
Research

Predestination and the Missionary Imperative: Historical, Theological, and Missiological Dimensions in the Nigerian Baptist Convention

Rev'd Prof. James J. Reynolds¹, Adamu Micah Adamu^{1*}

¹Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN)

Correspondence should be addressed to: micahadamu32@gmail.com

Abstract: The relationship between predestination theology and missionary engagement stands among the most consequential and enduring debates in Baptist history. This article examines how predestination has been understood, contested, and applied within the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) from its origins in Southern Baptist missionary activity in 1850 through to its contemporary expression as one of West Africa's largest Protestant denominations. Drawing on a critical survey of Reformed, Arminian, Barthian, and African theological traditions, a historical analysis of NBC doctrinal formation across five developmental periods, and empirical data gathered through a mixed-methods study (N = 240 questionnaire respondents; n = 9 in-depth interviews) in the Plateau Baptist Conference, this article advances three principal arguments. First, the NBC has developed a distinctive 'missional compatibilism' holding divine sovereignty and human responsibility in productive tension rather than seeking a philosophical resolution that is both theoretically coherent and historically grounded. Second, African theological resources, particularly indigenous conceptions of divinely ordered destiny in Yoruba, Igbo, and Plateau religious traditions, constitute indispensable partners for any contextually adequate Baptist predestination theology in Nigeria. Third, the NBC's most pressing institutional challenge is not doctrinal but pedagogical: the widespread lay misunderstanding of predestination, which manifests as fatalism, antinomianism, and evangelistic paralysis in some congregations, is structurally traceable to inadequate catechetical formation rather than to any deficiency inherent in the doctrine itself. The article concludes that Andrew Fuller's moderate Calvinism, recontextualised through African theological wisdom and anchored in Great Commission obedience, offers the most productive framework for sustaining the NBC's missional identity in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Predestination, Election, Missions, Missional Compatibilism, Divine Sovereignty

1. INTRODUCTION

Few theological questions have shaped Baptist missionary history more persistently than the relationship between divine sovereignty in salvation and human responsibility in proclamation. The tension between predestination and mission, between the conviction that God has eternally elected a definite people for salvation and the apostolic call to proclaim the gospel to all without distinction, produced one of the most consequential debates in Protestant ecclesiology. From the hyper-Calvinist stagnation that afflicted English Particular Baptist churches in the mid-eighteenth century to William Carey's missionary challenge and its aftermath, how a denomination navigates this tension carries measurable consequences for its evangelistic vitality, missional strategy, and institutional coherence (Morden 62; Haykin 45).

Within the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), one of Africa's largest Protestant denominations, with an estimated eight to ten million members across more than twenty thousand churches in thirty-five conferences, this theological tension is more than academic. Founded through Southern Baptist missionary activity in 1850 and shaped by a complex interplay of American Reformed soteriology, British colonial Christianity, and indigenous African religious thought, the NBC developed a distinctive approach to predestination that resists easy classification as either strictly Calvinist or consistently Arminian. This article characterises that approach as 'missional compatibilism': a principled refusal to collapse the sovereignty-responsibility paradox in favour of either pole, grounded instead in the practical priority of Great Commission obedience (Ogunrinde 234).

Despite the NBC's remarkable growth from a small number of Yoruba congregations in 1850 to over eleven thousand churches by 2020, no systematic academic study has examined how its operative predestination theology shapes, enables, or constrains its missional practice. Scholarship on predestination and Baptist missions remains largely Anglo-American in focus and fails to engage the African theological traditions that are essential conversation partners in the Nigerian context, or the specific missiological challenges of Christian-Muslim tensions, ethnic conflict, Pentecostal competition, prosperity gospel pressure that define the environment in which NBC missionaries and pastors operate (Audi 5; Walls 3–15; Kalu 14–21). This article addresses that gap by bringing together theological analysis, historical documentation, and original empirical data to offer the first comprehensive account of predestination and missions in the NBC.

The article proceeds in six sections. Section 2 examines the principal theological positions on predestination, Reformed, Arminian, and Barthian and evaluates their respective missiological implications. Section 3 introduces African theological perspectives on divine sovereignty and human destiny that are essential to any contextually adequate treatment in Nigeria. Section 4 traces the historical formation of NBC predestination theology from its missionary origins through five developmental periods to its contemporary expression. Section 5 presents and analyses empirical findings from the Plateau Baptist Conference study. Section 6 draws conclusions and proposes a constructive theological framework for the NBC's continuing missional engagement.

2. THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS ON PREDESTINATION AND THEIR MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

2.1 The Reformed Position: Sovereign Election and Missional Confidence

The Reformed doctrine of predestination, systematised from Augustine through Calvin and codified at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), provides the theological foundation from which the NBC's institutional heritage derives. Calvin's formulation in the *Institutes* defines predestination as God's eternal decree by which he determined what each person's end would be, ordaining some to eternal life and others to eternal condemnation (*Institutes*, III.xxi.5). The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) codifies this in confessional form, affirming that God's decree encompasses all creatures, actions, and events according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will' (Westminster Confession, V.I). Herman Bavinck defines the divine decree as God's eternal and sovereign plan encompassing all that exists or will occur, carefully noting that this plan "includes secondary causes without making Him the author of sin" (123).

The missiological strength of this position lies in what Packer calls a theocentric assurance that grounds missionary confidence in divine sovereignty rather than in the variable circumstances of the field (15). William Carey's response to the hyper-Calvinist objection that his missionary work was not futile precisely because God would gather his elect through human proclamation exemplifies the Fullerian synthesis: sovereignty does not inhibit but guarantees the fruitfulness of faithful evangelism (9).

However, Reformed predestinarianism carries persistent missiological vulnerability when it inclines toward hyper-Calvinist determinism. The question "If God has already chosen the elect, why evangelise?" has historically produced not merely theoretical difficulty but empirical missionary stagnation. Morden's study of Andrew Fuller documents

that hyper-Calvinist theology among English Particular Baptists led to “stagnation and decline, empirically verifiable through low baptism rates and a cessation of new missionary initiatives” (62). The decisive variable, as the empirical findings of the present study confirm, is not Calvinism as such but whether Calvinist conviction is held alongside a genuine affirmation of human responsibility in proclamation.

2.2 The Arminian Position: Conditional Election and Evangelistic Urgency

The Arminian response, formalised in the Remonstrance of 1610 and developed systematically by F. Leroy Forlines, grounds missionary urgency in the universal provision of grace and the genuine freedom of all persons to respond. Olson summarises the position: God’s decree of election is conditional upon his foreknowledge of an individual’s faith (154). McGrath notes the pastoral appeal of this framework: it portrays God’s relations with humanity as genuinely personal, he persuades by love rather than coerces by force, and human responses to his love are genuine rather than pre-determined (574).

Wesley’s ‘Free Grace’ sermon articulates the Arminian missiological corollary: the universality of grace is the foundation of the universality of mission. Since Christ died for all and the Spirit enables all to believe through prevenient grace, the missionary enterprise becomes the essential link between God’s universal provision and the individual’s necessary response. Wesley argued that Calvinist predestination “strikes at the very root” of missionary motivation by making the outcome of evangelism independent of human proclamation (548).

The Arminian framework nonetheless introduces what Sproul terms an anthropocentric shift: if God’s eternal decree is ultimately conditioned upon foreseen human faith, then at the deepest metaphysical level, human decision rather than divine sovereignty determines the shape of redemptive history (Sproul 150). The NBC’s empirical data reveal that this tension between the Arminian framework’s evangelistic urgency and its potential erosion of divine sovereignty is a live practical concern among NBC pastors and members, not merely an academic debate.

2.3 The Barthian Reformulation: Christocentric Election and Joyful Proclamation

Karl Barth’s reformulation in *Church Dogmatics II/2* offers a creative third trajectory that has begun to inform African Baptist theological reflection. Barth argues that the doctrine of election is the sum of the gospel and that divine predestination is, at its centre, the election of Jesus Christ, who is simultaneously the electing God and the elected

human being (103). Hunsinger summarises Barth's position: election is essentially good news, the announcement that in Christ, God has chosen to be for us and not against us (89).

Bruce McCormack's careful reading of Barth insists on important precision here. Barth's position is not universalism but a christological reframing in which missionary proclamation itself functions as the means by which individuals are existentially confronted with and incorporated into the reality of their election in Christ (258). This preserves the urgency of the missionary task without collapsing it into a mere announcement of an already-accomplished universal salvation. For the NBC's context, Barth's emphasis on 2 Corinthians 1:20, all God's promises finding their 'Yes' in Christ, provides a genuinely gospel-centred foundation for missionary confidence that resonates with the denomination's evangelical heritage.

2.4 Andrew Fuller's Moderate Calvinism: The Baptist Via Media

The most historically significant Baptist contribution to the predestination-mission debate remains Andrew Fuller's moderate Calvinism, set out in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785). Fuller argued that while regeneration is the sovereign work of God, the gospel command to repent and believe is addressed to all human beings without distinction. This synthesis preserved unconditional election while reclaiming the universal duty of faith and the missionary imperative (Haykin 45). Nettles provides quantitative support: the adoption of Fullerism correlates with a marked increase in associational funding for missionary work and evangelistic preaching in England (155).

Fuller's insight was to recognise that the logical tension between unconditional election and universal gospel proclamation need not be resolved speculatively but can be held productively in pastoral and missionary practice. The missionary proclaims the gospel to all without distinction; who responds is God's sovereign determination. This posture, combining the theological groundedness of Calvinism with the evangelical urgency of Arminianism, is precisely the structure that the NBC's empirical data reveal as its dominant operative theological framework, transmitted through its Southern Baptist missionary heritage and sustained through generations of indigenous theological development.

3. AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES: INDISPENSABLE CONVERSATION PARTNERS

3.1 African Concepts of Divine Destiny

Any theologically responsible treatment of predestination in a Nigerian Baptist context must engage the rich indigenous frameworks for understanding divinely ordered

human destiny that exist within the religious traditions of Nigeria's major peoples. These are not anthropological curiosities but genuine theological resources of the kind Bediako describes as constituting a *praeparatio evangelica*, a preparation for the gospel that the Christian theologian is obligated to engage rather than dismiss (Bediako 92).

The Yoruba concept of *ori*, a pre-birth spiritual identity and divine allotment examined extensively by Bolaji Idowu, articulates a form of pre-existence spiritual election that carries direct conceptual resonance with Reformed doctrines of unconditional predestination, yet operates within a relational, communal cosmological framework fundamentally different from Western individualism (170-174). The Igbo concept of *chi*, a personal spiritual identity and divine allotment explored by Chinua Achebe and given theological exposition by Emeka Nwankpa, presents a similarly nuanced understanding that is neither mechanistically deterministic nor purely voluntaristic (34-40). Among Plateau peoples, including the Berom, Ngas, and Mwaghavul, whose communities constitute the Plateau Baptist Conference's primary constituency, cognate concepts of divinely ordered destiny intersect with Christian theological categories in ways that remain systematically underexplored.

Mbiti's comparative theological analysis demonstrates that many African peoples possess a pre-Christian understanding of divine sovereignty over human destiny that both resonates with and nuances the debates between Reformed and Arminian positions (39-42). Where Western predestination theology tends to frame election in juridical and individual terms, God's legal decision about specific persons before the foundation of the world, African cosmological frameworks tend to frame divine determination in relational and communal terms, understanding destiny as embedded in networks of belonging rather than as a private transaction between the individual soul and God. This distinction is not a deficiency to be corrected but a theological insight that Kalu's sociology of African Christianity confirms as a defining feature of how African Christians receive and inhabit theological categories (78-85).

3.2 The Yoruba Reception of Baptist Predestination Theology

The early NBC's reception of Southern Baptist predestination theology among Yoruba converts was not passive absorption but active theological interpretation. As historian Peel documents, Nigerian Baptists developed a distinctive theological voice that affirmed divine sovereignty in culturally resonant ways while maintaining the evangelical emphasis on conversion, faith, and holy living that distinguished Christianity from

traditional fatalism (287). The Yoruba category of *ayanmo*, predetermined destiny assigned by *Olodumare*, provided both opportunity and challenge for missionary teaching on predestination: it made sovereign divine determination intuitively intelligible, but required careful theological differentiation from the kind of mechanical fatalism that would undermine moral agency and evangelistic response.

J. A. Okunade, who joined the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary faculty in 1928, represents the earliest systematic engagement between Baptist predestination theology and Yoruba religious thought. Okunade argued that whereas traditional Yoruba religion perceived destiny fatalistically, Christian predestination understood divine purposes as gracious and redemptive, necessarily involving human response and moral transformation (45–78). This contextual theological work, conducted long before the term 'contextualisation' entered the missiological vocabulary, illustrates the Nigerian Baptist tradition's capacity for creative theological appropriation.

3.3 The Translating Church: Sanneh's Paradigm

Lamin Sanneh's paradigm of the translatability of the Christian gospel provides the theoretical framework within which the NBC's theological synthesis can be properly evaluated. Sanneh argues that the gospel, unlike Islam, is inherently translatable, not bound to a sacred language or culture, but capable of genuine indigenisation in every cultural context (30-35). Applied to predestination theology, this principle suggests that classical Reformed or Arminian formulations are not the final or binding form of the doctrine but culturally specific expressions of theological content that can and must be re-expressed through indigenous conceptual frameworks without loss of theological substance.

Andrew Walls's related argument that the centre of gravity in global Christianity has shifted decisively to the non-Western world, including West Africa, further undergirds the importance of taking the NBC's indigenous theological synthesis seriously, not as a derivative approximation of Western theology but as a genuine contribution to the global Baptist theological conversation (10–15). The NBC's missional compatibilism, examined in subsequent sections, is not merely a pragmatic accommodation to theological diversity but a contextually grounded theological achievement that reflects the translating work of the Nigerian church over more than 170 years.

4. HISTORICAL FORMATION OF NBC PREDESTINATION THEOLOGY

4.1 Missionary Origins and the Fullerian Inheritance (1850–1914)

Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the first Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria, arrived in 1850 carrying a theological inheritance shaped by the moderate Calvinism that defined antebellum Southern Baptist soteriology (Sindima 87). This was not the high-sovereignty Calvinism of the English Particular Baptists at their most deterministic, but the Fullerian synthesis that had energised the modern missionary movement, a theology that held unconditional election and universal gospel proclamation in creative tension. Bowen articulated this synthesis in his journal: “If God has elected some to salvation, then our preaching is not in vain, for we are assured that the Word will accomplish His purposes and the elect will be gathered from every tribe and nation” (89).

W. J. David, one of the most influential early missionaries, expressed the same logic in his 1892 report to the Foreign Mission Board: “We labour in the confidence that God has His elect among these people, and though we cannot discern who they are, we preach to all indiscriminately, trusting that the Spirit will quicken those whom the Father has chosen” (78). This epistemic limitation argument that ignorance of who the elect are demands indiscriminate proclamation became one of the most consistently employed pastoral strategies in NBC theological practice, as the empirical data of this study confirm.

The theological curriculum of the Baptist Training Centre, established in Ogbomosho in 1897, institutionalised this Fullerian heritage, presenting Reformed soteriology through Pendleton’s Christian Doctrines with particular emphasis on how doctrines of sovereignty and election energise rather than undermine missionary zeal (Ogunrinde 76). The sermons of Moses Ladejo Stone, among the first Nigerian Baptist pastors ordained in 1875, provide direct evidence that this election theology was received and appropriated by the first generation of indigenous leaders as a foundation for evangelistic urgency rather than as a barrier to it.

4.2 Indigenous Theological Development and the 1941 Statement of Faith

The NBC’s 1941 Statement of Faith, the first attempt at indigenous doctrinal formulation, achieved a theological synthesis that has proved remarkably durable. Its Article V on ‘God’s Purpose of Grace’ affirms that “Election is God’s gracious purpose, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end” (Nigerian Baptist Convention, Statement of Faith, 4). This formulation is characteristic of

the NBC's theological method: election is affirmed as divine sovereign initiative; compatibility with human freedom is asserted without philosophical explanation; the ordained means of evangelism and preaching are included within the divine purpose; and the practical implications of humility and perseverance are foregrounded.

The juxtaposition of the Election article with Article XIV on 'Missions', which grounds missionary obligation in regeneration, divine command, and love for the lost, without attempting to resolve potential tensions between sovereignty and the missionary imperative, reveals the theological architecture that defines the NBC's approach. The NBC does not resolve the tension; it holds both poles as simultaneously authoritative and practically complementary. This is not theological incoherence but principled compatibilism: the conviction that both truths belong to the full counsel of Scripture and that neither can be sacrificed without distorting the gospel.

4.3 Consolidation, Expansion, and Contemporary Challenges (1960–Present)

The formal organisation of the NBC on 3 April 1960, coinciding with Nigeria's political independence, represented both institutional maturation and theological statement. S. M. Odunaiya, elected as the first indigenous president, articulated the same soteriological–missiological synthesis in his inaugural address: “God in His sovereignty has raised up the Nigerian Baptist Convention for such a time as this. We believe that among the peoples of Nigeria, God has His elect who must be reached with the gospel. We go forward in confidence that what God has begun, He will complete” (Ayeboyin and Ishola 287). The Reformed theological logic is explicit and unambiguous, functioning as a direct theological warrant for indigenous missional expansion rather than as a constraint upon it.

The NBC Handbook, published in 1988, consolidated this theological architecture further. Article 5 on Election affirms that election is “God's eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life not because of foreseen merit in them but of His mere mercy in Christ,” while Article 4 on Providence simultaneously affirms that God “does not destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures” (Nigerian Baptist Convention, NBC Handbook, 22–23). The deliberate structural juxtaposition of these two articles, presenting them as complementary rather than contradictory, embeds compatibilism as the official theological architecture without mandating any specific philosophical account of how the two truths cohere. This institutional wisdom has enabled the NBC to maintain theological unity across significant internal diversity, avoiding the divisive Calvinist controversies that have periodically fractured North American Baptist denominations.

The 2012 symposium on 'Sovereignty and Responsibility in Baptist Theology' at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary represents the most explicit institutional articulation of what Dr Jeremiah Jatau termed the NBC's missional compatibilism. In Jatau's formulation, the NBC holds that God is sovereign in salvation and that humans are responsible agents, and refuses to resolve this tension systematically because Scripture maintains both; what matters is not theoretical precision but practical obedience, evangelism pursued in confidence that God's purposes will be accomplished through it (34).

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: PREDESTINATION AND MISSIONS IN THE PLATEAU BAPTIST CONFERENCE

5.1 Methodology

The empirical component of this study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of how predestination theology functions in the Plateau Baptist Conference (Cresswell and Clark, 65). The quantitative component comprised a structured questionnaire administered to 240 respondents drawn from five Baptist associations in the Jos metropolis: Shalom, Jos Mainland, Philadelphia, Unity, and Jos Central Baptist Associations. These associations collectively represent approximately 85 churches with an estimated combined membership of over 15,000 baptised believers (Annual Report Book, PBC).

The sample was stratified into three groups: mission committee members ($n = 90$; 37.50%), church members or laity ($n = 93$; 38.75%), and seminarians ($n = 57$; 23.75%). The Theological Beliefs Scale (TBS), a 20-item five-point Likert instrument adapted from established theological surveys and validated through pilot testing (Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = 0.81$), measured predestinarian convictions. The Missional Implications Inventory (MII), a parallel 15-item instrument ($\alpha = 0.78$), measured attitudes toward evangelism and missions. Sample size calculations followed Yamane's formula for a population of approximately 15,000 at a 95% confidence level with a 7.5% margin of error, yielding a minimum required sample of 177; the 240 deployed exceeds this threshold (Israel 4).

The qualitative component comprised nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with NBC clergy and theological educators selected through purposive sampling. Selection criteria included: a leadership position within the NBC or the Plateau Baptist Conference; a minimum of ten years' ministry experience; demonstrable seminary-level theological

training; and active involvement in mission activities (Robinson 32). Interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis methodology, supported by NVivo software (Braun and Clarke, 87).

5.2 The Dominance of Missional Compatibilism

The most significant statistical finding of the study concerns the dominant interpretive framework for predestination within the NBC. Chi-square analysis confirmed that compatibilism holding divine sovereignty and human responsibility as mutually operative rather than competing is the statistically dominant framework ($\chi^2 = 231.049$, $p < .001$), with 214 of 240 respondents classified as compatibilist compared to an expected 94.7 under the null hypothesis of equal distribution. This finding provides the empirical foundation for characterising the NBC's theological posture as missional compatibilism.

The Likert-scale data illuminate the theological substance of this compatibilism. On Statement B2 that God's election is based solely on his sovereign will, not on foreseen human faith, 68.75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, confirming a predominantly Reformed understanding of unconditional election. Yet on Statement B3 that Christ's death was intended to make salvation possible for all people, 88.75% agreed or strongly agreed; and on Statement B4 that Christ's death was intended to secure salvation for the elect alone, 73.75% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This combination, affirming unconditional election while simultaneously rejecting limited atonement and embracing universal atonement, is characteristic of what historical theology identifies as Amyraldism or four-point Calvinism: a mediating position that holds Reformed convictions on election and sovereignty while affirming the universal scope of Christ's atoning provision. This is precisely the soteriological posture that enables unrestricted evangelistic proclamation in keeping with the Great Commission.

5.3 Predestination as Missional Motivator: The Empirical Evidence

The data provide strong empirical support for the claim that a well-understood predestination theology functions as a positive missional motivator. On Statement C4 that the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility is a healthy dynamic for mission, 65.00% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with agreement outpacing disagreement by more than five to one. On Statement C1, that one's view of predestination is a primary driver of passion for mission, 56.25% agreed or strongly agreed. On Statement C3, that the doctrine of predestination provides assurance that missionary work will be fruitful, 56.25% agreed or strongly agreed. These convergent findings constitute robust

empirical evidence against the assumption that predestination theology inherently inhibits mission.

The qualitative data enrich this statistical picture with pastoral texture. All nine interview respondents articulated positive missional functions of predestination theology. Thematic analysis identified a repertoire of pastoral strategies for managing the sovereignty-responsibility tension: command-based reasoning, which grounds evangelistic obligation in divine mandate rather than doctrinal resolution; epistemic limitation, which recognises that ignorance of who the elect are demands indiscriminate proclamation; the ends-means framework, which understands that God ordains both the election of individuals and the means of their calling through evangelism; and what one respondent, Dr Abbas, described as active partnership with God the sovereign sender. These strategies represent accumulated pastoral wisdom that translates the abstract doctrine into operationally effective missional motivation.

5.4 The Theory-Practice Gap and Its Structural Causes

The study identifies a significant and structurally explicable gap between the NBC's official predestination theology and its practical application in local churches. On Statement Q12 regarding the frequency of predestination teaching, 78.75% of respondents indicated that predestination is taught rarely or only occasionally in their local church, with just 15.00% reporting frequent explicit teaching. Furthermore, 33.75% of respondents were entirely unfamiliar with the NBC's official doctrinal statement on predestination, a finding that critically qualifies the 75.00% who reported their missionary activity as completely or mostly aligned with official teaching, since respondents who do not know the official position cannot meaningfully assess their own alignment with it.

Chi-square analysis of Hypothesis Four ($\chi^2 = 13.312$, $p = .01$; Cramér's $V = 0.167$) confirmed a statistically significant but weak-to-moderate relationship between official doctrinal position and practical application. The effect size indicates that multiple non-doctrinal factors, such as pastoral leadership style, associational culture, educational level, and denominational communication effectiveness, are at least as influential as doctrinal position in determining practice. Notably, deterministic churches held no consistent alignment between their official position and congregational practice, compared to significantly higher-than-expected consistent application among open theist congregations.

Themes 3 and 6 of the thematic analysis identify the structural causes of this theory-practice gap: inadequate teaching resources, infrequent explicit instruction, insufficient dissemination of official denominational documents, and pedagogical deficiencies in communicating theologically complex content to educationally diverse lay audiences. The widespread misunderstandings documented by interview respondents, fatalism, antinomianism, evangelistic futility, and identity anxiety are not inherent features of the doctrine itself but are predictable products of inadequate doctrinal formation.

5.5 The Great Commission as Denominational Unifier

One of the study's most practically significant findings is the near-universal affirmation of the Great Commission as a non-negotiable obligation that transcends doctrinal differences about predestination. All nine interview respondents, and 81.25% of questionnaire respondents, converged on the conviction that Christ's command in Matthew 28:18–20 creates an obligation independent of soteriological conclusions. Rev. Aboi's formulation was representative:

In Matthew 28, Jesus gave a command to reach all, not only the elect, so reaching out is a command, not a choice.

This finding resonates with Wright's argument that the Great Commission is not merely a final instruction but the culmination of a missional narrative that defines the church's identity and purpose across the entire biblical canon (Wright). The practical consequence within the NBC is that the Great Commission functions as a theological floor beneath doctrinal diversity: whatever one believes about election, the command to evangelise is universally received as non-negotiable. This means the NBC can sustain significant internal theological diversity on predestination without fragmenting its missional identity, a finding with important implications for denominational governance and theological education strategy.

6. CONSTRUCTIVE CONCLUSIONS: TOWARD AN AFRICAN BAPTIST THEOLOGY OF MISSION

6.1 Missional Compatibilism: Theological Justification

The convergence of historical, doctrinal, and empirical evidence supports a constructive theological proposal: that the NBC's missional compatibilism holding divine sovereignty and human responsibility in productive tension without philosophical resolution is not a theological deficiency requiring correction but a principled and

contextually grounded theological achievement that merits serious scholarly attention and denominational cultivation. Its justification rests on three pillars.

First, biblical fidelity. Scripture consistently presents both divine sovereignty in salvation (John 6:44; Ephesians 1:4–5; Romans 8:29–30; Romans 9:11–16) and human responsibility in proclamation and response (Matthew 28:19–20; Romans 10:14–15; 2 Peter 3:9) as simultaneously authoritative affirmations. No systematic resolution of this tension is provided within the biblical canon itself. Theological traditions that have forced a resolution, whether by subordinating sovereignty to foreseen faith or by so emphasising sovereignty as to eclipse the genuine duty of proclamation, have historically produced either doctrinal instability or missional paralysis.

Second, historical validation. The empirical record reviewed in this article consistently confirms that the most missionally productive Baptist theology is precisely the Fullerian synthesis the NBC has inherited and indigenised, a theology that holds both poles in productive tension, grounding missionary confidence in divine sovereignty while anchoring missionary urgency in divine command. Sheldon's study of Calvinist Baptist missionaries in Jamaica (1782–1879) demonstrates that a robust doctrine of God's sovereignty correlated with remarkable missionary resilience under severe conditions (Campbell 45), conditions directly analogous to those faced by Plateau Baptist Conference missionaries in a religiously plural and conflict-affected region.

Third, African epistemological resonance. As Bediako, Mbiti, and Walls collectively demonstrate, African communal epistemology is characteristically more at ease with paradox and mystery than the Enlightenment rationalism that shaped Western systematic theology's drive toward logical consistency (Bediako 58-59). The NBC's embrace of productive paradox in the sovereignty-responsibility tension may reflect not theological vagueness but a genuinely African epistemological contribution to the global Baptist theological conversation.

6.2 Institutional Imperatives: Closing the Educational Gap

The study's most urgent practical finding is the educational gap between the NBC's sophisticated official theology and the widespread lay misunderstandings that produce missional dysfunction at the congregational level. Three institutional imperatives follow directly from this finding.

First, the NBC should commission and publish an official teaching document on predestination and mission that explains the denomination's compatibilist theological

architecture in accessible terms, addresses common misunderstandings directly, and demonstrates the positive relationship between sound predestination theology and vigorous missionary engagement. The unanimous call for such a resource by all nine interview respondents representing different levels of education, institutional position, and theological sophistication establishes both the need and the demand.

Second, Nigerian Baptist theological institutions should develop a dedicated curriculum module on predestination and missions for inclusion in all pastoral training programmes. Such a module should engage biblical foundations, historical Baptist debates, African contextual considerations, and the specific pastoral strategies for communicating this doctrine effectively to diverse lay audiences. The ten pastoral strategies documented in Theme 4 of the qualitative analysis constitute a ready curriculum resource encoding the accumulated wisdom of experienced NBC pastors.

Third, the NBC should invest in improving the dissemination of its official doctrinal documents. The finding that 33.75% of respondents are entirely unfamiliar with the NBC's official statement on predestination represents a failure of institutional communication that no amount of theological refinement can compensate for. Doctrinal statements produce their intended effects only when they reach and shape the communities for which they were designed.

6.3 An Agenda for African Baptist Theological Development

Beyond these immediate institutional imperatives, this study points toward a broader agenda for African Baptist theological development. The near-complete absence of scholarship on predestination and missions from African, Nigerian, and Plateau Baptist perspectives means that the NBC's indigenous theological synthesis remains largely undocumented, unanalysed, and therefore undefended against internal drift and external pressure from Pentecostal, prosperity gospel, and hyper-Calvinist trajectories.

A constructive African Baptist theology of predestination and mission would need to accomplish several things simultaneously. It would need to engage the indigenous conceptual frameworks of Yoruba, Igbo, Plateau, and other Nigerian peoples not as theological curiosities but as genuine dialogue partners whose insights can enrich and contextualise the inherited Baptist theological tradition. It would need to develop what Klein has called a corporate view of election that resonates with African communal anthropology—understanding election not merely as God's pre-temporal decision about individual souls but as his calling of a people to corporate missionary vocation (Klein 45).

And it would need to articulate, with the rigour and accessibility the NBC's diverse membership requires, the specific ways in which the Reformed Baptist heritage properly understood and faithfully transmitted energises rather than inhibits the missionary engagement that is the NBC's most fundamental institutional identity.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the Nigerian Baptist Convention has developed, through more than 170 years of theological formation, historical development, and indigenous adaptation, a distinctive missional compatibilism that is both a significant theological achievement and a fragile institutional heritage. It is significant because it has historically sustained one of Africa's most remarkable missionary movements without requiring either the theological concession of Arminian prevenient grace or the missional paralysis of hyper-Calvinist determinism. It is fragile because it depends on a quality of doctrinal formation that the NBC's current educational infrastructure does not consistently deliver.

The empirical evidence from the Plateau Baptist Conference makes the stakes clear: where predestination is well-taught, it generates the sovereign confidence, missional assurance, and prayer intensity that sustain long-term evangelistic engagement; where it is poorly taught or absent from pastoral instruction, it produces the fatalism, antinomianism, and identity anxiety that undermine the very mission it was designed to support. The remedy is not less predestination theology but better predestination theology, contextually grounded, pastorally communicated, historically informed, and anchored at every point in the Great Commission imperative that has been the NBC's most consistently powerful theological resource since Thomas Bowen first arrived on Nigerian soil in 1850.

Andrew Fuller's foundational insight remains as relevant to the NBC's twenty-first-century situation as it was to the English Particular Baptist crisis of the 1780s: the logical tension between unconditional election and universal gospel proclamation is not a theoretical problem requiring philosophical resolution but a productive theological paradox requiring pastoral cultivation. The missionary proclaims the gospel to all without distinction; who responds is God's sovereign determination; the outcome is neither in doubt nor in the missionary's hands. This is the theological foundation on which the NBC was built, and on which, through sustained investment in its people's doctrinal formation, it must continue to grow.

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