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Dissertation Abstract

The Contribution of Paul Hiebert to Folk Religion: A Missiological Study among the Dendis of Northeast Benin

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Paul Hiebert contends that one of the reasons Christian mission has failed or has not been very successful among folk religions, is the long-standing ignorance of folk religion worldviews held by many of the early Western Christian missionaries (1982:35-47). Building on insights from his classic essay on the “excluded middle,” Paul Hiebert suggests the need for a new concept and paradigm for cross-cultural mission—a three-tiered view of the universe (1982:44-47).

First, I used the Dendi people of northeast Benin as the context of the empirical study. This research examined the impact of a phenomenological study of folk religion mission among folk religionists. I argue in this research that the implications for missions of Hiebert’s three-tiered view of the universe necessitates the development of two theological concepts: “a theology of the invisible” (Hiebert et al. 1999:370) and “a theology of the kingdom of God” (Love 2000:40; cf. Bosch 1991:10; Glasser et al. 2003:74; Hiebert et al. 1999:25; Ott et al. 2010: 65, 315).

Second, I reviewed the Dendi responses to spirit attacks with *ruqyah* and adorcism and discussed how a Christian ritual of exorcism could replace these Dendi crisis rituals. The objective of this study was to evaluate how life crises or special events in the life of the Dendi people call for radical shifts or paradigm shifts. The ethnographic research of this study comprised interviews conducted in two different cities (Kandi and Malanville). The data randomly collected from 28 Dendi adult men and women was analysed and interpreted using ATLAS.ti 9, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The qualitative data obtained from the field not only established the fact that the Islam practiced by the Dendi is still heavily influenced by the Dendi animist pre-Islamic worldview, but that a mission strategy that focuses on the people's felt needs would be most efficient.

This study concluded that a felt need approach to mission among folk religionists should be preferred and encouraged in Christian mission, because it is Christological missiology and holistic mission, which leads to worldview transformation and conversion: first meet the felt needs of the people and then invite them to follow Jesus (Love 2000:91; Ott et al. 2010:276; White 1905:143).



Michée Badé is a pioneer worker in the Maghreb. He successfully completed his PhD requirements in September 2022 with the department of Practical and Missional Theology of the University of the Free State, South Africa. Michée is also a Doctor of Missiology (DMiss) candidate at Andrews University.