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Sports and Religion*Akingbohunge Williams Ojo, PhD***SPORTS AND RELIGION**

Few churches in Nigeria have or emphasized a theology for sporting activities as a complement to spiritual fitness; yet there are many symbolisms of sports or athletes used in the Bible to convey spiritual discipline and competition. There is therefore a need to emphasise the importance of sporting exercise and physical fitness for Christians. Sporting activities that could keep Christians fit are hardly practiced by churches. Obviously, there is need for the imbalance between physical fitness and spiritual development to be addressed. It is in this light that this work evaluates and highlights the activities and commitment of the church towards bridging the gap between physical fitness and spiritual development.

CHRISTIANS, WORSHIP AND SPORTS

Sports and religion are aligned with each other in a variety of ways, including the association between churches and sports activity. The use of sports commonly occurs in Protestant Christian churches, including Southern Baptist churches which is a denomination that readily promotes the value of offering sports and recreational activities. This chapter identifies sport activities and related aspects of church provided sport.

Therefore, sport is a major facet in the lives of many people in contemporary communities and churches. The emergence of sports can be seen in practically all aspects of life and society. The presence of sport is even seen in relation to churches' worship. This connection between the church and sports proposes some interesting issues. The relationship that exists between sports and religion occurs in a variety of associations. As Hoffman stated, where the organized church is found, sport is also likely to be found.¹ The 'use' of sport, by religious institutions and organizations, as well as the 'use' of religion by sports organizations appears in various forms throughout contemporary sport. This can be seen through all levels of sport, from the local level (i.e. church sport) up through elite level of sports (that is, Olympic Games or professional sports).²

Rev. Samuel Ashe was an English clergyman who clearly saw the need for the interaction between the church and sport. He used to spend his Sunday afternoons hiding in the trees by the local sports field. He would bide his time till the football came near him when he would catch the ball and pierce it with a pin.³ He could then go home, pleased to have stopped his parishioners from sinning! Sadly, Samuel is far from unique. So many of the interactions between the church and sport have left the church in a rather negative light. One of the earliest references to a conflict between Christianity and sports came in 1364, when the Synod of Ely in England forbade its clergy from playing games, and some years later, the Prior of Lilleshall, issuing moral guidance, urged parish priests to banish games from their church yards.⁴ There are many examples of people in England being taken to court for playing sports on a Sunday or other holy day. For example in Asheldham, Essex, in 1592, one Richard Jeffercy appeared before the Archdeacon of Essex on the charge that he had procured company together and played at foot-ball in Hackwell, on Easter Monday in Evening Service time.⁵

In 1787, St Sepulchre's Church enclosed its yard to stop boys from playing games and in 1802, a church in Somerset replaced the stones to stop people playing fives against the church building.⁶ How-

1 Hoffman, "Sport and Religion," *The Smart Journal*, (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1992), 22.

2 D.S. Eitzen & G.H. Sage, *Sport and Religion* in C. Prebish ed. *Religion and Sport: The Meeting of Sacred and Profane*, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1992), 79 – 118.

3 R. Holt, *Sport and the British*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 39.

4 Mirc John, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 1403, E. Peacock ed. in Birley Derek, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, (Manchester: University Press, 1993), 43.

5 Lincoln Diocese Documents, 1450 – 1544 EETS, Original Serial No. 149, in Marples Morris, *A History of Football*, (London: Secker and Warburg 1954), 54.

6 R. Holt, *Sport and the British*, 46.

ever, the publication in 1857, of Thomas Hughes' novel, *Tom Brown's School Days* and the development of the Muscular Christianity movement started to change all that, first in the UK and then in the USA and beyond. Gradually the church began to see the value of sports. In the words of one scholar, sports and religion once again joined hands and the marriage is still going strong.⁷ One historian estimated that during the period 1863 – 1915, one quarter of all sports clubs in England were church, chapel teams or Sunday school teams.⁸ A recent book documents how 12 major English football clubs had their origins as church teams.⁹ This trend was also found in America with what one book VIII calls the church's "engagement with sport." A suggestion was made in 1869 that every village that has two churches now should put both congregations together to worship in one building and to practice gymnastics in the other.¹⁰ The New York YMCA found gymnasia an excellent way of attracting men into the building and so to attend their Bible Studies. American churches followed suit by building facilities for physical culture and recreation – a gymnasium, baths, very likely a swimming pool and perhaps a bowling alley, which, not long since, would have been deemed sacrilegious.¹¹ One continuing bone of contention was whether players had to attend church in order to be part of the church team. Most Sunday school leagues and most church clubs had rules insisting that all players attended church or Sunday school regularly. However, the rules were not always observed.

The Walkden Congregation Cricket club came up with a magnificent compromise, insisting that second XI players attended church but not first team players—presumably to allow them to strengthen the first team with good cricketers with no church allegiance! Contemporary evidence as to whether sports teams resulted in higher church attendance is inconclusive.¹² To date, the presence of church-provided sport has received a relatively small amount of attention by researchers. There can be numerous reasons that can be given to help explain why the research in this area has been and still is so limited. Prebish proposed that the lack of sophistication and a lack of knowledge related to the connection of religion and sport, as well as the relative newness of the study of sport as an area of academic interest have helped hinder such research.¹³

Churches providing sports is a common occurrence in America today. The phenomena of prevalence of churches providing sporting endeavours and facilities has really proliferated since the 1970's Ladd & Mathisen. Churches have made use of sports in the form of leagues, tournaments, facilities and so forth, for members and nonmembers alike.¹⁴ Various studies have looked at the place of sport and recreation as it is being used by churches. From these studies, results suggested that recreation was held in high regards among church leaders. Furthermore, it was shown that the majority of responding churches provided recreational programs to both members and nonmembers in the surrounding church community, though it was noted that the majority of the recreational activities were offered to members.

Ermand found that church programs can provide opportunities to a wide selection of people, both from the church site, as well as to people that are not church members or church regulars.¹⁵ Ogden found that though respondents (church pastors and lay leaders) felt that evangelism should be church recreation's most important purpose, the results suggested that the actual practice was to meet the church member's needs.¹⁶ Aspects of teamwork also appeared during this research. It was obvious that some teams functioned well together. Nowhere was this more prevalent than in the volleyball league play. Teams commonly functioned smoothly, and it was obvious that some of these individuals had played together before as well.

EVANGELISM: AS A DYNAMIC SPORTING ACTIVITY

Despite the spread of the influence of Muscular Christianity in the UK, evangelical objections to sport did, however, remain in some places. One Welsh minister denouncing sport and other amusements, de-

7 J. Robert Higgs, *Sports – A Reference Guide*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1982), 209.

8 T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863 – 1915*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), 26.

9 Lupson Peter, *Thank God for Football*, (London: SPCK Press, 2006), 12.

10 Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880 – 1920*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22.

11 Ladd Mathisen, Putney and Williams, *Cricket and England, 1919 – 1939*, (Chicago: Ontario Press, 1960), 155.

12 Williams *Cricket and England* 127 says it did not. Buff, 18 Nov, 1922, in *Cricket and Christianity*, 150.

13 C. Prebish, ed. *Religion and Sport: The Meeting of Sacred and Profane*, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1992), 52.

14 T. Ladd, & J.A. Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 39.

15 M.R. Ermand, "Religion and Leisure: A Case Study of the Role of the Church as a Provider of Recreation in Small Ontario Communities," unpublished Master's Thesis, (Canada, Ontario: University of Waterloo, 1990), 17.

16 M.W. Ogden, "Attitudes of Southern Baptist Leaders towards Leisure and the Place of Recreation in the Church Program," unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1978), 29.

creed that, if men wished to frequent pubs, theatres and football then let them, in the name of the living God, remain outside the Christian pale.¹⁷ In the wake of Evan Roberts' crusade through the valleys of Wales in November 1904, Noddfa Chapel Treorchy suddenly found its Sunday school increased by the addition of a "footballer's class," which included the captain of Treorchy RFC who had renounced rugby forever. At Ynysybwl, the entire team was baptized and immediately stopped playing rugby and disbanded the team.¹⁸ Given the general disapproval of sports among evangelicals, it is hardly surprising that the typical evangelical played sports only for a short time. Generally speaking, the evangelicals had a low view of sports: life was far too serious, and duty far too important to have any real relation to a game for Evangelicals.¹⁹

Sport was perhaps fine when you were young, but when you became a man and put off childish things, sport was likely to be dropped as having no relation to the real business of adult life. Bishop JC Ryle, (1816–1900) for example, had been a cricket captain of Eton and represented Oxford in cricket and two other sports. However, he never played cricket after ordination. His attitude is summed up in his *Who's Who* entry, which records his interests as "cricket until ordained." The objections to sports were often not the inherent sinfulness of sport itself as much as its association with sin – sport often encouraged gambling, was associated with drinking and took place on Sunday.²⁰ The Wesleyan minister, who wrote to his local paper about the races, seemed to cover all the options with his criticisms, "Races are cruel and inhuman as it respects animals, they are the fruitful source of profligacy and vice, drunkenness and debauchery, fraud and theft, personal degradation and domestic misery. It is impossible to devise anything more mischievous in its tendency or more subversive of the morals of the people."

We cannot disagree with the ministers' diagnosis of sport as a sinful environment but would beg to differ with his conclusions. We prefer to see sports as part of God's creation, but like the rest of the world, is tainted by sin which entered the world with the fall. In Christ, it can be redeemed and God can be glorified in sports, as much as in any other human activity. From a period when Christians viewed sports with suspicion, if not outright antagonism, how did we get to a position where there are Christian missions dedicated to working in the world of sports? Arguably, it all started in the last 1940s. Ladd and Mathisen documented what they call the re-engagement of religion and sports in the Post Second World War Period, seeing Billy Graham's partnership with America's top miler, Gil Dodd in 1947, at a Youth for Christ rally as the launch pad.²¹

Ladd and Mathisen argue that in finding for sport a redefined place in their larger mission; churches were doing the same things, albeit in a more sophisticated manner, that DL Moody and the Studd brothers had been doing at the end of the 19th Century. "Not only would the un-churched listen to a famous athlete or to a revivalist using sports metaphors, they might also choose an evangelical church or college in part on the basis of its athletic programs."

Since the 1940s, the significant model of sports ministry has been one which is driven primarily by the pragmatic principle that sport is a huge influence in contemporary society and so getting involved in sport is a means of reaching into that culture with the Christian message. Many churches, following pioneering American churches, have adapted this model, developing sports activities and teams as an integral part of their evangelistic programmes.²²

OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON SPORTS AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

God gives spiritual gifts to His people so that they might be effective and enabled for ministry. All Christians are endowed with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12: 7; Ephesians 4: 7). These gifts are never given to believers that they might profit by them or that they might use the gifts for themselves. They are given, as the apostle says "to produce what is beneficial" (1 Corinthians 12: 7). Gifts entail ministry. This means that all Christians are ministers. All Christians have tasks to perform in the service of the Lord in the church. No one is ever meant merely to be a receiver of ministry; all of God's people both give and receive ministry. Churches will never achieve the level of maturity that Christ means for

17 R.J. Dunn, *An Exploratory Study of the Participants in a Christian Hockey League: Integration of their Christian Faith*, (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1998); D.M. Cowling, "Attitudes and/or Conduct Problems in Church Sports," PhD Dissertation, (Georgia: University of Georgia, 1985) and R. Dunn and L. Christopher Stevenson, "The Paradox of the Church Hockey League," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 33, 1998, 131 – 142.

18 David Smith and Gareth Williams, *Fields of Praise: The Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union, 1881 – 1981*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980), 101.

19 David Smith and Gareth Williams, *Fields of Praise: The Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union, 1881 – 1981*, 127.

20 Patrick Scott, "Cricket and the Religious World of the Victorian Period," *The Church Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 134 – 144, 1970.

21 Letter to Derby Mercury, 16 Feb, 1845, in Anthony Delves, *Popular Recreation and Social Conflict in Derby, 1800 – 1850*, in E. Yeo, and S Yeo ed. *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590 – 1914*, (London: Harvester Press, 1981), 109.

22 Garner John, *For an Excellent Apologetic for Church Sports Ministry can use Sport as a Tool (or Hook) to Share the Gospel, Recreation and Sports Ministry*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 123.

them to have until all members are actively demonstrating their giftedness by engaging in the ministries which their gifts entail (Ephesians. 4: 12 – 16). When churches discover the importance of an every member ministry, they will truly experience the growth of the body, for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians. 4: 16).²³

The King James Version uses 'sport' or 'sporting' to translate a number of different Hebrew and Greek words of the Holy Scriptures all of which mean some form of laughing, or even 'cheering,' which being means cheerful:

The Hebrew word, pronounced *saw-khawk*, means to laugh or to play. The Hebrew word, pronounced *sek-oke*, means mocking laughter. The Hebrew word, pronounced *aw-nawg*, which means effeminate or delicate.²⁴

To laugh at, to mock, to play with, and in one place to live in luxury. The versions do not agree on how to translate this word. For instance, Isaiah, 57: 4 is translated. "Against whom do ye sport yourselves?" ('Jest'; 'mocking'). Samson is said to have made sport for the Philistines (Judge 16: 25). Modern translations use 'perform' and 'entertain.' Second Peter 2: 13 speaks of the unrighteous as "sporting themselves with their own deceiving while they feast with you." Modern translations translate reveling.²⁵

The Hebrew verb "makes sport" is used to indicate ridicule (e.g. Genesis 29: 9), but also sport in the sense of entertainment (Judge 16: 25 – 27):

The Philistines were however great "sports fans." When they captured Samson and blinded him, they brought him out into their arena so that "when their hearts were merry, that they said, call for Samson, that he may make us sport" that is, they laughed at a blinded man stumbling around in their arena, likely while being struck and prodded by 'opponents' that he couldn't see. They might even have gotten away with it, except while doing so "they praised their god" over the Lord. In response, the Lord gave Samson the strength to bring down their stadium, for their "house fell upon their gods, and upon all the people that were therein."²⁶

Therefore, 'play' (Exodus 32: 6), "And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play," Psalm 104: 26: 'There go the ships: there is that leviathan, which thou hast made to play therein', Zech 8: 5 – 6: 'And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. 6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; if it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of ****this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? Saith the LORD of hosts.'

In the beginning of Creation, God started the physical fitness work by creating the world, from the first day to the sixth day, and observed the works as good, and then rested on the seventh day. He made man in his image and breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and it became man, and the man began to live. And he put man in the Garden of Eden to keep clean and guard it, that is, to get busy working in it. Genesis 1-2.

In the first book of the New Testament called the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus started His Ministry by choosing His disciples in order to work with him as Someone that God has sent to humanity for salvation. The work of salvation began as He elected His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 4: 12 – 25.

WALKING

When God called Abraham to leave his father's place to a place where he would show him to live, that is, from Ur in Haran to Canaan, Abraham was 75 years old. He took his wife, his nephew Lot, and all the wealth, and all the slaves they had acquired in Haran and headed on journey to the Land of Canaan all through by walking and this is attributed to their strong energy and ability for long living, because they were physically fit to tackle so many things beyond their age, (Genesis 12: 1 – 9.)

Abraham, the first Hebrew patriarch, was known from the beginning as Abram that is, "father is exalted,"

but this was changed subsequently to Abraham, "that is, father of multitude," (Gen. 17: 5.)

23 Chad Owen Brand, in Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, (Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1530 – 1531.

24 Chad Owen Brand, in Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 2003, 1530 – 1531.

25 Chad Owen Brand, in Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1531.

26 Wayne Blank, Journal of the Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies, 1(1), 2010, 9 – 17.

Abraham journeyed from Haran to Egypt, Hebron, Mamre, Kedesh, Shur, Gerer, to mention a few, through wandering, that is, by trekking, and where the night came to them, they made tents and had their rest. The next day, the journey continued. (Genesis 12, 13 and 14.)

The descendants of Abraham, that is, Isaac, and Jacob were wanderers like their father. They trekked from one place to another for survival and all these were done happily as sporting activities to keep them fit as there was no means of transport than to walk and it became routine exercises that contributed immensely to their physical fitness and long life than that of the present generation, (Genesis 24 – 36). According to R.K. Harrison, “Abraham was the physical father of the nations and a typical man of faith.”²⁷

***In the Old Testament, walking is the common means of transport from one place to another. For more than forty-years, Israelites in Egypt walked to a cross the Red Sea to the wilderness led by Moses and Aaron, there was no other means of transport for them than to trek, “that was how they make a long difficult journey, especially on foot and often over rough or mountainous terrain.”

On the account of Moses in the Old Testament, Moses led the Israelites out of the land of Egypt through walking across to the Red Sea to the wilderness. After his demise, Joshua and Caleb took over the baton and led the Israelites to the Promised Land according to God’s instruction, through walking, (Exodus 3 – 20; Joshua 1 – 24).

Further accounts were given of the Old Testament prophets who had no other means of transportation than to trek from one place to another, and their places of abode were in the wilderness. They walked all their ways to the cities, covered so many kilometers to and fro their abode every day during their pious duties. As a result of this, they were very fit physically fit and healthy and they as well lived longer. Such as Prophet Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Zechariah to mention a few.

God created the five senses, that is: Sight, Smell, Taste, Touch, and Hearing, so that we could experience, enjoy, and take pleasure in physical things. No particular physical thing of itself represents worldliness, but lusting after that thing is wrong. Lust is an illicit and sinful desire. It can make us desire or use something in a manner contrary to God’s law or the purpose for which He created it.²⁸ Lust represents a wrong attitude of the mind and heart. Sex, alcohol, dancing, card playing and watching television and movies are examples of activities that can produce certain pleasure. These are not wrong when used within the confines of God’s Law.²⁹ God created sex and called it good (Genesis 1: 27, 31). He commanded man and woman to use it a right and proper way, (vs. 28). Yet, fornication, adultery, and other wrong uses of sex violate God’s law and are forbidden (Exodus 20: 14; Galatians 5: 19; 1 Corinthians 6: 18). He inspired Solomon to write, “A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry” (Ecclesiastics 10: 19). God’s people often danced in times of celebration:

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, that the woman came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with taborets, with joy, and with instrument of music.³⁰

Joshua gives the account of his strength and ability through his journey even at the age of eighty-five years, as God gave him grace to travel with the Israelites in the wilderness for forty-five years without tiredness and yet he was very strong. This contributed to their (Israelites) walking exercises, because there was no transport facility at that point in time: it was also said that he (Joshua) was even physically able to go to war.

Looking at the Patriarchal Period, from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob who were the ancestors of Israelites, and were wanderers all the days of their lives, this made it possible for them to be strong, physically fit and lived long, as there was no room for storage of blood-sugar or aiding cholesterol, because they burned it through their walking exercise.

The patriarchs are portrayed in the biblical narratives as individual semi-nomads living in tents, wandering up and down Palestine and its borders in search of seasonal pasture for their flock and on occasions, making long journeys to Egypt and Mesopotamia. They did not (except for Lot) settle in towns and did little farming on the way (Genesis 26: 12). Thus, Abraham set out from Haran, accompanied by his wife, and their servants and their flock; they moved through the land of Canaan, wandering from place to place until Abraham settled near Hebron.³¹ The same picture is given of his son, Isaac and grandson, Jacob. The latter travelled to Haran and back (Genesis 28: 35). During the time of the great

27 R.K. Harrison, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers. 2003), 13 – 14.

28 Wayne Blank, *Journal of the Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies*, 1(1), 14

29 Wayne Blank, *Journal of the Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies*, 1(1), 14 – 15.

30 Wayne Blank, *Journal of the Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies*, 1(1), 17.

31 Wayne Blank, *Journal of the Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies*, 1(1), 16 – 17.

famine, Jacob migrated with his family into Egypt. In this way, the patriarchal narratives portray certain individuals and their families who move through their world as if they were alone in it. The great world empires of the day, even the little people of Canaan, if they are introduced at all, are mentioned only in passing.³² Most of the incidents in the Genesis narratives which would puzzle us today, find explanation in the light of social customs that existed in the second millennium.

NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVES ON PHYSICAL FITNESS

Having done the exegesis of the four gospels, that is, the “Synoptic Gospels” on the account of Jesus’ miracles, in respect of physical fitness and spirituality, Jesus treated the multitudes psychologically in terms of what was good for them at the appropriate time. He told His disciples to feed them, because He could see them as being weary and weak; He knew that nothing can be assimilated when one is hungry and whatever effort applied will be wasted. He first and foremost delivered them from hunger by giving them food that would make them fit to further listen to whatever He was about to tell or teach them.

Secondly, He made them sit on the field, gaining their strength and began to teach them. He gave them the food of life that is, the spiritual food, preached the kingdom of God to them and healed those that needed healings. All of them went out to proclaim the miracles done by Jesus in the nooks and crannies of the city, and eventually went home happily. So, by and large, Jesus made them physically fit and made them spiritually filled.

The accounts of the synoptic gospels are similar to one another in terms of the aim of Jesus to make every one physically fit and spiritually sound in order to be developed spiritually so that others may be developed. The instruction given by Jesus to His disciples to gather the fragments was to let nothing be wasted, that is, no one should be lost. The instruction was primarily based on taking care of the souls of the flock. The basket of loaves and fish was not collected from them; it remained twelve baskets of which each disciple had his own basket which basically represented the tool for his ministry.

RELIGION AND SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN THE CHURCH TODAY

The sporting activities were programmed according to the age’s capabilities in various churches and competed for through the Archdeaconries’ level of the diocese. The sporting activities go thus: athletics, table tennis, draft (checkers) game, Chess, football, *Ayo-Olopon*, Ludo. Walking for Jesus (Road walk), dancing/singing, drama, Bible quiz and Bible marathon exercise. The sporting activities were lined up with the youths, adults and elders of each Archdeaconry seated in their various parishes of the diocese both for physically fitness and spiritual development.

Church Sports Orientation for all Ages

In a bid to enlighten the church members of the diocese, various seminars of sporting activities were organized to reoriented/orientate all the ages in various disciplines of sports. Secondly, some of the clergymen who were knowledgeable in sports had organized special trainings for them through a short time training at the National Institute for Sports at the National Stadium, Surulere, Lagos, by the churches in order to take good co-ordination of the sport assigned to them. In most cases of sporting activities whose finals during the church sporting festival, which normally came up on Saturday before Easter Sunday and Easter Monday precisely, sports officials were sent from the National Institute for Sports (NIS) as keen umpires who would officiate and manage the good atmosphere of the events.

Church Novelty Matches

The church’s novelty matches were organized through the senior and junior clergy of the archdeaconries to the diocesan level as well as laity respectively on an interdenominational basis. This was an attractive, interesting and interacting field game, which was full of fun and drama. The novelty matches were, mixed comprising men and women church members. And before the match took off, a medical check-up is conducted to prevent casualties.

Royal Physical Fitness

This event of physical fitness was a clarion call of The Rt. Revd. B.T. Adeyemi sometime in year 2004. It was scheduled for every fortnight that is every 2nd and 4th Saturdays of the month. It was a day set aside for his diocesan keep-fit days of the blessed month and he tagged it as “Royal Physical Fitness.”

32 T.N.O. Quarcoopome; History and Religion of Israel, from THE Creation through the Monarchy to the Exile (586.B.C.), (Ibadan: African Universities Press, Pilgrim Books Limited, 1988), 22 – 24.

He mapped out the programmes and venues where it would take place periodically in the Archdeacons' seat of the Diocese, for both the clergy and the laity of the church.

Walking for Jesus

This event is another area of evangelizing through sport with the members assembling at the church hall. Having observed a short service led by the Archdeacon, the youth leaders of each Archdeaconry would distribute the evangelical "Track-Script" that would be given while walking on the road to passersby, and place them in a strategic place among people when they are ready to go for the exercise. A long distance of about six (6) kilometers was to be covered with drumming and singing to and fro the exercise. Though not all the people who started the exercises finished the walking for Jesus exercise, the statistics revealed that one third of the team had backed out on the way but amongst the people who finished the walking for Jesus were youths in particular and some men and women of the church.

Youth Games

The following are the little sports games that were earmarked for the youth sports in some churches. The youth participate in it, especially during the Youth week and Easter Monday respectively. They compete and win laurel prizes in this regard. The events participated in include athletics, table tennis, Chess, football, dancing/singing, drama and Bible quiz. Though there was no sponsorship for it, organizing it yearly as an event gathered the youth together, made them relate with one another and speak together in one voice. That is love with one another and to be able to look physically fit and spiritually developed.

A religious/theological appraisal of sport in some churches

First and foremost, we need to look into the words that make up the topic that is, Theology, Appraisal and Sports before giving the evaluation. What are theology, appraisal and sports?

Theology has been defined in so many ways but the same intonation. Macmillan English Dictionary for Advance Learners (New Edition), defined Theology as 'the study of God and religion and as well as a set of religious beliefs'.³³ Theology is a biblical discussion of what the Bible itself teaches about God and His dealings with human being and the rest of creation.³⁴ Theology is the study of the nature of God and the relationship of the human and divine.³⁵ Theology is systematic: It tries to harmonise all the teachings from different parts into a coherent whole. Theology also relates to the issues of general culture and learning. It relates to cosmology, psychology and philosophy of history.

Therefore, theology is practical. This means that it has to relate to not just belief but also to living. Paul set an excellent example of this truth because his epistles dealt with theology and then practical application of the truths expounded. Theology of every generation must do this if the message will continue to maintain its relevance.

Appraisal is an opinion about how successful or effective someone or something is. Also, it is an interview between a manager and an employee which allows the manager to judge how well the employee is doing his job.³⁶

Sports, all over the world, have become an established entity that exerts great influence on the social, political and even the economic environments of any nation and that of individuals. It is for this reason that Sports occupies a unique position in the life of a nation. So, it is therefore not surprising that a lot of man's hours and finances are devoted to its development and publicity.³⁷ The Oxford Dictionary defined sport as an activity engaged in especially outdoors, for amusement and exercise³⁸ while Mbaye defines sport to be a group of physical exercises that may be organised into individual team games with one specific rule.³⁹ Sport is an activity in which players or teams compete against one other, usually an activity that involves physical efforts.⁴⁰

With the above explanations, we can simply give the judgment that is, "to appraise" the role of re-

33 Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, New Edition, (Oxford: Macmillan Publisher Limited, 2007), 1550.

34 Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, (Nashville: Tennessee Holman Publisher, 2003), 1581.

35 Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 2006), <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com>, Accessed 15/07/2013.

36 The New Webster Encyclopedia Dictionary of English Language, (New York: Publisher by Black & Dog Leventhal Inc. 1993), 65.

37 The Official Magazine of the International Council for Health Physical Education Recreation, Sports and Dance; African Region, (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2003), 56.

38 The Official Magazine of the International Council for Health Physical Education Recreation, Sports and Dance; African Region, 56.

39 K. Mbaye, "Sports and Human Rights," Olympic Review XXVI, 1999, 24.

40 Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, New Edition, 1442.

ligion/theology and sports in the life of church members as well as the impact and evaluation of physical fitness and spiritual development.

- a. That religion and sports is a way of God making because in the beginning, God mysteriously and physically created heaven and earth in His command. (Gen. 1 – 3).
- b. Theologically, God bound his Word and physically gave man knowledge to be able to study the Word for their physical and spiritual development, both politically, economically, socially, educationally to mention but a few.
- c. In another perspective, God likes good environs. He showed this by putting man to be in charge of Eden and guard it for mutual communication between Him and man. Hygienically, The Spirit moved with good ideals, good thinking, and good health moved with physical fitness and good diet. In lieu of this, God created heavens for fresh air and earth to bring forth food for the beings and all these led to good health and a sound atmosphere.
- d. In the case of physical fitness and spiritual development, the church is also known as the body of Christ. “This consists of the universal and local gathering of believers under the headship of Christ who meets regularly,” and orderly for the purpose of exalting God, edifying one another and evangelizing the world. It consists of all those who believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life; the church which meets as local congregations are the physical representatives of the “body of Christ,” in every locality.
- e. In considering or examining it, Theology and Sports, which could be termed as physical fitness and Spiritual development in Christian religion, is experienced in the form of God’s knowledge and worship. It is the rational studies of God as relates to how He could be understood, how His character can be presented and applied to human existence in attempt for human to respond to Him.
- f. As a matter of fact, Sports or physical fitness, is a neutral word. Like money, it only takes shape as people begin to deal with it, and brings it into the compass of their lives, to value its very nature in terms of competition and leisure. It breeds in a social environment where it is the mental, emotional, physical training ground, for the Christian and the sharpest of places for him to work out his faith. In considering, “Christians in sports,” is a natural outworking of theology proper because Jesus made it clear to His disciples that their contact with the world was to be based on His teaching and his redeeming sacrifice on Calvary. Because of this, the Biblical and Judeo-Christian perspective to ministry is the natural outworking of systematic theology, and does not need to be denominationalized and made a creed in its own right.
- g. Conditionally, sports brings physical fitness to someone’s life. Diet is also very important to the body, soul and mind. Without a proper diet, nothing can be reckoned with as being physically fit because a proper diet produces power, health, energy, skill, endurance, emotion, and agility to mention but a few.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between religion and sports is as follows:

- i. That it disposes weakness of the body, mind and soul.
- ii. It sets a new life to those who absorb it.
- iii. It makes people to walk by faith not and by sight (1 Corinthians 13: 9; 2 Corinthians 5: 7).
- iv. It renews love and harmony and happiness within the assembly of God.
- v. Religion and sports give more enlightenment on lives in education especially in terms of seminars and workshops on health medical check-up and others.
- vi. Religion and sports are like two objects, that is, like an iron that sharpens one another, in order to enhance physical fitness and spirituality advancement in the lives of the people.
- vii. Both religion and sports are healers in the area of individualism beliefs because the Word of God makes man to be whole while sports heals sicknesses. People often sought the help of God directly through prayers or through someone who is believed to have the special power to heal, as well as sports specialists in terms of exercises for healing the sick person or people from their ailments.
- viii. Furthermore, Religion is a process of how to know, or to come closer to God, through the vessels of God to His people. These include prophets, apostles, teachers, evangelists, and pastor, who would stand as an instructor (coaches) of God’s Words to the people, Likewise, Sports is a process of Religion- to know, or to come closer to God physically and spiritually in terms of development through sports specialists who would guide and guard exercises and some nutritional balancing such as food intakes, each piece of food that we eat, and drink that we consume and various exercises..
- ix. Religion and sports are inseparable because it helps to develop mankind both physically and spiritually. In the extent of applications, man or woman, or irrespective of sex has a basic need to worship and exercise good relationship and the result of ignoring this need, can result in poor health. (2 Peter 1: 4 – 7.)
- x. Both Religion and Sports are networked processes to man’s transformation and development. If one engages his or herself in God’s Word and fitness exercises, in any way of life and in order to receive blessings, favour, mercy,

and power from God, and enable one to be free from sinning and to be able to grow in love, in stability and good health.

- xi. On the other hand, Religion and sports in the churches make us to extend hands of fellowship to one another. In cheering the name of Jesus, study the Scripture, serving not to be served, simplicity and celebrations, and its relationship is another way of having fellowship and to experience spirituality amongst ourselves. There, we talk about Jesus, there we share our life testimonies to others and there, we share the Word of God, prayers, education, social life, politics and other ways of life. So, both physical fitness and spiritual development are over emphasized in the church interdenominational...

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