by the unique and unforeseen circumstances brought about by the pandemic, which added an extra layer of complexity and challenge to the research process. However, other happenings were specifically tethered to the COVID-19 interruption, such as pivoting to online asynchronous teaching, embarking on an "emergency remote teaching" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p.44) experience, and making significant changes to the activities and methods in the third phase of the action research study as a result of the pandemic.

The academic rearrangement caused by the pandemic affected traditional and nontraditional learners and lent no mercy to all students and teachers despite teaching methodologies and learning styles. However, despite such unprecedented challenges, the academic community, much like the Los Angeles Lakers winning the NBA championship in a bubble, displayed its adaptability and determination. The ecumenical community has many of the same intangibles, if not more. Like other institutions, places of worship worldwide were blindsided by the pandemic. Some had the resources to adapt, while most still needed to. The gubernatorial mandate restricted in-person worship, though some churches, temples, and mosques were defiant in the name of being faithful and pressed on despite the mandate. Also witnessed is the opposite. Some churchgoers found the pandemic an effortless way to avoid church altogether, using it as an excuse not to go with underlying dissatisfactions as well as coping with stress.

Notwithstanding, COVID-19 has disproportionately hurt Black communities, and past research evidence has shown that Black Americans facing anxiety were more likely to turn to religion compared to White Americans. The disproportionate stress response of those of lower socioeconomic statuses who were affected by COVID-19 through overcrowded accommodation, poor housing conditions, and limited access to personal outdoor space could result in searching for a coping mechanism, with religion being a viable option. Concerning education, since more educated individuals tend to be less religious, they may be less likely to turn to religion and more likely to turn to alternative sources to cope with stress (Leonhardt et al., E. A., 2023, p. 3).

Despite this, it was the church, the Black church in particular, situated in marginalized zip codes, distressed, and low-wealth neighborhoods where the pandemic adversely affected the most. Individuals in these communities witnessed firsthand the devastation the pandemic had on their neighboring institutions. The same institutions that its constituency relied on in times of crisis and life uncertainties are now vulnerable victims such as they are. Progressive pastors began adapting and transitioning their ministries to social media platforms as those with cushioned budgets could invest in the technology that developed a quality online presence. Large and megachurch pastors with their thumbs on the pulse of innovative ministry could appeal to the digital natives of their congregations or be receptive to the technological ideas of these millennials and Gen Zer’s as it relates to transitioning to a 100% online ministry presence.

Online platforms of ministry and worship challenged digital immigrants, mostly baby boomers, to upgrade their computer literacy skills and increase internet usage. First-generation churchgoers had two choices related to online worship: fail or succeed entirely. Those beyond the age of being digital immigrants relied upon family or church members to assist them in navigating the internet highway, even assisting them in learning how to make essential usage of their smartphones. For the Black church, the millennial aggregation helped save their ministries. The pandemic unveils a glaring generation gap within the Black Church tradition.

Contrary to most anecdotal accounts, many Black millennials have launched into the digital deep to revive faith communities in the United States (Jones, 2022, p. 54). COVID-19 exposed socio-religious, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical vulnerabilities. Places of all shapes and sizes of worship found themselves on a level playing field. It was the millennial generation, the digital natives, who demonstrated remarkable resilience, stepping up to maintain a religious presence and creating digital relationships that previous generations of churchgoers, in some cases, were forced to lean upon. The pandemic quarantine interrupted the flow of ministries.

The pandemic quarantine intercepted the fellowship of believers. Churches that were 'four-walled' only had to adapt to survive. COVID-19 changed how churches, large and small, conducted business. Places of worship lost members to pandemic death; some never returned to the church post-pandemic. After witnessing the church stripped down to a social media presence, others decided that pastors and their agendas looked much different, became disillusioned, and left the church. The post-covid church culture needs a transformative reformation that is Christ-centered. Concerning this, a Christ-centered approach does not mean a concentration on the relationship with Christ but on the *world* of Christ: "Christian education does not spend all its time looking at the Son; instead, it looks at the world and our places and tasks in it in the light that the Son provides" (Edlin, 2014, pp. 41, 53). Elsewhere, Edlin (2010, p. 98) states that "the nation-building goal of these Christian schools is to equip children to discern what is best (Philippians 1: 9–11), including a peaceful and robust cultural critique and transformation in the name of Christ". Christian education with an emphasis on socially conscious ministry, spiritual gifts, leadership training, and organization is how a pandemic-impacted ministry can galvanize itself to begin its journey of revivification and revitalization. The need for revitalization in some post-covid churches is primarily due to the impact of the online church, the lack of resources to survive, the non-Christian direction of the church, the social media church's disconnect from the assembly, and a loss of a shared cultural understanding of social reality and the need for the church to be socially conscious in their mission.

"Black Christianity is a part of Black culture, where culture is a constitutive dimension of all human action. Black church culture constitutes a common language that motivates social action. It comprises beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, ceremonies, and informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. These components constitute the tool kit, or cultural repertoire, of individuals and groups and are organized to create particular action strategies. Even so, the words themselves, along with their performative delivery, say something about the way members of the group will frame, receive, and act upon an issue" (Pattillo-McCoy, M., 1998, p. 769).

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