

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THE SALVATION TESTIMONY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CONVERTS IN THE
PROTESTANT FAITH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Prospectus Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Tenielle Jones Cook

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Humanity's frailty and mortal existence create the space for a spiritual conversion experience that resolves matters of life and death. However, spirituality is an abstract concept with an ambiguous definition, and activities surrounding the application of its concepts are interpreted differently from one religious group or community to the next. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African-American males and females in the Protestant faith. A semi-structured interview and Conversation analysis are used for data collection and analysis to identify emerging themes for the descriptive essence of the salvation testimony. At this stage in the research, a salvation testimony is defined as an intrinsic revelation of one's redemption towards God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Bergel, 2019; Estes, 2011; Oliver, 2018). Three theories guided the study: Identity and Social Theory (Stets & Burke, 2000), Structural-Functional theory (Murray, 1998a; Stryker, 2008a), and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Each theory assisted with interpretations about behavior adaptation within the social constructs for African-American converts in the Protestant faith. The researcher claimed that a salvation testimony is an incipient mechanism contributing to Christian identity formation and connectedness for African-American converts within the Protestant faith.

Keywords: Salvific testimony, Salvation, African-Americans, Protestant, Christology, symbolic interactionism, intentionality, reflection, converts

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Dedication

This labor of grace is dedicated to my parents, Robert L. Jones, Sr., and Evelyn Rose Kelly Jones, who lived and shared the gospel of Christ with me and for all the world to see.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the source and strength of my life because he has directed my every step in my life story. Next, I acknowledge my gift of grace from God, my husband, Reginald Cook, for his unwavering love and support that he shares with me daily. Additionally, I acknowledge our children and granddaughter, Allie, Shaun, CJ, Jeremiah, and Anais, for supporting me throughout this journey. I acknowledge the love, support, and prayers offered by family and friends. Thank you all!

I want to acknowledge Liberty University's dedication to building up the kingdom of God in the capacity of academia that allows Christ's followers to grow from faith to faith that will bring honor and praises to God alone! I want to express my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Butler, Dr. Jackson, and Dr. Lewis, who came alongside me and stood as intercessors, instructors, and fellow servants of the Lord! Also, I thank God for all the support received from professors, technical support, admissions, librarians, and many more who played an essential part in my academic pursuits at the university.

The completion of the journey is an acknowledgment of God's word: "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:" (New King James Version, 1979/1985, Hebrews 10:36). In the end, this journey is a fulfillment of God's loving grace and mercy that know no bounds. To God belongs all the glory, honor, and praises!

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List of Abbreviations

African American Converts (AAC)

Confession of Faith (COF)

Speech Act Theory (SAT)

Structural-Functional Theory (SFT)

Symbolic Interactionism Theory (SIT)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

The preacher takes the hand of the new convert who made the brave decision to “come to the altar” and receive Jesus Christ as their savior. In a different scenario, an individual signs up for a Baptism class as a prerequisite to confirm the personal decision to accept Jesus as the Lord and Savior of their life. Then, the one-on-one mentorship of a loving parent or neighbor shares the Good News of Jesus Christ with an individual who makes a personal declaration outside the church's walls –the physical structure. These scenarios vary from person to person, and the storytelling of one’s salvation testimony provided rich social context about the profound, life-changing event or events. Moments such as these are individualized experiences that impact an individual’s life-long journey (Ecclesiastes 3:4- 5). These moments are both tumultuous and joyous.

Chapter One covers eight sections of the study on the phenomenon of a salvation testimony for African-American converts in the Protestant faith. These sections include the Background of the Problem, a Statement of the Problem, the Purpose Statement, Research Questions, Sssumptions and Delimitations, the Definition of Terms, the Significance of the Study, and the Summary of the Design.

Background to the Problem

Theological Context

Conceptualizing spiritual change is an abstract concept that has various interpretations. Holder (2005) conceptualizes Christian spirituality as a multifaceted existential phenomenon that is personal and tethered to biblical precepts that influence cognitive and behavioral responses in an individual’s lifestyle. Also, conceptually, spirituality is not limited to intrinsic personal moments but manifests in connections with others affected by life-altering situations (de Jager

Meezenbroek et al., 2012). Zinnbauer et al. (1997) connected religiousness to “organizational or institutional beliefs and practices, and the focus of spirituality of definitions on the personal qualities of connection or relationship with a Higher Power” (p. 257). Morrow (2008) situates spirituality in the scope of “positional salvation or justification” (p.43) and the experience of a new identity. The previous literature indicates that spirituality is a complex topic that incorporates a lived experience and religious tennets in context of an individual’s life.

Smith (2006) discloses quantifiable data indicating that about half of the American population experienced spiritual or religious change, individual circumstances surrounding the spiritual transformation, and its lasting impacts in The National Spiritual Transformation Study. Smith captured participants’ reflections that “there was a before and then an after period between which a spiritual/religious change happened, but no description of the moment or event of change itself.” (p. 290). Klaver et al. (2017) compel readers to examine the authenticity of a conversion story or salvation testimony as a “dialogical process between external structures of authority and the evaluation of one’s individual experiences” (p. 249). Furthermore, Ondrasek (2017) affirms the practical and effective use of recalling, reflecting, and sharing an individual’s testimony or salvation testimony to nurture spiritual and ethical transformation. Previous literature highlights that an individual’s salvific experiences validate converts’ religious authenticity/identity and spiritual conversion within the narration of their salvation testimonials. The Christian salvation testimony alerts the human conscience that spiritual conversion has begun, and it transforms cognitive, behavioral, and social responses to align with biblical principles outlined in the canonized Bible. The researcher claimed the salvation testimony served as a catalyst and asset that that supports spiritual change and maintenance for African American converts in the Protestant faith.

Spiritual change or conversion indicates a makeover that is personal and lasting. The researcher sought to understand how African American converts describe their salvation testimony in the Protestant faith. What validates the salvation testimony? What spiritual practices (e.g., Communion and Bible reading)? Conversion frameworks are critical to understanding the humanistic value between the convert and their social context. The study extrapolates from the crucial work of Rambo (1993), Lofland & Skonvod (1981), and Martin (2009) for crafting the foundational knowledge of spiritual conversion in a broad stroke.

Conversion

The ethereal construct of conversion is equally complex (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981; Martin, 2009a; Rambo, 1993). Conversion is revealed and differs in the context of converts' theological underpinnings, worldviews, and cultural influences, known as presuppositional lenses (Admirand, 2020; Buchanan, 2011; Galonnier & de los Rios, 2016; Lofland & Stark, 1965). For instance, the Eastern and Western churches present differing cultural nuances with conversion (Aagaard, 2005; Dueck et al., 2017; Eastvold, 2018; Oliver & Oliver, 2019), and denominational influences shape converts' conversion experience and identity (Cartledge, 2008; L. Taylor, 2021). Asamoah-Gyadu (2017) and Eguizabal (2018) discuss ethnic diversity as an integral component of discussing and understanding conversion within minority communities in the Protestant faith.

Three Conversion Frameworks. Conversion is a transformative activity that changes one's worldviews, identity, and social connections (Gillis & Krull, 2019; Hiebert, 2008; Lockwood, 2016; Lowe & Lowe, 2018a; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). Lifestyle changes are progressive through the refinement of God's word and guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13, 17:17). Conversion is a lived experience that interacts with mystical ideas and psychological

components of the life of a convert (Draper, 2017; Hui et al., 2017; S. K. Johnson & Armour, 2018; Rambo & Bauman, 2012).

The lived experience of conversion nestles the formation of trusting relationships with other adherents and cognitive awareness exercising the convert's belief system in life. From a biblical perspective, the God-given gift of grace is the foundation of conversion (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Bible highlights the account of Nicodemus, who "came to Jesus at night" (New International Version, 2011/1973, John 3:1-15) with intentionality and cognitive awareness to understand the message of faith in Jesus' teachings for a spiritual conversion that extended beyond human perceptions. Navone (1993) says, "Conversion entails the transformation of the human and its world in all spheres of human intentionality and conscious operations" (p. 1). Therefore, humanity purposefully responds in a willful act of faith through conversion. Rambo (1993), Lofland and Sknord (1981), and Martin (2009) provide insight into understanding the incorporeal aspects of conversion from both theological and social perspectives.

Rambo's (1993) critical research on the spiritual conversion process lays the foundation for researchers in various disciplines to incorporate the lasting impact of the conversion on an individual. The principal factor in comprehending and applying Rambo's model is understanding conversion as an ongoing, interactive process rather than a single moment. "Conversion is a process, not a specific event. Perhaps the word *converting* better captures the phenomenology of the process." (Rambo, 1993, p. 7). The researcher found that conversion encapsulates the divine regenerative process, and sanctification is the life-long, cooperative process directed by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit in a convert's life (Allison, 2008, pp. 200-2018).

Taylor (2021) and Rambo and Baun (2012) concur that conversion is not an isolated event that instantly changes a convert's mental and emotional life. Additionally, Tighe (2015)

positions the spiritual change process with faith development, which occurs through interactions in life events that allow "multiple commitments" (p. 62) to faithful principles while converting. On the other hand, Weissenbacher (2016) and (Navone, 1993) consider conversion instant and incremental depending on the convert's doctrinal knowledge, affiliations, and testimony. The researcher suggested that the authors above discuss conversion – incremental or instant – in terms of sanctification that revolves around the principle of consecrating one's self to live and adhere to the word of God (Strong, 1996, pp. 222, 568).

Additionally, Lofland and Skonovd (1981) determine the perception of conversion through the lens of converts' external circumstances and interpersonal interactions with God and others. The study's themes are as follows: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive, which interplay or persuade converts' conversion at various intensity levels and interactions (p. 375). Finally, Martin (2009) offers a Synthetic Model that gives credence to biblical anthropology and denominational preference alongside social science themes such as attachment in conversion. Martin explains:

The *normative* approach explains conversion through the view of the respective religious tradition The *descriptive* approach, however, pays little attention to the particular ideology or stated requirements of a religious tradition, and instead focuses on the variety of ways measurable phenomena of conversion manifest themselves. (p. 2)

Altogether, Rambo (1993) recognizes converts' cognitive participation in conversion, Lofland and Skonovd (1981) acknowledge human qualities of emotion and social connections, and Martin (2009) includes theological and denominational components to the subject of conversion. Each conversion framework establishes the position to evaluate conversion through a personal reflective lens and social context for spiritual change in the convert's life.

Conversion as a Lived Experience. The theological perspective of conversion is sanctification, which involves an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit to align a convert's lifestyle with their confession of faith or salvation testimony (Allison, 2008). The Christian conversion journey is a lived experience (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011; Knibbe & Kupari, 2020) shaped by role models (P. C. Lee, 2008) and reflective self-awareness (Myers, 2020b) and community (Biernot & Lombaard, 2017). The convert's life evolves through exchanges with role models and realities of justice, liberation, inclusion, and hope lived within the view of the community of other adherents (Biernot & Lombaard, 2017; P. C. Lee, 2008; Myers, 2020b). The lived experience of conversion is an assimilation of a new life through socio-linguistic and spiritual practices that encourage a convert to participate and develop within their preferred faith community of adherents (Davis, 2017; Harris, 2020; Inya, 2019; Rathe, 2016; Thorley, 2009; Wang, 2016).

Salvific Experience. The fundamental theological principle of Conversion is Salvation, which reconnects humanity to God through the work of Jesus Christ's grace that delivers from the perils of life and death (Bergel, 2019; Coulter, 2008; Dembele, 2001; Mdingi, 2016; Oliver, 2018). The "first conversion" (Martin, 2009a), salvific grace (Feller & Lombaard, 2018), and "born-again" (Burge, 2021; Draper, 2017) encounter with the God-head brings the convert into a heavenly family or kingdom (Claunch, 2017; Henriksson, 2020; Kilner, 2015; Reimer, 2019; Van der Merwe, 2019). The transcendental moment affirms that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (New King James Version, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:17). The salvation testimony is an evidentiary activity that leads and individual to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (John 8:36; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10). Furthermore, the salvation testimony articulates a decision that declares the

direct association with the heavenly kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:25-27; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 7:9-10, 13-14). Robinson (2000) and Thorley (2009) highlight the complex views of Salvation, namely the view of Jesus' role in the redemption plan for all humanity and who is "capable" of receiving grace between Jews and Gentiles and these differing perspectives are fundamental to the Church's ecclesiology. Although differences persist, the salvation testimony fills the individual with the hope of their reality of a redeemed life in Jesus Christ. There are differences in the interpretation of Jesus' role in the redemption plan that prompt attention to the powerful influence of a cultural context on the concept of Salvation threaded throughout an individual's salvation testimony.

Brzezinski (2020) and Baldovin (2016) arrange the salvation testimony alongside recognition of God's appointed time – for deliverance – for all his creation and glory. Anamnesis is the medium by which the individual can understand the impact of their salvific moment and participation in the liturgy. The salvation testimony involves an intentional recollection of the convert's life story and experiences within the time and space of conversion (Brzeziński, 2020; Cope, 2014; Ryrie, 2016; Yamane, 2000). Cope (2014) and Urbaniak (2015) observe anamnesis or recalling the origin story of faith as an individual or group to affirm or ponder the validity of one's commitment. On the other hand, Barbeau (2016) observes that conversion narratives from everyday people were not regarded as reliable sources of evidence of spiritual transformation. Instead, viewed as entertainment in the era of Faris's (2008) commentary on the "Salvific Law," it draws on Eastern church philosophy to review the salvation testimony and sacred writings to point towards an ecumenical positioning for the Christian church today. Finally, Kalilombe (1979) discusses the salvation testimony from the perspective of native African traditions to share that "whether through the agency of the Law or through the working of conscience for the

others" (p.152). The literature shows that a spiritual encounter is concentrated through a lived experience in the context of religious traditions or customs. Anamnesis is the activity that communicates rich details of a spiritual experience and practices that penetrate the realities of converts' identity and the imagery of their salvation (Cope, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014; Townes & Townes, 2011; Urbaniak, 2015b). The intentional reflection on God's saving grace and mercies brought through Jesus Christ's obedience frames the articulation of a confession of faith or salvation testimony and the decision to live a renewed, sanctified life (1 John 2:2).

In summary, spiritual conversion is an abstract concept that is revealed in the practice of a convert's preferred religious tradition. The biblical foundation of salvation establishes the biblical providence of spiritual change. The repentant heart and confession of faith to believe in Jesus' redemptive work on the cross extends to the Christian convert the legal honor – or righteousness to live a sanctified life under the guise of the Holy Spirit with the triune God (John 3:16-17, 17:17; Romans 10:9-10).

The salvation testimony points to change in every area of a convert's life and activates participation in spiritual practices in the community of other converts (Gatison, 2017; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; Newton, 2017; Townes & Townes, 2011). The mercies of God undergird the convert's continuous change process of sanctification by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, his Son, and the Holy Spirit's benevolent care in their life to becoming God's workmanship on the earth (Kilner, 2015; Pettit, 2008; Van Yperen, 2002). The salvation testimony is the incipient human response to affirm the convert's regeneration or new life through Jesus Christ's salvific ministry and ascension in obedience to God and their willful submission to the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in their lives (Cope, 2014; Dembele, 2001; Seidel, 2008).

A profound sense of change ensues when the individual accepts the "invitation" to reconcile with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The experience of inviting Christ into one's life is an event that occurs by faith (Romans 10:9-10), reconnecting the soul of man with the omnipotent (Kilner, 2015; Van Yperen, 2002). Individuals and faith communities receive and recall each encounter differently (Bulthuis, 2019; Cartledge, 2008; Gutierrez et al., 2018; Knitter, 1995; Nel, 2019; Peace, 2004; Rabali, 2021; Yong, 2016). The salvific experience begins with a spiritual encounter with Jesus Christ (John 10:9, 14:6). The Bible provides examples of individual encounters with Jesus (Luke 2:28-32, 38; John 4:1- 26, Acts 9:1- 6). Also, examples of group encounters (Luke 17:11- 19; John 4:39- 42; Acts 2:41) serve as the genesis of Christian conversion and contribute to developing a salvation testimony. Christian conversion experiences have various meanings and outcomes based on the individual and group social context.

Sociological Context

Rambo's (1993) principal research on the spiritual conversion process is critical for discussing conversion and its lasting impact on an individual. Rambo states, "Conversion is a process, not a specific event. Perhaps the word *converting* better captures the phenomenology of the process" (p. 7). Taylor (2021) and Rambo and Baun (2012) concur that conversion is not an isolated event that instantly changes a convert's mental and emotional state. On the other hand, conversion is viewed as both instant and incremental depending on the convert's doctrinal knowledge and affiliations (Navone, 1993; Tighe, 2015; Weissenbacher, 2016). Additionally, Slatter (2015) questions the intricacy of conversion regarding an intrinsic, radical lifestyle change or an external decision-making process that speaks to growth. The elusive characterization of spirituality affixed with religion presents a challenge in identifying a

convert's salvation testimony that supports the formation of a new identity and connectedness throughout one's spiritual change journey (Schneiders, 2003).

Historical Context

Cultural identity and language (Bullock & Toribio, 2009; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Rabali, 2021), ethnicity (Carpenedo, 2018; Cook, 1993; Elrod, 2001; Johnson, 2006; Wilcox, 2014), and worldview (Graizbord, 2008; Power, 2011; Samellas, 2013) frame the social context of a convert's conversion experience. Furthermore, conversion is understood in broader terms that affect an individual's mental health (S. K. Johnson & Armour, 2018). Other social contexts are organizational context (Gillis & Krull, 2019), political association (Burge, 2021), personality (Hui et al., 2017), and interreligious foundations (Barentsen, 2018). This literature provides a glimpse of varying factors that interact with the conversion experience.

African-Americans' culture is profoundly connected with Christian traditions that are historically complex and contentious (Henry-Robinson, 2017; Lowery, 2016; Nyomi, 2016; Walls, 1996; Wells-Oghoghomeh, 2019; Wright, 2017). In 2022, the African-American population accounted for approximately 74% of the Protestant faith population in the United States of America (*Peoples*, 2022). Approximately 83 percent of African-Americans profess Christianity as their religious preference (Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2022, Peoples section). Additionally, in 2016, the Pew Research Center tabulated that "two-thirds of all Black adults (66%) describe themselves as Protestant" (Mohamed et al., 2021). This data reveals that African-Americans' spiritual experiences are contextualized in Christian traditions aligned with Protestant traditions – in broad terms. The Christian church or church community has long served as a conveyor of information and support in navigating the religious experience through the lens of a marginalized group of people (*African American Religion, Healing, and Health*,

n.d.; Hinds, 2020; Lee et al., 2015; Mohamed et al., 2021; (R. Taylor et al., 2004). In addition to guiding converts' or congregants' spiritual conversion, a ministry for African-American church leaders becomes a surrogate to fill the gap in health, social, and mental health issues (Armstrong, 2016; Laws, 2018; Lumpkins et al., 2013; Rowland & Isaac-savage, 2014). The significance of the literature above for African-American ministries is the work of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies Christ's converts to be restored both naturally and spiritually and collectively for the glory of God (Matthew 5:16). Lowe and Lowe, (2018) explain that "ecological sanctification that occurs within the body of Christ as individual members who possess the Holy Spirit connect to and interact with one another in many ways." (p. 200). The salvation testimony affirms the spiritual connections guided by the Holy Spirit.

Statement of the Problem

The related literature suggests concepts of mental, emotional, spiritual, and social transformations aligned to Christian principles and practice regarding conversion; however, the literature does not identify a beginning or the new birth that leads to the converting and a sanctified life (John 3:1-21, Hebrews 13:20-21).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the salvation testimony of African American males and females in the Protestant faith. At this stage in the research, salvation testimony is defined as an intrinsic revelation of one's redemption towards God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Bergel, 2019; Estes, 2011; Oliver, 2018). Three theories guided the study: Identity and Social Theory (Stets & Burke, 2000), Structural-Functional theory (Murray, 1998a; Stryker, 2008a), and Symbolic Interactionism Theory (Blumer, 1969). Each

theory explains perceptions of behavior adaptation within defined social constructs for African-American converts in the Protestant faith.

Research Questions

RQ1. How is the salvation testimony described by African-American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ2. How does reflection on the salvation testimony, if any, impact the personal identity of African-American converts to the Protestant faith?

RQ3. What activities, if any, validate the salvation testimony of African American converts within their preferred Protestant faith tradition (e.g., New member and Baptism courses, First Communion, or a mentoring period)?

RQ4. What spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer), if any, interact with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for African American converts in the Protestant faith?

Research question one focused on the storytelling reflection by each participant. The researcher intended to capture the participants' voices and perspectives on their life experiences that shape the salvation testimony. For example, each narrative may identify a mentor, trauma, voluntary submission, and cultural context to account for their testimony through reflection (Cutter, 2011; Kaminski, 2017; Kern, 2019; Russell, 2022). Also, the descriptions by each participant will provide a road map to examine the diversity of the complex phenomenon of a salvation testimony.

Research question two addressed concerns about forming a Christian identity through a verbal confession of faith (i.e., a salvation testimony). The researcher documented identity characteristics that remained or changed following the admission of a salvation testimony. Finally, the question is a starting point to understand if changes were instant or incremental.

Research question three focuses on the external actions or activities that validate or corroborate the participant's salvation testimony. Also, the question allowed the researcher to

explore whether participants followed normative or descriptive actions before or after the declaration of their salvation testimony. Furthermore, the question guided the researcher to determine if participants relied on the affirmation of others or physical evidence to validate their spiritual journey (Attebery, 2017; Kupari, 2020; Martin, 2009b).

Research question four explored whether spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer) interact with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for the African-American convert in the Protestant faith. The last research question allowed the researcher to identify specific activities that aid in creating a curriculum about a salvific experience, leading to identifying tenets for a salvation testimony (Estep et al., 2008; Pettit, 2008; Yount, 2010). Also, the Symbolic Interactionism theory is the lens through which the last research question guides discussion on the value of intentional connections with symbols, others, and self to establish clear perceptions of behavior norms that align with identity characteristics (Blumer, 1969a; Carter & Fuller, 2016; Stryker, 2008a; Thorley, 2009).

Assumptions and Delimitations

The constructivist approach was used in the research. The study examined the salvation testimony of African-American converts to the Protestant faith by applying three theories: Identity and Social Theory, Structural-functional theory, and Symbolic Interactionism. The Identity and Social theory focuses on the intrinsic aspects of changes or acceptance of an individual's professed association or connection to a lifestyle or ideals. The Structural-Functional theory explicitly deals with the conflict of change that occurs when assimilation is required to match an individual's professed identity or associations. Symbolic interactionism deals with the relevancy of participating in rituals, customs, and habits to solidify one's identity and behaviors

according to the internal and external ideals of one's lifestyle choices. Assumptions that show the researcher's position for the study are listed below.

Research Assumptions

The researcher's assumptions are as follows:

1. God establishes the creation of humanity and all things based on the biblical worldview presented in the canonized Bible.
2. Jesus Christ's redemptive work of salvation is the only choice for humanity to be redeemed from sin and restored to fellowship with God.
3. The Holy Spirit is the supernatural guide to bring all confessing and believing Christian followers in alignment with God's purpose and plans in an individual's daily decisions – sanctification – if they choose to surrender to his leading.
4. The God-head – God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit – provides a supernatural choice to have access and fellowship to the God-head, both present and in eternity.
5. A salvific experience is a spiritual encounter with God that constructs the salvation testimony.
6. Salvation is offered to all humanity because Jesus Christ came to earth in human form to redeem the souls back in fellowship with God (Romans 6:23). However, all humanity will not accept acceptance through faith (2 Peter 3:9).
7. A conversion is an intrinsic event that manifests through fellowship with other Christian converts in an individual's preferred faith tradition.
8. Protestant faith traditions are presented differently in orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Delimitations of the Research Design

The researcher study's delimitations are as follows:

1. Participants are expected to identify as Christians who accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior based on the gospel message of reconciliation (Romans 1:1- 6, 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:7).
2. Participants with inter-religious preferences (e.g., Buddhism and Christianity or Islam and Christianity) will not be included in the study. However, the study will include participants who profess Christianity as their only religion.

3. The study will include female and male African-Americans who affirm that their salvation testimony occurred ten years prior to the start of the study. The study will not include African Americans, males, and females, who attest that their salvation testimony is fewer than ten years from the start of the study.
4. The study will include individuals who identify as African-American. The study will not include individuals who do not identify as an African-American, such as Hispanics or Caucasians.
5. The study will include individuals from Protestant traditions such as Baptist, African Methodist Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Reformed, Independents or Congregationalist, Pentecostal denominations, Evangelicals, Charismatics, and Nondenominational. The study will not include individuals from other religious traditions such as Catholicism, Mormonism, Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism.
6. The study will include female and male adults aged 30 and older. The study will not include minors.

Definition of Terms

1. *Born-again*: is a spiritual regeneration of heart, mind, and soul towards God through confession and faith in Jesus Christ and a willing submission to the guidance of the canonized Bible through the Holy Spirit's guidance (Tighe, 2015).
2. *Conversion*: is considered the change process in mind, behavior, and words that is spiritual and continuous for Christian followers based on the Bible (S. K. Johnson & Armour, 2018; Navone, 1993).
3. *Convert*: one who believes in, professes, or confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior or is assumed to believe in Jesus Christ, an adherent of Christianity (Livingston, 2014; King, 2016).
4. *Protestants*: Christians in churches originating in or reformulated at the time of, or in Communion with, the Western world's 16th century Protestant Reformation in European languages called Evangeliques (French), Evangelische (German), Evangelicos (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish), though not usually Evangelicals (in English). It includes many traditions, such as Anglicans, Lutherans, and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions or Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists or Independent Charismatics.
5. *Salvation*: the saving of a man from the power and effects of sin; deliverance, redemption, restoration, reconciliation with God, liberation, healing, help, wholeness, and preservation (Estes, 2011; Haight, 1994).

6. *Testimony*: a personal recount of an event or activity by an individual or group with explicit details (Kaminski, 2017)
7. *Anamnesis*: intentional recall or remembrance of events or moments in an individual's life that creates both distinct emotive and behavioral responses (Cope, 2014; Urbaniak, 2015b)

Significance of the Study

The significance of the phenomenological study is to fill the gap in the literature identifying the salvation testimony as the affirmation of the new birth for converting African American males and females within the Protestant faith. The salvation testimony aligns with the evangelical mission to make disciples throughout the nation as *living witnesses* [emphasis added] for Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3). The study on global Christianity indicates growth trends for affiliated Christians globally, 1.20% per year from 2000 to 2022 (Crossing et al., 2022).

A salvific experience can be characterized as moral fortunateness (Davison, 1999; Zagzebski, 1994) and ethical exercise (Henriksson, 2020). This research adds to the discussions about a salvific experience that constructs a salvation testimony through intentional reflection (Clayton, 2014; Walton, 2014). Finally, the study's significance provides commentary on the influences of culture, language, and a personal narrative on the conversion phenomenon (Grams, 2006; Tabb, 2017; Vorster, 2015).

Summary of the Design

The phenomenological research design provided an efficient option to explore the lived experience of a salvation testimony from African-American male and female converts in the Protestant faith because of its use of intentional reflection through the personal narrative by the researcher and participants (Argyris, 2003; Hsiung, 2008; Roberts, 2019; van Manen, 2016; Walton, 2014). The phenomenological research aims to "describe the common meaning for

several individuals of the life experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75) within participants' cultural backgrounds. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to gather data through dialogue captured via a videoconferencing tool (e.g., Zoom) to understand the phenomenon in the context of participants' lives and knowledge. Conversation analysis was used for data collection and analysis to identify emerging themes for the descriptive essence of the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith. Saldaña (2016) describes verbal exchange coding and analysis as a verbatim transcription of an interview formatted vertically on a page with descriptions of the interaction appearing vertically on the page (p. 81). Conversation analysis in a phenomenological analysis involves In Vivo coding and researcher's memos to develop rich categories and themes representing participants' voices about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2018a).

The study's central research question asks what determines the inception of Christian identity and connection with the faith community. The next question asks what actions validate the salvation testimony for African-Americans in the Protestant faith (if at all). Lastly, what spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical worship and readings, Bible reading, and prayer) interact with the salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith (if at all)? These questions allowed the researcher to understand the salvation testimony of African American converts in Protestant faith traditions and their identity and connection to the faith community. The study's central phenomenon –salvation testimony – is a spiritual concept that requires a theological framework to engage in an intelligible conversation. Furthermore, the study's secondary phenomena – spiritual activities – allowed the research to consider social science theories as support for the lived experience of the salvation testimony of converts.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Change is a part of life (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Pettit (2008) decisively shares, “The most basic, foundational level of any discussion on spiritual formation is the topic of change, and it is there we must start.” (p. 18). At the center of the discussion is biblical anthropology, focusing on humanity’s existence in the *imago Dei*, their disobedience, separation, and subsequent redemption through the predestined work of the Triune God (Genesis 1:26, 3; John 3:16, 17:17). The Bible states, “When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!” (The Living Bible, 1971/1973, 2 Corinthians 5:17). This biblical truth represents the foundational belief of the Christian faith (John 3:16, 14:6; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9).

In 2016, Pew Research projected that 75.5% of North Americans would profess Christianity as their preferred religion in 2020 (*Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project*, 2016, Christian Population by Country section). In 2021, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) reported that 70% of Americans identify as Christians, with 7% as Black Protestants (*Public Religion Research Institute*, 2021, Percent Who Identify as section). These statistics indicate that the Christian faith tradition holds precedence in the lives of Americans in the Northern Hemisphere. However, representation from African-Americans or Black Protestants is marginal in the data set. Therefore, the researcher focused on the salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith to represent this demographic and cultural context. The Theological framework focused on Biblical Anthropology, the Ontology of God, Christology, and Pneumatology to inform the convert’s spiritual identity from a biblical perspective. The Theoretical framework included three theories, the Identity and Social Theory

(Stets & Burke, 2000), Structural-Functionalism (Murray, 1998a; Stryker, 2008a), and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), to provide a discussion on behavior modification that supports identity formation. The researcher expected to show that the salvation testimony is grounded in Scripture and intentionality to shape Christian identity and connectedness in the community of other adherents.

The Related Literature chapter discusses the Limbic System, Spiritual Transformation, and Organizational Learning Theory and discusses changes in human thought and behavior concerning salvation testimony. Next, practical Theology, Christian Education, and Speech Act Theory focused on the valuable element of verbalizing the salvation testimony to shape spiritual identity. Lastly, Biblical Ecology and Mental Images broaden the context by which a salvation testimony is relative to Christian connectedness for a convert. The Rationale for the Study is to highlight the biblical anthropological components of a salvation testimony for Christian converts. Finally, the gap in the literature identified the omission of the element of regeneration or the new birth in Jesus Christ utilizing the articulation of a salvation testimony as the incipient mechanism that contributes to forming Christian identity and connectedness for African-American males and females in the Protestant.

Theological Framework for the Study

God transcends time and space, hence the biblical declaration that “in the beginning God created the heavens and earth.” (New International Version, 1973/2011, Genesis 1:1). Furthermore, God created all things (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Colossians 1:16). The history of the Creator and his creation – including humanity – is found in the canonized Bible. Scripture records God's intent to establish a relationship with humanity and care for their needs (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Genesis 1-2). The connection or fellowship was exacted the instant God “breathed

into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Genesis 2:7). Unfortunately, the spiritual relationship was severed – not destroyed – by the sin of disobedience birthed through Adam and Eve (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Genesis 3). The research applied the Ontology of God, Biblical Anthropology, Christology, and Pneumatology to form the theological framework to define Christian identity characterized by a salvation testimony.

Biblical Anthropology

Biblical anthropology discusses the relationship between the Creator and his creation – humanity through reflection on the *imago Dei* and Trinitarian theology. These spiritual concepts shape the Christian identity. The origins of creation and humanity are centered on being formed in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Biblical anthropology requires followers of Christ to understand the devastation of humanity's sinful nature, which is contrary to the original nature created by God (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Galatians 5:17). Kilner (2018) explains, “People created according to that image are to reflect godly attributes, even if it takes the death of God’s Son to enable people to conform to God’s image in Christ” (p. 134) who is the reflection of God’s image. Kilner engages his audience to capture the biblical redemptive plan for man, creation, and spiritual and physical relationships. Kilner uses anthropomorphic language about Christ as the perfect, acceptable *imago Dei*. Henriksen (2013) affirms that the interpretation of the *imago Dei* is inherently connected with the cultural climate of one’s lifespan. Additionally, his interpretation incorporates human responsibility to “being human” (Henriksen, 2013).

The Image of God

God created humanity and all creation, namely nature (Genesis 1:1,26; John 1:3). The infiltration of sin in the Garden of Eden broke a harmonious relationship with God (Genesis 3; Isaiah 59:2), but the truth remains that the creation of humanity is in the *imago Dei* (Henriksen,

2013). The English term, image, is translated into the ancient Hebrew language as tselem, a figurative sense that means “illusion, resemblance; hence a representative figure, espec. an idol:” (Strong, 1996, p. 500). Additionally, the English term likeness is translated in the ancient Hebrew language as *d^emûwth*, which means “fashion, like (-ness, as), manner, similitude” (Strong, 1996, p.348).

Cultural context influences the interpretation of the *imago Dei* concept, which shapes Christian identity and connections to the community of other adherents. Issues surrounding corporeal and divine concepts stem from cultural influences in language and the context of time for each scholar exploring humanity’s divine essence. McCasland (1950) critiques biblical and secular writers' interpretation of humanity shaped in God's image in the context of their time. Jones and Barbeau (2016) and Eastvold (2018) concur with the translation of terms and emphasize the relevance of language in ancient times when translating the term *imago Dei*. Jones and Barbeau's translations of *imago Dei* are based on the cultural context of Israel’s neighboring societies, such as ancient Mesopotamia or near Eastern borders. Eastvold (2018) points out that the Eastern Church’s interpretation of the *imago Dei* focuses on God’s divinity or supernatural essence, while the Western Church’s interpretation of the *imago Dei* focuses on the characteristics of God. The comparison adds to the pertinent element of the cultural context in the discussion on spiritual concepts that shape a convert’s spiritual identity and connection to the “church.”

The notion is that societal influences within time or a specific era contribute to converts’ or adherents’ identity and connectedness with the Christian faith. Lee (2016) uncovers the cultural difference from a Reformer’s perspective, focusing on the relational, individual accountability aspects for interpreting humanity’s form in God's image. Lee points out that

Reformers of the Christian faith, such as Calvin, blend eschatological teachings with the image of God to embrace righteousness or a Christ-like lifestyle in a culture that is distant from reconnecting with God. Fried (2019) relates the *imago Dei* in correlation to judgment and knowledge capabilities by pointing out God's divine ability to judge matters rightly by discerning what is best for his creation.

Overall, language and culture impact the interpretation of the *imago Dei* theology and a perspective that shapes the convert's identity and connection to the Christian faith. For example, Jones and Barbeau (2016) and Fried (2019) use metaphoric language to describe kinship relations. The literature shows various perspectives and applications of the spiritual concept of the image of God. The *imago Dei* refers to the intimate relationship between God and humanity that is an extension of the triune God-head.

Trinitarian Theology

Trinitarian theology is critical to understanding Christian identity and connectedness to the community of other adherents. The Bible speaks of God, the Father, Jesus, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit as functioning in divine purpose and fellowship (Genesis 1:26; John 1:1-2, 10:30, 14:26). Estep (2008) expounds on the supernatural truth that relates to Holy Spirit's divine nature and operation to conclude, "the Godhead is not fully comprehensible to finite human thought" (p. 105). Quinn's (1999) Trinitarianism description, God is three persons in One – monotheistic – and each Father, God, Son, and Holy Spirit are divine in nature and essence. Dunne (1984) weaves together the biblical and societal aspects of the function of Trinitarian theology in life. Dunne's perspective considers salvific events in relationship to human choice to adhere to the Gospel message towards change in concert with the Holy Spirit or rejecting the Gospel message with a probable different outcome. Accepting the Gospel Message and Triune

God-head into a convert's life profoundly impacts their identity and connectedness to a new community of other Christians.

The connection to Trinitarian theology is derived from personal intuition and a cultural context. The presuppositional lenses are the perceptions that drive an individual's filtering of new and old information based on their life experiences and social surroundings. The presuppositional lens gives credence to doctrinal beliefs, rituals, and language spoken about an individual convert's faith walk. These uncontested viewpoints influence an individual's conscience, subconscious, and behavior. Oliver and Oliver (2019) explain that language and cultural influences from ancient biblical times to present times impact the interpretation of Trinitarian theology and its application in Christian theology. For example, Reimer's (2019) review of the Russian Orthodox artist Rublev's painting "The Icon of the Holy Trinity" visually represents a corporeal concept of the eternal God. Trinitarian theology is transcendent precepts because "God is spirit" (NIV, 1973/2011, John 4:24a). Venter (2015) offers an approach to broaden the scope of contemplating Trinitarian theology by embracing both theology and personal reflection or subjectivity to understand the grace offered by the divine Creator.

The researcher reflected on the literature above and submits that asserting biblical anthropology to understand the *imago Dei* and Trinitarian theology are fundamental to a Christian convert's salvation testimony and influence the *new* [emphasis added] identity and connectedness with other Christian followers. Christology is the vein that constructs a salvation testimony for converts and impacts their identity and connectedness in the Christian community.

The Ontology of God

The ontological argument concerns the "substance" of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God entangled with the finite substance of creation – humanity (Page, 2019). Saint

Haslem of Canterbury is accredited with affirming God's existence in an age of philosophical wonder and debate that extends back centuries (Burgess-Jackson, 2014; Eder & Ramharter, 2015; Rushby, 2021). The contested debate about God's existence within the constraints of "being" is filled with complex interpretations by scholars from the past to the present, namely Kant in opposition and Plantinga in the affirmative (Grim, 1979; Haltzman, 2016; Heathwood, 2011; Rowe, 2009; Tolhurst, 1982; Wood, 2010; Zhang, 2017). An ontological argument can also be based on the Bible's covenantal promises and service missions (Hjalmarson, 2013; Michelson, 2018; Vidu, 2017). These various positions on God's existence afford an individual's presuppositional lens to define their reality about God's existence and authority. Therefore, the section affirmed God's existence based on the *written* [emphasis added] word of God and the Word – Jesus Christ.

The Bible – the word – is offered as a conveyor to formulate the reality of God's existence for the regenerated believer in Jesus Christ. Opiah (2021) and Rylisškytė (2017, 2019) highlight God's attributes and descriptive commentary on spiritual realities that formulate realities for their audience. The Bible solidifies God's authority from the word that ascribed Him in his interactions with humanity following the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). For instance, God declares, " 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " (NKJV, 1979/1985, Exodus 3:14). The words by God form the reality of His supremacy to the Israelites, God's chosen nation (Exodus 6:7).

Anthropomorphic and metaphoric language shows God's existence, allowing humanity to comprehend His Deity's infiniteness. For example, God chose to speak to Moses through a bush (Exodus 3:2), revealed by the use of common social constructs (Jeremiah 18:3; Hosea 3:1) and the elements (Exodus 13:2). These examples exhibit His transcendence and desire to have a

relationship with his creation. A biblical understanding of God's existence and care is revealed by God and dynamic for an individual or group that receives general or special revelation (Erickson, 2013; Pârvan & McCormack, 2017).

The written word of God establishes God's existence for eternity (Isaiah 40:8), as does the Word – Jesus Christ. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.” (NKJV, 1979/1985, John 1:1, 14). The hypostatic union of Jesus Christ underlines the hope of restoration to God for all those believing in His earthly ministry and resurrection. (Bigalke Jr., 2011; Selak, 2017). The atoning work of Jesus, the second person in the Trinity, is the manifested existence of God (Crozier, 2022; Vidu, 2017). The revelation of the word in one's life leads to the existence of God, the first person in the Trinity, by faith (Colossians 1:19-20, Hebrews 2). “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father [God] except through Me.’” (NKJV, 1979/1985, John 14:6).

The section does not expound on the subject of faith, which is inherently connected to understanding, articulating, and accepting the existence of God. However, Cui (2022) and Canullo (2017) indicate that the manifestation of God's existence and religion is personal and intentional. Formulating an individual's beliefs about the existence of God involves affectionately connecting with His compassion and almightiness in a biblically sound manner to stabilize present and future anxieties and expectations. Vacek (2013) mentions the need to combine the “right” doctrine (orthodoxy) with the “right” experience (orthopathy) as practical instruction to navigate the strain of life and accomplishments that may derail the reality of God's existence. The third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is the guide that balances the

emotional and spiritual development of those who profess and believe in the salvific work of the Son – Jesus – and reconciled to God – the Father (John 14:26, 16:13).

In conclusion, the ontological argument about God's existence is not unanimous for or against it. However, the revelation of God's existence is reality based on the written word of God, the Bible, and the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the salvation testimony creates a reality about God's existence because of the convert's biblical understanding of the Trinity and an intentional reflection and spiritual experiences. Pursuing God's existence is a life-long exercise for the believer or convert who accepts their new life in Christ, and words spoken establish the reality of God's existence in the affirmative (Proverbs 18:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Christology

Christ is the image-bearer of God (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Philippians 2:6-8), author of spirituality for Christian adherents in the kingdom of God (*NKJV*, 1979/1982, Hebrews 12:2). Christology is the study of Jesus Christ as Deity and his earthly ministry (Anthony, 2008) – the redemptive work that all humanity would be reconciled to God (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 3:18). O'Collins (2013) provides a passionate reflection on Jesus Christ's authority and authenticity in biblical and modern times that prompts urgency to discuss spirituality reclaimed in the image of God in Christ's likeness. Priebbenow (2019) examines the early church's dialect or language to show Christ's identity as Deity and human (Bigalke Jr., 2011). Scripture explicitly shows that Christ is God and human simultaneously to bring salvation to the world (Hebrews 2:5-18; Philippians 2:5-8). Claunch (2017) blends the discussion of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's spiritual identity and purpose through biblical content and scholarly insight that supports the life-changing event of a salvation testimony for Christ's followers.

Jesus Christ is at the epicenter of a convert's salvation testimony. Salvation comes through Jesus, the Redeemer, for all humanity (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:9). The salvation testimony is an apparatus that frames the reality of transference of a new identity and connectedness with other Christian converts in the faith community (Romans 8:15-17).

Pneumatology

The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity. Scripture shows the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit – was at the beginning of creation with God, the Creator, and Jesus, the Son of God (Genesis 1:2, 26). Moon (2013) writes, “The Holy Spirit is the theological reference of the Church, including the hierarchy” (p. 246) and transmitter of grace that manifested through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who redeemed all humanity (John 12:32-33; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

The direct bond between Jesus and the Holy Spirit is recorded during Jesus' baptism. “It came to pass that Jesus was also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him,” in solid recognition of the Trinitarian fellowship (NKJV, 1979/1985, Luke 3:21-22). The power and authority of the Holy Spirit fueled Jesus' earthly ministry (Barnhill, 2020; Studebaker, 2006). The Deity and authority of the Holy Spirit are affirmed by scholars referencing Scripture and the early church's discussions by theologians and philosophers (Abecina, 2020; Burgess, 2011; Lillback, 2016). The Holy Spirit operated in the life of Jesus as he ministered to the redeemed and enslaved spiritually and naturally.

The Holy Spirit continues to operate in power and authority to impact and change the lives of believers. This process of change is called sanctification. Allison (2008) exquisitely describes sanctification as a cooperative relationship between God and humanity through a

convert's submission of their "intellect, emotions, will, body, motivations, purposes" (p. 217) on a *continuous life-long* [emphasis added] basis. This process of sanctification includes the cognitive and emotional components of awareness about the change process of the convert's identity and behavior to connect with God and others in the body of Christ. Hull (2019) reminds the body of Christ that the Holy Spirit is the "active agent" and power needed to serve in a pastoral position effectively. Additionally, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is personal in times of struggle and recovery (Lilly, 2010). The activity of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification process is evidentiary in the lives of believers and their communities.

The Holy Spirit is the agent of change for the Christian convert. The experiential activity of sanctification is defined by Colle (2001) as "being 'set apart' (holiness) and 'being sent' (mission) [that] constitute the shape of Christian life as life in the Spirit which endows the human self and community with power." (p. 324). The definition highlights the two-fold priority of the sanctification process. First, it is for the believers or converts who have accepted and believed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to have a lifestyle change. The second priority of the sanctification process is for the community of converts to be able to serve and fulfill their assignment to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world (Matthew 28:19- 20). Jesus' foreknowledge about the mission indicates that the indwelling Holy Spirit will endow His followers, giving them the strength, knowledge, and will to accomplish his commands (John 14:12).

Through sanctification, the Holy Spirit actively forms a Christian identity and fellowship for the individual and faith communities (Combs, 2006; Hill, 2020; Hughes III, 2005; Lord, 2017).

Jesus Christ promised to send the Comforter and Truth before his ascension to lead his disciples toward obedience to God and service to others in fellowship and beyond (John 14:26,

16:13). Clapsis (1989) comments that “there is no Christology without Pneumatology and no Pneumatology without Christology.” (p. 340). The statement is a bold acknowledgment of the intimate connections between the Son and the Spirit. They operate with power and authority to transform the convert’s new identity and connection with the community of believers (Romans 10:11- 13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:9- 1). The Holy Spirit is a bearer of truth, hope, and care (John 16:7-13). The Bible is the resource to learn about the lifelong sanctification process, and the Spirit of God leads (Matthew 4:4; John 17:17).

Biblical Anthropology, Christology, and Pneumatology establish the theological framework to understand God’s Deity and design for living and non-living things on earth. Additionally, the theological framework for the research study is the foundation for creating awareness about the significance of the salvation testimony for Christian converts. Lastly, the literature shows that cultural context matters in understanding spiritual concepts like a salvation testimony that contributes to forming a new identity and connectedness with other Christian adherents. The salvation testimony starts the journey of acceptance, the confession of a salvation testimony by faith and direction of the Holy Spirit’s divine instructions for living as a Christian convert (John 16:13). Jesus teaches, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.... the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, ... will teach you all things” (John 14:23,26, NIV).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Identity is a dynamic but elusive concept that melds with life-changing experiences and daily interactions for an individual, group, or organization (Tighe, 2015; Walker, 2022). The research explored the phenomenon of salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith. Identity and Social Theory (Stets & Burke, 2000) and Structural-functional

Theory (Murray, 1998a; Stryker, 2008a) are associated with the change effect of a salvation testimony. Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is associated with an intentional practice and community forming of a salvation testimony. These theoretical frameworks assist with understanding and explaining perceptions of behavior adaptation within defined social constructs for African-American converts in the Protestant faith.

Dahlberg (2006) adds, "meaning emerges in relation to 'events' of the lifeworld, and when the lifeworld changes, meaning changes as well" (p. 16), such as in the event of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior. Murray (1998) unlocks contributions made by several change theorists to help society explain or respond to change caused by economic or social events that place culture in an equilibrium state or dis-equilibrium state that creates 'cultural lag'" (pp. 37-38). Stryker (2008) expertly summarizes identity formation and social interactions concerning change and humanity's strategies or efforts to cope with significant change events on a personal and societal level. Additionally, Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism theory offers context to observe and interpret the nature of social interactions, objects, and human actions, which "should not be regarded as mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process" (p. 5) in an individual's life. Structural-functional theory and Symbolic Interactionism focused on connecting with other converts in the faith community to verify and standardize the Christian identity activated by a salvation testimony.

Identity and Social Theory

The discussion of identity is intimately connected to the cultural context of the individual, group, or organization being studied. Usborne and de la Sablonnière (2014) indicate that "the perception of cultural clarity" (p 452) allows positive self-identity that allows flexibility to maneuver within their social context effectively. African-Americans have relied on their culture

to inform their identity – individually and collectively – for support and stability (Grayman-Simpson & Mattis, 2013; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; *Toolbox Library*, 2009). Identity and Social theory also discuss the interplay between self, group, and roles, focusing on salient qualities that dictate coordinating behavioral responses (Brenner et al., 2014; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014; Kuppens et al., 2013). The researcher integrated personal and social identity theory into understanding the central phenomena of a salvation testimony in forming a Christian identity and its association with other Christian adherents.

Behavior responses and identification processes characterize identity (Burke, 2006; Reid & Deaux, 1996a; Stets & Burke, 2000). Reid and Deaux (1996) are careful to denote that identity is relative to the social aspects of the individual and is exhibited with coordinating behaviors and responses. Reid and Deaux share that “from the perspective of integration model, most individuals would have more than two organizing structures of self-related features, many of which would contain some combination of social identity and personal traits” (1085). The model shows the cognitive awareness of self-identification and the corresponding actions or activities that verify or represent the self-structure. The researcher suggested the integration model supports the discussion on the nomothetic construct of a salvation testimony attributed to the self-structure and links with the social identity of a Christian in a community of other Christians (Ephesians 2:4-10). For example, most notably, Paul recounts his salvific experience in his letter to the Galatian Church, which depicts the divine call to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:11-17). The salvation testimony is attributed to his *link* [emphasis added] as a fellow citizen with other Christian followers in the kingdom of God.

The discussion of integrating identity and social theory components is relevant to understanding the whole person. Stets and Burke (2000) are proponents of investigating the

similarities of both theories in an overlapping manner rather than isolated discussions. In their proposal, potential linking factors include categories and roles, the concept of salience, and a focus on core processes. For this study, the researcher concentrated on the linking category “*salience* to indicate the activation of an identity in a situation” (p. 229). The researcher proposed that a salvific experience forms the salvation testimony that activates a Christian identity. First, the category or identity structure of converting to a Christian is acknowledged in mind by *believing*, followed by a confession – acceptance or testimony – that comes from a personal reflection (Romans 10:9-10). Therefore, the salvation testimony is inchoative of Christian identity and activates the pursuit of connection with other Christians.

The salvation testimony is a mechanism that contributes to the intrinsic transformation toward a Christian identity. Burke (2006) presents the Identity Control Theory (ICT) in a study on married roles concerning spousal and gender identities. ICT discusses identity change within multiple identity structures nuanced by a control mechanism to regulate behaviors and expectations over some time for the individual.

ICT is itself the output of a higher-level control system.... When the higher-level system is activated, it changes the meanings of the standard in the lower-level identity system as the mechanism by which the higher-level control system controls the higher-level perceptions. (Burke, 2006, p. 84)

Therefore, the researcher presented the salvation testimony as the mechanism in the higher-level system – activated by a Christian identity based on a biblical precept – that controls lower-level identity output meanings and standards. Carter (2013) applies identity theory to evaluate the activation of the moral identity of undergraduates in various social contexts. The study concluded that “only when activated did the moral identity influence behavior across

conditions, which speaks to all literature in identity theory” (Carter, 2013, p. 218). The researcher promulgated that a salvation testimony activates the formation of a Christian identity and guides the convert to seek out social situations or groups to verify the identity standards, behaviors, and perceptions.

Identity and social theory provide a basis for understanding the identity structure(s) of self and stimulate one to ponder the timeless question: who am I? However, the literature presented highlights that identity and social theory are as dynamic and complex as the ordering of individuals’ identity structures within their social contexts. Why? Identity means different things for individuals in their social contexts (Burke, 2006; Carter, 2013; Jones, 2022). Therefore, the researcher advised that a salvation testimony is a mechanism that activates Christian identity – albeit with different meanings for each convert – and stimulates the pursuit and stabilization to connect with the God-head, his followers, and others across social contexts in their lives.

Structural-Functional Theory

The Structural-functional theory addresses change on a macro level. Structural-functionalism is an antiquated reference to studying societal change. However, it remains a sustaining force to intentionally understand change or control change elements in society (Ryan, 2005). Murray (1998) considered the theory an extension of conflict theory because change creates conflict. Today, the consensus theory is called Neofunctionalism (Ryan, 2005).

The researcher perceived Structural-Functional theory (SFT) or Neofunctionalism’s goal is to employ structural conformity and identify a change that potentially places society in disequilibrium (Cole, 1966; Izadi et al., 2020). Cole (1996) favors the dialectic approach that examines the power of language to identify the rate and direction of change. “The dialectic can

tell us that a given structure will change, but it is still more valuable if it can be used as a predictive instrument” (p. 57). Therefore, in this study, the salvation testimony is the predictive instrument that the individual will change their secular worldview to a biblical one, necessitating conformity to God’s word and placing them back in an equilibrium state. For instance, Scripture indicates an individual’s internal conflict (Romans 7:19-23, 8:7; Galatians 5:17) and a change of identity and position (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:9) by faith and confession of accepting the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1-6). Therefore, the researcher viewed the application of SFT or Neofunctionalism as a deployable theory to understand the change in an individual's life through a salvation testimonial.

Structural Functionalism creates a pathway to pinpoint change and understand what prompts changes from the “norm.” Nelson (2019) takes on a different perspective that combines religion and social sciences from the position of structural Functionalism. From the backdrop of Catholicism, Nelson emphasized “dabar-YHWH... more than the spoken word and captured the meaning of things, affairs, events, and actions in harmony with the concept of ‘all that God is doing.’” (p.82). There is planned activity on a human level to navigate and control the changing tempo for a society that meets missional objectives. A criticism of this perspective lies within its teleology because society has diverse religious beliefs; therefore, the motive is one-sided. On the other hand, the perspective provides a powerful motivation to bring meaning and purpose to social engagement for a group or individual.

Vanderstraeten (2016) informs readers of the prominent figure who contributed to the Structural-Functional Theory, Talcott Parsons. Vanderstraeten retrospectively highlights Parson’s perspectives on Christianity to the differentiation between society or state and religion or church in structural institutions from a historical account of the “New World” (pp. 58-59)

and values therein. Ultimately, Structural Functionalism or Neofunctionalism theory builds on the merits of purpose and value perceived by society or individuals to manage change through conforming. The researcher added that the theory assists new converts with navigating change – instant or gradual. The activity of anamnesis on the salvific experience makes the connection for converts to stabilize their perceptions and behaviors in conformity with their preferred religious traditions. The salvation testimony applies to other Christian disciplines and theories. Spiritual Transformation and Organizational Learning Theory offer insight into the perplexing matter of change processes – intrinsically and externally – that occur from a salvific experience that informs the salvation testimony.

The Salvation Testimony Change Effect

Salvation is a foundational concept that interacts with change for a Christian convert (Bergel, 2019; Coulter, 2008; Dembele, 2001; Mdingi, 2016; Oliver, 2018). The Limbic System, Spiritual Transformation, and Organizational Learning Theory are relevant to learning about how change occurs from a biological and organizational perspective. These areas of study provide context for intentionality and cognitive self-management or self-discipline to align with the effects of a salvific experience that connects to a convert's salvation testimony. The Christian follower plays an integral, active, and conscious role in spiritual change. The active conscience and verbal confessions are essential to molding their identity and behavior (Matthew 10:32-33, 11:29; Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:5). The brain's function and structure are critical in this development.

The Limbic System

Integrating neuroscience with a focus on the brain's anatomy – namely the Limbic System – aided in understanding the performative act of a salvation testimony concerning the

genesis of Christian identity and drive to connect with others in the faith community. This section does not offer expertise or complete knowledge of the Limbic System. Nevertheless, the researcher recommended that the brain and a salvation testimony experience are interconnected.

The brain is a complex part of the human anatomy. The biology of how the brain can recall specific memories – or not – depends on many factors, such as the brain’s structure (Eichenbaum, 2017; Mitchell, 2017; Moshé, 2001). The relationship between the brain and spirituality is a mysterious companionship but valuable when examining the impact of emotions and how they are lived or disregarded in the human conscience (Begley, 2001; Burgdorf & Panksepp, 2006). Additionally, the sociological connection between the brain and what connections are made to identity and behavior are formidable studies that embrace the perceptual lens of a person or group’s cultural vibrance (Fivush, 2018; Livingston, 2005; Morgane & Mokler, 2006; Turner & Stets, 2006). The limbic system is the science that assists with framing the discussion of emotions and memories.

The Limbic System includes the Amygdala, Hippocampus, and Temporal Lobes, which are associated with the brain hemisphere connected to human emotions (Ashbrook, 1996; C. Smith, 2015; Vaillant, 2013). The Limbic system enhances the understanding of where and how intense emotions and memories are processed in the brain. The salvation testimony is personal and traumatic – good and bad – that impacts the convert. The research by Vaillant shows that “mystical experiences is firmly rooted in the limbic system.” (p. 592). A salvation testimony and salvific experience is a mystical or spiritual experience. It is recorded that “God is Spirit. And those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (NKJV, 1979/1985, John 4:24).

The limbic system is the link that shows the commonality of all humanity on a biological level. “The limbic system is common to all peoples; this might explain why belief in souls,

spirits, haunted houses, angels or demons, and the capacity of mystical experiences ... because all human beings possess a limbic system and a brain that evolved, develops, and is organized in a similar manner.” (Joseph, 2001). On a spiritual level, the writer Solomon informs his audience that the innate connections between the transcendent God and all humanity are placed within their created being (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The emotion and memories of a salvation testimony occurred in the limbic system. The limbic system provides the gateway to the salient memories and emotions of an event or experience (Gainotti, 2012; Heimer & Van Hoesen, 2006; Urbaniak, 2015a). The science of the limbic system highlights the significance of the convert’s cognitive interplay with the supernatural experience of a salvation testimony that transforms and informs a convert’s spiritual identity and connection to the body of Christ.

Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation is elusive because it connects to the intentions of humanity and is understood within the infinite and intimate domain of God (1 Corinthians 2:11). A salvific event or experience creates the space to question and explore the possibility of spiritual transformation. Burge (2021) studies the tenets of being a born-again Christian convert or deconversion to political and religious behaviors of participants aligned with the Evangelical faith tradition. Burge shares that born-again is an implication “of a singular change in religious identity: taking on the label of born-again Christianity.” (p. 84). The study participants needed to intentionally recall and state their status as a born-again convert or one who had been de-converted. Therefore, spiritual transformation is associated with an individual’s narrative or testimony that classifies their identity and shapes behaviors and perspectives based on their spiritual change preference. The Christian convert’s spiritual transformation is metaphoric and literal (Romans 8:29; 2

Corinthians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:52), and the change is individualized.

A confession or testimony is a guide that shapes one's identity, behaviors, and perspectives about spiritual change, particularly about salvation. Croatto (2005) examines Old Testament text to challenge a long-standing interpretation of salvation for Gentile nations. "The purpose of this study is to deconstruct exegetical tradition that emphasizes the promise of universal salvation for the foreign nations in the book of Isaiah (Croatto, 200, p. 161)." The discussion is not about whether or not his summation is theologically sound. Instead, the researcher emphasized that identity is grounded in historical experiences and testimonies from generation to generation. Croatto gives precedence to the biblical identity – position, classification, or status – that the chosen children of Israel will be the recipients of salvation or deliverance from the destruction of the present life and all eternity (Genesis 17:1-8) by God. The author adds that the declarative testimony of " 'Yahweh [it] is a reference to Israel's own 'creed,' which recalls the salvific events of their God." (p. 151). The article indicated a strong connection between an individual's conviction or testimony about a salvific experience and the social context that fortifies one's identity and inspires connections to others in the preferred religious community. Burge (2021) and Croatto (2005) show that change does not occur in isolation but is reflected through conviction of personal testimony or narrative that informs an individual's identity and social connections or preferences.

Finally, spiritual transformation is a heart matter exercised through our words and behaviors (Proverbs 4:23; Luke 6:45). Issler (2008) shows the intimate nature of spiritual transformation that pertains to the heart and emotions that mark change(s) in a convert's life. He writes, "Spiritual formation involves attention to both insides ('heart work') and outside ('mouth work') (p. 126)." For example, a salvific testimony interacts with the heart and mouth work that

propels converts to strive for changes that align with their faith in God. Scripture's roadmap to accept Jesus' gift of salvation is the individual's belief – in the heart – and a declaration or testimony is made with the mouth (Romans 10:9- 13). The manuscript allows readers to become transparent with God about matters of the heart that conflict with our identity as followers of Christ. Inner conflict is not resolved automatically upon belief and a salvation testimony. However, it takes a willingness to identify the inner conflict that does not align with Christian identity and disrupts the connection with others in the faith community.

Organizational Learning Theory

Transformation or change is not limited to religious disciplines; therefore, the researcher suggested Organizational Learning Theory (OLT) as a viable approach because its principles include extensive dialogue and reflection to address change. Edmondson (2015) explained that Chris Argyris', an American Psychologist, collaborated with Donald Schon and developed the Theory of Action framework, also called Organizational Learning Theory (OLT). OLT calls for acknowledging faulty reasoning and actions that do not match. "The fantasy that somehow organizations can change without personal change, and especially without change on the part of people in leadership positions, underlies many change efforts doomed from the start –" (Senge, 2003). The theory indicates that words and behavior need [emphasis added] to match an organization's positive and effective transformation. With that said, a Christian convert's spiritual transformation is nurtured by the words or testimonies spoken (Revelation 12:11) and followed by the actions aligned with their biblical identity and connection in the kingdom of God (James 1:22-25) in a convert's life. A Christian salvation testimony changes an individual's identity and forged a connection with other adherents through intentional reflection and practice to respond to established norms in their preferred religious community.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Stryker (2008) details Mead's groundbreaking work that led to the interactive theory of Symbolic Interactionism, an interpretive activity involving the individual or group interactions with society, things, and "self" simultaneously and often. The theory acknowledges instances of interaction to create meaning and appropriate action, behavior, or response that fits life's situations. "Interpretation [of interactions] should not be regarded as the mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action" (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).

Blumerian Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic Interactionism (SIT) is an interpretive activity involving the individual or group interactions with society, things, and "self" in segments or concert with each other. Low and Bowden (2020) celebrate Blumer's work and clarify errors in applying or interpreting his work in the special edition of "Symbolic Interaction" publication for SIT practitioners and researchers. Low and Bowden highlight the significance of the work in a time of American history inflamed by social conflict and change. The approach and methodology of SIT filled a gap by creating a bridge to study human interactions in person, a "real-world" context for field practitioners during that period (p.576). Precepts of Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism prescribe the basis of human interactions to meaning-making processes for the individual, others, and the operating in a social context. These precepts appear as the nature of social interactions, the nature of objects, and the nature of human action.

Nature of Social Interactions. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes meaning-making in all interactions at any point throughout the day and in life. Blumer (1969b) explains, "When the gesture has the same meaning for both, the two parties understand each other" (p.9) and respond

accordingly. For example, Christ came as man and died on the cross (Philippians 2:7- 8) to show love and interact with humanity. The Bible shares that the interaction between Jesus and humanity was an act of love (John 3:16; Romans 5:8;1 John 4:19). The new convert utilizes their voice as a salvation testimony to express and affirm the gesture of redemptive love. Therefore, the meaning of this interaction is love and understanding by both parties.

Nature of Objects. Interactions with objects and their meaning vary from one group to the next. In other words, “out of a process of mutual indications, common objects emerge- objects that have the same meaning for a given set of people and are seen in the same manner by them” (p. 11). For Christian converts, physical objects have meaning, and our interactions with them carry weight in how we respond to them. Baptism, Eucharist, and the Bible are objects/symbols held with high esteem in the body of Christ. Specifically, the Bible is the final authority and solemn truths from God Himself (2 Timothy 3:16). Allison and Anthony (2008) remark, “The Bible is truthful when it addresses matters concerning salvation through Jesus Christ, promises about eternal life, statements about the nature of human beings,” (p. 83) and everything about life now and life eternal. The salvation testimony indicates that the convert exposed to the sacred objects supported the new identity as a follower of Christ.

Nature of Human Action. Nature of Human Action. Blumer highlights social interaction from the context of interconnections. This thought deals with how “the individual handles his [or her] world and constructs his [or her] action” (p. 15) in varying situations. Human actions or interactions are sometimes pre-determined, socially associated, or historically based on self-identification and interpretation through verbal and non-verbal cues (Blumer, 1969b). The salvation testimony is encased by biblical anthropological ideas that bound human interconnections from a spiritual and historical view of God the Creator and his creation. Blumer

writes (1969b), “The new form of joint action always emerges out of and is connected with a context of previous joint action” (p. 20). The salvation testimony is potentially a mechanism that activates a new identity that renews fellowship with God through the joint action of receiving grace through Christ and faith as a convert (Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Ephesians 2:8).

Blumer emphasized meaning-making from verbal and non-verbal interactions with any and everything that a group or person deems significant in their “world” for varying situations that occur in life (pp. 10-12). For instance, Christian followers or converts regard objects associated with Baptism, Eucharist, and the Bible as sacred. Allison and Anthony (2008) remark, “The Bible is true when it addresses matters concerning salvation through Jesus Christ, promises about eternal life, statements about the nature of human beings” (p. 83), and everything about life now and life eternal. The constant interaction and historical value placed on the above objects in concert with others in the Christian faith indicate the significance of participation in spiritual practices to inform one’s spiritual experiences, such as salvation testimony.

Symbolic interactionism is a formidable theory that studies human interactions by validating the “self” and the value placed on social interactions with others in a group and in life.

The salvation testimony is an element that validates and directs participation in the normative language and symbolic references as a Christian convert. A Christian salvation testimony outlines the new identity and mode of social engagement for the convert and interacts with emotions. Stryker (1987) thoroughly reviews the birth, rebirth, and extensions of the Symbolic Interactionism theory, specifically in emotion. “Emotion is central to affect control theory, ... Explicitly a version of symbolic interactionism,” that contributes to the

consistent exchange of interactions between the individual and others (Stryker, 1987, p. 90).

Lawler (2001) presents the Affect Theory on social exchanges, emphasizing emotion in connection with social interactions relative to identity. The variant of emotional gratification or disdain in an interaction solidifies a connection or disconnection to participate in social interactions with others in the network group – psychologically or physically. A unique element in Lawler’s theory is the element of decision-making in concert with an individual’s emotions. “The individual actors decide whether to exchange, with whom to exchange, and under what terms” (Lawler, 2001, p. 236). The salvation testimony can be either an emotional motivator for a convert to engage with other Christian followers within the preferred faith community or isolate oneself from other adherents based on their individualized perception about their salvific experience.

Structural Functional Theory (SFT) and Symbolic Interactionism are complimentary. Johnson (1971) uses the family structure as a basis to elevate the relevance of structure in a familiar social setting. Constantine (2017) highlights biology as a primary component that impacts humanity in social context and identity. Moreover, Carter and Fuller (2016) expound on the evidence that Symbolic Interactionism theory is compatible with various disciplines and perspectives for years to come. The researcher offered that Structural-Functional Theory (SFT) is the input of developing identity structures. Symbolic Interactionism is the theory that situates the output of functioning in the new identity in various social contexts. For example, the salvation testimony is understood from the perspective of SFT – input element signaling change – and Symbolic Interactionism provides opportunities to formulate meanings and standards for social engagement in various contexts as a Christian convert. Emotion and social context matter in evaluating a salvation testimony that activates the desire and intention to connect with other

Christians in the faith community (Francis & Adams, 2019; Shott, 1979). The researcher considers Practical Theology, Christian Education, and Speech Acts Theory for providing insight into strategies for converts to develop and “practice” their lived experience of a salvation testimony in the faith community, abroad, and in every area of life. Finally, connecting to the faith community in the reclaimed image of being a child of God (2 Corinthians 5:17) can be understood within the social topics on Biblical Ecology and mental images.

The Salvation Testimony in Action

The biblical mission is to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;” (New King James Version, 1982, Matthew 28:19-20a) is actuated by the testimonies of the Apostles who witnessed and encountered the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry. The salvation testimony is a resource to equip followers of Christ in the mission field. These testimonies and witness accounts may differ based on the audience, the social context that includes language, and the purpose. However, the vision to compel others to experience the love of God through Jesus’ work on the cross to bring salvation to all humans remains the same for all witnesses past, present, and future (John 3:16, Romans 5:8-11). Practical Theology, Christian Education Instruction, and biblical practice provide the necessary instructions and practice to participate in the “building” of God’s kingdom as an obedient servant or convert.

Practical Theology

Change is a part of life. Wilhoit (2014) advises that the next step is “to transfer learning, to apply the knowledge and skills in one particular setting to a new situation” (p. 141). In other words, the salvation testimony predicates that the convert decided to engage and develop their

development for a convert – old or young. The Association of Practical Theology allows practitioners and members to reflect, study, and discuss strategies for implementing their theological agenda and pedagogy action (Welcome to the Association of Practical Theology, n.d.). This organization is a contemporary resource for generating practical ways to serve and develop as a Christian in fellowship with God and others in the faith community. The researcher declared that a salvation testimony practiced in personal time, worship services, family settings, and service to one another could help develop a Christian identity and connection with other adherents in the preferred faith community selected by the individual. The convert's time to define and refine their salvation testimony is through prayer. (Van Oudtshoorn (2012) elevates prayer to the practical priority for the body of Christ. Personal prayer is open communication with the omnipresent God who watches and cares for those who have confessed and believed in his Son Jesus (Matthew 6:6).

Participation in worship services is helpful for the further development and refinement of one's salvation testimony. Toledo (2012) and C. Harris (2020) highlight the relevance and value of the worship service and Sunday school for Christians, although the impact may vary from one individual to the next. First, these settings (Harris, 2020; Toledo, 2012) stage opportunities to connect and extol God through testimonies while encouraging one another in the faith (Psalm 105:1; Hebrews 10:25). Furthermore, Wilhoit (2014) states, "God in our worship, in our giving, in our study, and our concern for others. Springing from a heart given to God, service always involves doing" (p. 24). Therefore, there are several opportunities for the Christian convert to explore and refine their salvation testimony in private and public. Next, there is family time. In the Old Testament, Joshua remembered and shared Israel's salvific experiences with the children of God to activate their identity, commitment, and position in Him as his chosen nation (Joshua

24). Also, in the New Testament, fathers and mothers – their companion helpers (Genesis 2:18) – are informed of their duty to train, instruct, and lead their children to know the Lord God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). The family time presents optimal time to refine one’s salvation testimony in a place that is safe and rich with teaching to develop all family members in their identity as a Christian believer.

Lastly, the researcher discussed the value of serving and connecting with others in the faith community. Lowe and Lowe (2018b) illuminate the idea of “reciprocity in relationships” (pp. 132-133), which influences spiritual development and trust in relationships to ask questions about salvation. Howell (2003) explains, “God will distribute his rewards not based on human notions of fairness, but according to his sovereign, and abundantly gracious determination” (p. 196) to those who respond in faith and service. Servant-followers “are light of the world” (Matthew 5:14a, NIV), and the expectation is for them to “shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, NIV). Service to one another in reciprocal relationships is practical theology in action. Christian converts have clear instructions on service. “God’s representatives we are called to proclaim his way in word and deed” (Pettit, 2008b, p. 114) through the recounting of one’s salvation testimony and fellowship with others in the faith community and abroad (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 10:23-25).

Christian Education

Change is not automatic. The Bible announces that a preacher can deliver the gospel message about Jesus and his followers that carry the message of hope and love (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 10:14; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21). Wilhoit (2014) adds, “a theory of education... must accurately reflect the real world so that the teacher is not torn between theory and reality” to make instruction applicable in the lives of spiritually renewed students or congregants. Wilhoit

begins the discussion on the necessity of purpose for Christian Education. The author announces the prevalence of establishing clear objectives to build unity within the ranks of those who teach Christian education or volunteer their time. Otherwise, efforts are muddled by routine rather than a significant change in people's lives. Next, the objective is to discuss Christian education from being an active participant in learning and service as a believer. "The image of the priest brings to mind access to God, intercession, worship, service, responsibility, and stewardship. The image of the servant reminds us that the redeemed in Christ stand before him ... and serve him and others" (Wilhoit, 2018, p. 32). The design of Christian education is to present biblical doctrine or truth so that others can commit to effective change as God directs.

Christian education designed to meet the spiritual needs of congregants or student participants involved in a particular study at the local church or small group affords all parties opportunities for practical application. For example, Head (2022) constructed a thorough curriculum about biblical principles of salvation, but congregants struggled to construct their reflections on salvific perspectives. The multiple variations of understanding and communicating one's salvation experience show a need to apply biblical foundations and concepts such as salvation in recollecting a salvation testimony. Penick (2013) shows the power of conversion testimonies through online media. The approach is a valuable resource that prompts individuals to recognize, recount, or develop their salvation testimony. Zagzebski (1994) looks at the salvific experience from a philosophical lens that integrates "luck." Lee (2008) showed participants' salvific or conversion narratives as events or processes. The literature above indicates ample opportunities to develop Christian Education as a church or parachurch to help understand, develop, and practice an individual's salvation testimony.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory (SAT) is a viable concept to explore a salvation testimony. The theory's principal author, J. L. Austin, creates the pathway for Richard Briggs' work, adding biblical interpretation and borrowing concepts from Donald Evans' work on self-involvement (Briggs, 1999; Wisse, 2004). The researcher determined that the element of self-involvement would build upon the notion that the salvation testimony is an incipit mechanism that frames Christian identity and connections to others in the faith community. Briggs shared, "[t]he speech act of confession grounds the utterance of the words in the lifestyle which gives them backing." (p. 191). In other words, an individual's declarative statements about their faith ascribe to a lifestyle that identifies with their biblical identity. An example would be declaring that as a Christian convert, he or she identifies as a conqueror (Romans 8:37).

The function of Speech Act Theory in a convert's life prompts change and action that aligns with the Bible. Johnson (2011) removes the complexities of religious traditions using SAT to allow Christian converts or adherents active "participation" in their change through declaring God's word and responding in kind based on the immediate inherent "status" change (Johnson, 2011, p. 775). Romans 10: 8-9 states, " 'the word is near you, in your mouth and your heart (that is the word of faith which we preach): that if you *confess* [emphasis added] with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in you heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.'" (New King James Version, 1970/1985, p. 1275).). Converts that proclaim and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ receive the grace and gift of salvation to be reconciled to God (Romans 1:1- 6; Ephesians 2:5- 8).

Speech Act Theory intently melds together an examination of text and semantics that constructs opportunities for individuals or groups to create meaning for their world. Haddox

(1971) offers the ontological perspective that religious language as religious experience is sufficient for establishing a knowing or understanding of an individual's identity, world, and expectations. The usefulness of Haddox's perspective with the salvation testimony is the aspect of an individual's conscience posturing based on their religious language as an essential element to religious experience. He adds, "my uses of religious language are ways of constituting my world and re-affirming my life as a part of a larger history, in which I am confronted by a radical Otherness to which I must respond." (Haddox, 1971, p. 226). Therefore, the salvation testimony is an operational speech act that allows individuals to shape their Christian identity and conform and connect to other converts in the faith community.

Speech Act Theory (SAT) has practical implications in the life of a believer. Yeo (2017) details the use of divine discourse in Scripture with the illocutionary act(s) by the Creator, God, with his creation – humanity. First, Yeo situates the idea of the speaker and addressee, adapting their behavior to align with the content of phrases or words spoken. "It is the linguistic institutions or systems of arrangements in effect within a community that allows for seemingly innocuous illocutionary acts to count as illocutionary acts that carry normative weight in the public domain" (Yeo, 2017, p. 209) with help from Wolterstorff's seminal work. Next, Yeo incorporates Alston's work that focuses on the speaker and addressee assuming responsibility to fulfill the requirement or obligation of spoken phrases or words. "For Alston, illocutionary acts alter the normative status of their addressees by way of the speaker taking responsibility for certain conditions, some of which 'tap' into this complex social and moral network to lay a claim on the addressees." (Yeo, 2017, p. 211). Furthermore, Yeo provides biblical context to the soteriological aspects of God's speech acts in Scripture and the believer's inherent responsibility to respond to the normative standards established by the relationship in Christ (pp. 215-218).

Finally, the researcher informed that the salvation testimony is the perlocutionary act from Jesus Christ's illocutionary act of grace to bring salvation for all humanity through grace (Luke 18:32-33; John 3:16-17, 12:32-33).

Another practical use of SAT in the life of a believer occurs in liturgical readings. Calvert (2020) brings worship into the conversation of applying Speech Act Theory. The author demonstrates that the illocutionary acts of liturgical worship and lyrics create meaning and an appropriate response reflected in a convert or believer's life in a Christian context. The researcher identified that it is probable that the salvation testimony that is recalled and spoken – an illocutionary act – prompts the perlocutionary effect to live according to one's biblical identity as a Christian and fellowship with others in the faith community. Overall, the Speech Act theory applies to the salvation testimony because it allows the convert to knowingly respond and participate in forming their Christian identity and social context of their preferred faith community.

The Salvation Testimony as Community

Language and spoken words provide a gateway to shape an individual's or group's perceptions, habits, and social interactions. The speaker and listener(s) can profit or be damaged by spoken words (Proverbs 15:23, 18:21; Matthew 12:36-37). Religion or faith also shapes the communal language that defines meanings and establishes social boundaries and customs. For example, Thomas and Sayahi (2019) show the impact of language in written form based on syntax and grammatical structure to inform one's identity and expectations for religious practice. Inya (2019) offers insight into the linguistic landscape of a Nigerian city's signage to compare English, Yoruba, and Arabic levels of perception and acceptance. Although the signage is inanimate, the words communicated to community members trigger an affective interpretation of

each language's means for the individual or group. To that end, "Languages are rooted in cultures, and humans as representatives of their culture appropriate their language for social identity." (Inya, 2019, p. 1157). Wang (2016) evaluates language in the context of worship service in a Malaysian Chinese community where a "language shifting" (p. 284) from the native Hakka language to Mandarin because of its primary usage in communal activities and practices. Wang indicates that "heritage language" (p. 280) is susceptible to decline and extinction if not intentionally shared and practiced in formal religious settings to maintain authenticity for a group's heritage. These examples are bold presentations of how language interacts with a community to transmit religious ideas, practices, and identity. Language and the transmittance of religious concepts are studied in cultural exposure. Biblical ecology and mental images highlight the impact of a salvation testimony on a Christian convert's identity and connection to other adherents in their preferred faith community.

Biblical Ecology

The biblical history of humanity begins with a harmonious fellowship with God and his creation in paradise; unfortunately, disobedience severed the relationship that once functioned in perfection (Genesis 1-3). The book, "Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth Through Online Education," eloquently expounds on the intricacies of the spiritual interconnectedness within the social context of Scripture and an ecological perspective (S.D. Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The Bible outlines the Christian community connection in this manner: "one body and one Spirit, ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (New International Version, 1973/2011, Ephesians 4:4-6). Therefore, the salvation testimony can conform to the contents of the above Scripture to shape a Christian convert's identity and connectedness, as outlined by S. D. Lowe and Lowe. Its

impact involves socialization and spiritual formation for Christians (Lowe and Lowe, 2018, pp. 124-126).

Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is the pinnacle of fellowship with the community of believers. The institution of Jesus's command was given to his disciples as he prepared to fulfill his destiny to bring salvation through his selfless act of dying on the cross for the sins of the world (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:14-20). Present day, his disciples or followers receive holy sacraments as commanded, which suggests individuals identify as Christ's followers (convert) connect with other adherents by participating in a biblical activity. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, Christ's disciples are reminded that "for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." (NKJV, 1979/1985, 1 Corinthians 11:26). The salvation testimony provides the convert a point of reference to confirm their "status" or position to participate as Jesus instructed righteously.

The experience may vary from one denomination to an individual, but the command remains because of the explicit instructions for Christ for his followers. Phelps (2000) offers a peek into the Catholic sacrament from an African-American perspective and the complexity of the community's practice. McDuffie (2019) explains the spiritual connections between the body of believers, the Holy Sacrament, and ecological responsibility as God's created beings.

Communion or the Lord's Supper is a valuable community activity that allows the convert to reflect on their salvation experience, contributing to their salvation testimony.

Lastly, there is the community gathering to hear preaching or a sermon. Shields (2008) explains, "Preaching is not a cultural or time-bound phenomenon. It is a part of God's will for those who gather to worship him – both to know him and make Him known." (p. 246). Therefore, preaching is another aspect that assists with the idea of a salvation testimony that

constructs Christian identity and prompts connections with others in the faith community.

Gunson (2014) recounts a family's generational history of preaching in the faith community to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the call to receive God's grace (Ephesians 2:4-9).

Preaching is the verbal engine that transmits spiritual symbols, conduct, language, and guidance needed to apply biblical principles in every area of converts' lives to solidify their salvation testimony.

Mental Images

Perceptions and images situate an individual's level of cooperation to align with collective standards and conduct associated with an organization's culture or a specific task.

Bolman and Deal (2017) determined that "a frame is a mental model – a set of ideas and assumptions – that you carry in your head A good frame makes it easier to know what you are up against, and ultimately what you can do about it." (p. 12). These mental images bring swift judgment on how one's behaviors align with one's position, passions, and expectations.

Morgan (2006) extensively depicts how individuals or groups view their organization, including corresponding behavior traits and nuances associated with each mental model. The researcher shared that salvation testimony is the incipient experience that provides pertinent information about the view of converts' Christian identity and connection to fellow believers. The mental image of a family is a biblical worldview. John writes, "but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name;" (NKJV, 1979/1985, John 1:12). Most families desire their loved ones to succeed in their personal or collective endeavors, and it is through collective perseverance that goals become a reality.

Therefore, a salvation testimony is critical to prompt a willful identity alignment and purpose for connecting to others in the family structure.

Scripture develops mental modes that direct social interactions, perceptions about life, and Christian identity. For example, the image of the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9-10), being a child of God (1 John 3:1-3), sojourners (1 Peter 2:11), and a member in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14) depict an extensive level of connectedness and a family unit for all redeemed Christians by faith and grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). The metaphoric language creates images that frame identity characteristics such as royalty and being in a position of authority. Also, the metaphoric language establishes a rightful association with others identified in the heritage and inheritance of being in the kingdom of God. The mental image that places culture as a driving factor to accomplish work is the "reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways." (Morgan, 2006, p. 133). Nguyen et al. (2016) and Taylor et al. (2016) study the relevance of family imaging in the cultural context of African-Americans' lives. Overall, mental images defined through the utterance and recall of a salvation testimony are an action that simplifies a spiritual concept of salvation for human comprehension. The Bible is a resource to help shape an accurate mental image for receiving salvation. The salvation testimony is the vehicle that prompts cooperation of the new identity and social context for the convert.

Related Literature

The research aimed to explore the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith. The study's participants and researcher intentionally reflected on the decision to accept the invitation of Jesus Christ's salvation that formed Christian identity and connectedness with other adherents. Semi-structured virtual interviews are conducted to study the phenomenon. The researcher presented ten studies on the discussion of conversion and spirituality as a lived experience similar to this research.

The first study by Edwards-Dunn (2011), “An Invitation to Wholeness: The Power of Story in the Spiritual Formation of African-American Single Christians,” offers insight into the discovery of a spiritual identity that aligns with a biblical worldview in the *imago Dei* from the cultural perspectives of African-American Christians who are not married through active participation in storytelling. The author utilizes storytelling to assist participants with reflecting on their life story to unveil “what shapes and informs identity” (p. 28) and miscues within their formalized beliefs and values. The study's objectives materialized through the application of a five-week course of instruction that included storytelling activities, reflections, discussion, and pre- and post-surveys. The overall outcome affirmed the value of storytelling in upholding individuals' perceptions of their lifestyles and relationships. The study is relevant to the current study based on storytelling and reflection as a mechanism to create a new identity for African-American Christians.

In the second study, "Coming Into Our Own: Helping African American Families to Name, Claim and Live Out Their Spirituality," the author explores the family unit of African-American families in the context of its historical narratives and spiritual influences (Gillie, 2004). Gillie (2004) emphasizes the notion that "we live the stories we tell and believe" (p.1) and utilizes Groomes's shared praxis, which is the methodology used to dissect the stories of seven families. The researcher developed the following research outcomes: (1) learn to tell the story, (2) family must be family, not 'me,' and (3) consider the other. The study's information and methodology are relevant to the current research because of the intentionality to holistically embrace and reflect on the life journey – past, present, and future choices – that inform and shape identity and relationships with others in the community.

The third study by Myers (2020b), "The Spiritual Conversion Experience of the African American Male," engages in learning about the personal narrative of the spiritual change processes of the sample group. Myers (2020b) used a phenomenological method and implemented interviews as a data collection strategy that led to the six themes:

- Spiritual conversion is a self-reflective process of man seeking a relationship with a higher power;
- spiritual conversion entails developing a level of self-awareness to recognize internal struggles and the willingness to confront these struggles;
- transcendent thinking promotes changed life perspective;
- the onset of the conversion process is generally marked by a pivotal moment;
- ownership of spiritual conversion is progressive as a higher power reveals its sovereignty through life experiences;
- church communities serve as growth tools and social resource.

The research is similar to the current research in that the current study used a phenomenological methodology, snowball, and interviews as data collection strategies and distinguished between biblical topics about Salvation and Sanctification.

The fourth article, titled "The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church Involvement" by O'Connor et al. (2002), is a longitudinal study that investigated two elements of spiritual development – personal religious and church involvement – of over two-hundred individuals at ages sixteen and thirty-eight from three denominations, Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic. The researchers redeployed an original study from 1976 to develop quantifiable data representing the determinates from youth religious and denominational experiences that correlate to impact adulthood (D. R. Hoge et al., 1982; R. Hoge

& Petrillo, 1978). The study's outcomes varied to identify definite determinants for personal religiosity and church involvement for participants aged sixteen and thirty-eight. However, a notable discovery is that "the culture of the denomination in which the person was raised, including its teachings and habits" (O'Connor et al., 2002) from childhood impacts the *personal* [emphasis added] religious involvement through adulthood. The relationship between the study and current research is the inclusion of denominational influence and spiritual practices in forming and continuing spiritual development for an individual.

The fifth article by Peace (2004), "Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge," assesses tensions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy elements relating to the complexities of conversion within five Christian faith traditions: Evangelicals, Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox. Peace organizes the data based on Scott Knights' conversion typologies, such as socialization, liturgical acts, and personal decision (Lamerson, 2002). The investigation concluded that "all views contribute important parts to a holistic understanding of conversion and hence of evangelism. Holistic evangelism will invite people into the kingdom of God." (Peace, 2004, p.12). The commentary in the article is relative to the current study for two reasons: (1) an explanation of a personal decision from a theological, denominational lens that undergirds the articulation of a salvation testimony and (2) the three conversion typologies – socialization, liturgical acts, and personal decision – intersect in a salvation testimony in an inner-outer transformative manner.

The sixth source presented in this section is the research "Union with God and Holy Spirit: A New Paradigm of Justification" (Holtzen, 2002). The study focuses on the Holy Spirit's role in justifying Christ's followers. Holtzen (2002) provides extensive literary context about the

theological and historical components of the nature and mission of the Holy Spirit in concert with God and Jesus Christ – also known as the triune Godhead. The presented is

The mission of the Son is God's work *pro nobis* for justification and the mission of the Spirit is God's work *in nobis* for sanctification. Therefore a legitimate theological distinction can be made between justification and sanctification by appropriation.

The research is similar and relative to the current research because of the distinction between the personal decision of accepting grace-filled justification through Jesus, the Son, to be born-again and viewing conversion as sanctification by the leading of the Holy Spirit for life.

The seventh literary study, "Communicating Indirect Feelings: American Stories of Indirect Experiences" (Lawson, 2023), offers an original framework to examine indirect communication encompassing a lived experience by unpacking the communication (e.g., vocabulary) and messages about the indirect experience. The study uses a narrative paradigm, qualitative questions, and interviews to understand cognitive and emotive elements in the storytelling processes of an indirect experience. The information in the study is relatable to the current study because of an emphasis on individual storytelling to understand the phenomenon, a salvation testimony, and shares a basis for including the Limbic System as a viable source to understand the value of emotions in life experiences. Additionally, Lawson (2023) indicates that their research applies to spiritual experiences and other areas of study like ontology.

The eighth research by Bailey (2016), titled "Spiritual Formation: A Model to Strengthen the Mission, Operation, and Commitment to African-American Churches," is a direct response to the need to foster a devout community of Christian followers in the body of Christ to serve beyond the brick and mortar church house. Interviews were used to gather pertinent data to achieve objectives that support the development of a thriving spiritual formation model designed

by pastors and church leaders in small North Carolina churches. One of Bailey's (2016) discoveries is that "many current local religious leaders are not able to aptly respond to questions about spiritual formation because they have not clearly agreed on a working definition." (p. 73). The researcher interpreted this observation not as condemning; instead, the literature indicated that the church needs to identify a starting point that is clearly articulated, rehearsed, and shared for identity and connectedness in the work of God's kingdom for spiritual formation. The study is relevant to the current study because of the use of interviews as a means of data collection and the recognition of building a biblical community through a cultural context of African-American Christians or converts. "A cultural sensitivity will be required to keep intact the family and community history, recurring events and approaches to biblical interpretation that have bound congregants over many decades. After all, those traditions have delivered them to the current times." (Bailey, 2016).

The ninth study, "Finishing Well: A Phenomenological Investigation of Spiritual Formation in Retirement-Age Evangelical Men," is by Baker (2012). The author explored the wealth of life experiences and personal change for eight participants concerning their spiritual formation for a group of Christian men. An objective for the exploration is to shift from the socialization aspects of conversion to "redirect funds and energy toward spiritual maturation and personal encounters that had eternal significance." (Baker, 2012). The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to use interviews to collect data, and the phenomenological methodology provided opportunities for the researcher and participants to reflect on their personal stories of spiritual transformation introspectively for a holistic understanding of the phenomena. The study yielded a total of five themes:

- spiritual transformation as a process and fiat experience

- recognition of God's initiative role in spiritual transformation
- general influences on spiritual transformation
- specific precursors to spiritual transformation
- evidences of spiritual transformation (Baker, 2012)

The research is similar to the current study primarily because of its phenomenological methodology that relies on the authenticity of participants' reflections and the researcher's bracketing to understand the essence of a phenomenon as a lived experience. Furthermore, the study acknowledges the impact of home life – at a young age –, a personal decision moment, and the influences of family, friends, and others involving spirituality and conversion.

The tenth study in the section is by Boyd Mitchell (2015), entitled "Spiritual Nurture in Developing the Faith of Christian High School Students: A Phenomenological Study." The research objective is to uncover components that lead adolescent high school students in a Canadian high school to nurture and be nurtured in their faith development. The researcher utilized interviews, journaling, and observations in the field while working with fifteen students to formulate desired outcomes. The results indicate that students, teachers, and administrators are responsible for building faith in students' lives. The research is appropriate for the current study because of the focus on a didactic approach to understanding a lived experience for participants, and both studies have tenets of faith development and identity as a foundation to explore the phenomenon.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

The rationale for the study and the gap in the literature are two sections. The first section expounds on rationales for the research subjectively. Secondly, the researcher identified a gap in

the literature from the related literature section. The research rationale guides the introspective reasoning in the inquiry.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for the study section contains four elements: (a) rediscovery of God's gracious love by the salvific authority of Jesus Christ, (b) intentionally infusing biblical anthropology with a specific religious tradition in the discussion on conversion, (c) examining personal identity in the context of Christian values, and (d) utilizing the salvation testimony as an attribute that links identity and social theory together for African American converts. First, the intentionality of reflecting on the individual's salvific experience of redemption through articulating the salvation testimony connects the heart and mind towards the triune God's omnipotent and transcendent love and deliverance(s). The Bible states, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the work of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." (New King James Version, 1975/1985, Revelation 12:11).

Another rationale for the study is to infuse biblical anthropology and Christian traditions, specifically Protestant traditions, into the conversation on conversion. Martin (2009a) emphasized that a "social science model is constrained to operate in isolation from the transformational experience itself, in sharp contrast to an actual religious tradition" (pp. 80-81). Therefore, the research strives to connect social science with the transformative conversion experience by exploring the Christian salvation testimony. Additionally, the research incorporates specific denominational dimensions to understand normative aspects associated with a convert's salvation testimony.

Next, the research highlights aspects of personal identity in the context of Christian faith and values. Hitlin (2003) places values as the essential component of conceptualizing personal

identity alongside studying identity and social theory. “Values develop in social contexts, draw on culturally significant symbolic material, and are experienced as a necessary and fundamental, but noncoerced, aspect of self” (Hitlin, 2003, p. 121). This approach indicates that personal identity is derived from within the internal dimensions of self and then intentionally practiced in one’s social context. The final rationale for the study is to utilize the salvation testimony as an attribute that links identity and social theory together based on integrating both theories in studying identity structure(s) (Reid & Deaux, 1996b).

Gap in the Literature

Jesus shares a personal moment with Nicodemus concerning how men, women, and all those who seek to identify and fellowship with the triune God: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (New Kings James Version, 1979/1985, John 3:3). Previous literature intertwines conversion and spiritual formation in the process of regeneration for males, females, students, Evangelicals, and church communities. The Gap in the Literature is the omission of the element of regeneration or the new birth in Jesus Christ utilizing the articulation of a salvation testimony as the incipient mechanism that contributes to forming Christian identity and connectedness for African-American males and females in the Protestant faith.

Profile of the Current Study

The research used the qualitative research design to inquire about the nature of the salvation testimony as a lived experience through the lens of the Christian faith. The study focuses on salvation testimony as the incipient mechanism contributing to forming a Christian identity and a transformative lifestyle for converts to the Christian faith, specifically within the context of African-American males and females in Protestant faith traditions. Applying a

phenomenological methodology and implementing a semi-structured interview with African-American males and females affiliated with Protestant faith traditions in Texas, Georgia, and Colorado achieve the study's objectives.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The chapter discusses the research design synopsis and the research design methodology. The research design synopsis section details the research problem, research purpose, and questions. The following sections of the chapter cover the research design and methodology, focusing on the research setting, participants, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, data collection methods and instruments, and data analysis. These sections in the chapter capture the intent of abiding by the design standards, transparency, and safety measures to protect participants in the study.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

The lack of research on the spiritual concept of regeneration through the supernatural design of the triune God from the personal narrative of African-American converts in Protestant faith traditions contributes to the problem of discussing spirituality and conversion.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African-American females and males in the Protestant faith.

Research Questions

RQ1. How is the salvation testimony described by African-American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ2. How does reflection on the salvation testimony, if any, impact the personal identity of African-American converts to the Protestant faith?

RQ3. What activities, if any, validate the salvation testimony of African American converts within their preferred Protestant faith tradition (e.g., New member and or Baptism courses, First Communion, or a mentoring period)?

RQ4. What spiritual activities (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer), if any, interact with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for African American converts in the Protestant faith?

Research Design

Qualitative research is an emerging approach that allows a researcher to immerse themselves in the surroundings of participants' natural settings to collect data and analyze data based on the detailed descriptions of study participants to derive the essence of the phenomena studied Creswell and Poth (2018). The qualitative research approach and phenomenological design are gateways for understanding the salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith and the context of their lives. Qualitative research requires the researcher to reflect on their interaction with the studied phenomenon. Reflexivity transparently presented potential biases because of the researcher's previous knowledge and reflection on the studied phenomenon. In other words, "inquirers reflect about how their role in the study and their background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations... and the meaning they ascribe to the data." (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 182).

The phenomenology research design "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). It intertwines philosophy with subjective interpretation to understand the studied phenomenon that participants experienced at a point in their lifetime (Converse, 2012; Flick, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger are recognized for their foundational contributions to Phenomenological research, which researchers reference today in their study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hermeneutical and transcendental phenomenology are two traditional phenomenological types utilized to explore a phenomenon that participants share and experience. Sloan and Bowe (2014) and van Manen (2016) expand on Heidegger's interpretative

framework by pinpointing language as the focal point to analyze the context and content of participants' in-depth interviews about the phenomenon studied. Transcendental phenomenology is birthed from Husserl's work in phenomenology research, which takes a descriptive approach to understanding a phenomenon shared by participants and the researcher to develop descriptions of themes that "flow from the intentionality of consciousness. The reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of an individual's experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). The Interpretive and Descriptive phenomenological inquiry approach studies human experiences in life (Dahlberg, 2006; Rockmore, 2017; Vagle, 2018b). The Transcendental Phenomenology allowed the researcher to bracket their experience with the phenomenon throughout the exploration of identifying its essence (Roberts, 2019).

The researcher implemented the Transcendental Phenomenology method for the following reasons: (1) the embedded element of introspection to understand one's environment and life processes, and (2) the researcher is an African American convert who identifies with the Protestant or Christian faith. The phenomenological design satisfied the element of reflexivity for the researcher. It aided participants in describing the underpinnings of the salvation testimony at various points or seasons in their lives and natural environments.

Research Methodology

The phenomenological methodology emerges in the study. First, purposeful sampling will identify the site, participants, and the phenomenon studied, and data collection and analysis processes to undertake phenomenological research from social constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 185-186). Data collection begins with a criterion sampling that requires participants to have experienced the phenomenon of a salvation testimony in the Protestant faith and African-American male and female. Next, the participants who fit the criteria must review, sign, and

return the consent form to the researcher. A virtual interview is scheduled, and then semi-structured interviews occur via Zoom's videoconferencing platform.

Finally, data analysis processes include organizing and reviewing interview responses and observation notes and the particular activity of coding text (e.g., sentences and phrases), images, documents, and other artifacts. The phenomenology coding framework includes centering analysis on significant statements, clustering meanings, and identifying themes that contribute to the overall description or essence of the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). The goal is to support themes and the phenomenon's essence with what participants experienced – textual descriptions – and how they experienced the phenomenon – structural descriptions – in the context of their reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). After the implementation process, data collection, and analysis, the researcher presented a detailed narrative with pictures and charts about the essence of the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith. Also, the study's results are shared with all internal and external stakeholders for accountability and accuracy.

The researcher reached out to known potential participants in the population. The study's emergent methods require balancing planning and maintaining various data sources to study the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith. Purposeful sampling strategies are valuable to "intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination." (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher implemented the following sampling strategies: (1) Maximum variation, (2) Snowball, and (3) Criterion to study the salvation testimony of African-American adherents or converts to the Protestant faith. These strategies were selected because the researcher compiled data that compared individuals' salvation testimonies of

African-American converts in the Protestant faith.

Maximum variation sampling informed the researcher, participants, and audience that different demographics and perspectives are a part of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). The Snowball sampling strategy indicated that the researcher explicitly shared information with potential participants and received recommendations for others to participate in the study to reach the recommended sample size of 8 to 12 participants (Jupp, 2006). Finally, the Criterion sampling strategy was used to ensure that participants for the study met the primary criteria of the phenomenon— a Christian salvation testimony (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Setting

The researcher explored the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith to understand the nature of the lived experience of participants. The researcher was inclined to study the dynamics of a salvation testimony that leads one to repentance to become what is known as a Christian follower or disciple of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18- 20; Acts 11:25- 26). The nuances of spirituality and individualism are inherent in deciphering the impact of the convert's life.

The researcher and study participants conducted the research in a virtual environment. The dialogue reflects on the participants' events and the context in connection to their salvation testimony. The narration varied from participant to participant because a salvation testimony is individualized based on a personal reflection of the time, location, and people associated with the event(s). The data collection is through a virtual videoconferencing platform (e.g., Zoom) to conduct an in-depth, semi-structured interview to determine specifications on participants' settings. The rationale is to minimize the disruption of participants' daily lives. Also, the data collection extended across multiple states, including Texas, Colorado, Michigan, and Georgia.

Participants disclosed that their local church polity and liturgies practiced were diverse based on the different organizations or Protestant or Christian denominations in the study. For example, denominational affiliations could include Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, Independent/Congregational, Non-Denominational, and Holiness. The study's sample size included eight male and female participants. Their denominational affiliations ranged from Baptist, Church of God in Christ, Methodist, and Congregational churches. The researcher learned about these various denomination affiliations in the study based on participants' experiences. The study's virtual setting allowed the researcher to collect data representing African-Americans' diversity in the Protestant faith and cultural context to study the phenomenon of a salvation testimony.

Participants

Participants in the study, including the researcher, reflected on the salvation testimony to understand a study's phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that phenomenological research is not deductive reasoning that derives an answer. Instead, it is inductive reasoning that seeks to elevate and illuminate participants' experiences into a shared theme or idea in the context of their lives. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling strategies to ensure participants had self-identified to answer questions about the salvation testimony as an African American convert to the Protestant faith. The initiation of the convenience sampling strategy ensues to identify participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159).

The minimum age for participants would be 30 years old. The researcher expected African-American male and female participants to articulate their salvation testimony in detail. For instance, participants detailed their emotional and cognitive perceptions

surrounding their salvation testimony. Participants were expected to conduct a one-on-one interview virtually via a teleconferencing platform (e.g., Zoom). Participants are expected to identify as Christians who accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior based on the gospel message of reconciliation (Romans 1:1- 6, 10:9- 10; 2 Corinthians 5:7) for ten years.

Identifying the sample group evolves from the primary objective to explicitly recall and articulate their salvation testimony as a criterion to participate in the study as identified in the IRB Consent document. Lee (2008) used maximum variation for her thirteen participants because differences were presented at the beginning of the study (p. 243). The sample size for the study is a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 12 participants. The smaller sample size than the examples listed above is due to time constraints for the research and minimizing scheduling conflicts to conduct a 45-minute one-on-one interview with each participant. Transcendental phenomenology was the best option for exploring the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp 76, 159). Research study participants provide data necessary to understand a phenomenon personally and socially.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was a primary instrument in the data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and analysis phases of the phenomenological study on the salvation testimony experience of African-Americans who converted to the Protestant faith. The researcher did not "rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 43) to develop specific data related to the researcher's proposed study and sample group. The rapport established between the researcher and participants reflected quality research results that accurately represent the voice and essence of the salvation testimony of African-American

converts in the Protestant faith.

Reflexivity is the cornerstone of phenomenological research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Myers, 2020a; Roberts, 2019; Roulston et al., 2008; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). The activity is centered on requirements to address "biases, values explicitly, and personal background" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183) to create authenticity and trustworthiness in the study. The researcher's role and strategy was to implement reflexivity research throughout the research. For example, they take memos or notes during the interview to create a viable audit trail to validate the research study. Also, bracketing the researcher's background knowledge or experiences ensured the focus remained on participants' voices about the phenomenon.

The researcher openly disclosed previous experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon being studied – the salvation testimony. The researcher was raised in a home where both biological parents were Protestant–Christian – ministers. The significance of this detail means the researcher was conditioned to recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ leads one to repentance as a priority and custom for survival in the earthly realm and brings eternal life in the heavenly kingdom of God. The researcher's salvific experience was a personal moment exhibited in a public setting in front of the local church congregation. Homelife was centered around the teachings of Jesus Christ; therefore, the decision to accept the "invitation" was constantly at play in the researcher's life. The researcher's upbringing influenced the researcher's foundational knowledge about salvation and personal perception of the value of participating in formative and descriptive activities. The researcher is an African-American female Protestant convert and ordained minister who believes in the gospel message of grace or salvation through faith through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and confession (Romans 10:9-10).

The researcher's denominational influences included Baptist and Church of God in Christ

doctrinal practices. These background experiences required the researcher to bracket one's biases to understand the salvation testimony from participants' experiences and denominational dimensions rather than the researcher's. The epoche approach exposed the researcher's perspective on the phenomenon studied, which would be used at the onset of the study. The steps for bracketing the researcher's biases and perspectives on the phenomenon studied were transcribed in a personal journal, Word document, and a small notepad. These hand-written and electronic notes included reflections, research ideas, concepts, and preliminary themes.

Additionally, the items were dated and stored in the locked file cabinet in her home office area. The notes recorded would be drafted separately from transcriptions of participants' perspectives about the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the researcher participated in the local non-denominational congregation through weekly worship services, including Communion, prayer, choir, and music ministry team. The researcher's biases are placed on the value of God's word and infallibility and gathering to the fellowship of the community of believers based on the canonized Bible (Hebrews 10:25, 35- 39). The activity used to bracket out the researcher's knowledge and interaction with the study's phenomenon – the salvation testimony – throughout the research process created a viable audit trail that created the research's validity (Vagle, 2019, pp. 14-15).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations ensured that the researcher and participants were safe and compliant with institutional and organizational standards throughout the research study. Therefore, the first objective for the researcher was to receive consent from the institution's review board. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is an oversight committee that reviews the researcher's preparedness to ensure participants are not harmed emotionally, socially, or

financially (if applicable to study parameters). Each participant was at least 30 years old. The study did not include minors. The IRB application authorized the planning, execution, and reporting processes outlined by the researcher's design methodologies.

The consent form was another ethical consideration utilized at the onset of the study. The consent form was sent and signed electronically to the full scope of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, opt-out option, location, meeting times and places, and reporting process at the end of the study (Appendix B). The consent document justified the study's ethical question about transparency. The electronic consent document included the researcher's email and contact number on the form and was emailed to each participant before the start of the study. If a participant decided to opt out of the study, he or she would have been able to contact the researcher to make the change, and their status would have taken effect immediately with no punitive outcomes. The consent and consent change would be documented and filed with each participant's file – electronic and hardcopy.

The researcher purchased a file cabinet with a locking mechanism from the local office supply store for hard copies of data recorded from the interview, documents received, and audio as a safety measure to protect participants' identities. Also, portable hard-drive devices were purchased at the local office supply store to protect the participants' identifiable information. Electronic and hard copy data are stored in the locking file cabinet to safeguard participants' personally identifiable information for five years following the study. Finally, the researcher downloaded the data analysis software QDA Miner Lite to assist the researcher with coding and sorting data. The strategy added another element of showing the study's reliability and validity (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Myers, 2020a).

An ethical consideration for the researcher was locating a gatekeeper with access to information about potential participants to help recruit African-American converts within the Protestant faith as a baseline criterion. The researcher disclosed the purpose of the study in written format and orally to ensure participation is voluntary. Research participants – male and female – were thirty years old and older and professed to be Christian converts for at least ten years, as the consent form prescribed. The research did not include minors. The rationale for the participants' criteria is to study the salvation testimony from the perspective of converts who professed to be Christians for more than ten years. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to safeguard their privacy. The researcher needed to represent participants and the institution safely and appropriately; therefore, clarifying the study's processes and expediently sharing results was critical throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The salvation testimony is wrapped in the ethereal realm of humanity's conscience. From a biblical worldview, the canonized Scripture shows the eternal Godhead initiating fellowship with his creation – humanity and all living things (Genesis 1-2; John 1:1). The researcher collected the cognitive and emotive data of the participant's salvation testimony articulated from memory and within the social context of their lives.

Collection Methods

The data collection options are diverse and vast. Craig et al. (2021) and Djamba and Neuman (2002) explained that diverse modalities in the data collection provide vivid descriptions that illuminate verbal and non-verbal cues, emotions, and behaviors of participants and the researcher that are a part of the phenomenon being studied. The researcher used a semi-structured interview that assisted her with building a complete picture of the lived experience. A

semi-structured interview and conversation analysis approach constructed the data collection and analysis of study participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research planned to conduct virtual one-on-one interviews with each participant. First, initial contact was made via email with each participant to obtain consent. Second, the researcher scheduled a 45-minute one-on-one videoconferencing interview session with each participant using the approved interview protocol. Finally, a second 30-minute one-on-one videoconferencing interview session would be scheduled to clarify or amend responses and if the request was received within five days following the initial interview. The semi-structured interview provided the researcher and participant with opportunities to build rapport and understand their unique perspective on the phenomena.

Instruments and Protocols

Instruments used to understand the salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith provide transparency and guides for the researcher and participants in the study. The consent form and interview protocol address ethical considerations (e.g., the safety of participants and interview questions surrounding the phenomenon studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher's role as the primary instrument in a phenomenological research design is paramount because of the use of documenting reflective commentary to be transparent and ethical in the research processes. The researcher collected data using an interview protocol (see Appendix C), a researcher reflection journal document, and a document and item tracking log (see Appendix D) that balanced the study's progress.

Interview

Interviews include extensive dialogue between a researcher and study participants to understand a phenomenon within their lived experiences. In phenomenological research, the in-

depth interview is critical for building rapport to understand each participant's perspective and impressions of the phenomenon being studied. Interviews are the principal method of producing quality qualitative data for the phenomenological research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Interviews give "a voice" to a subjective experience by an individual in their own words and emotions. For example, Fisher (2020), Lee (2008), and Myers (2020) conducted semi-structured interviews to intentionally foster rich dialogue between African-American females and males who shared a lived experience in a spiritual and natural context. In the phenomenological research design, subjectivity and reflection are valued. In addition, the semi-structured interview allows researchers to consider theoretical concepts and present open-ended questions to allow flexibility and comfort in discussing the phenomenon's sensitive nature (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Gubrium et al., 2012; Wengraf, 2001).

The study's open-ended research questions assisted the researcher in understanding how to define the phenomenon being studied personally and reflectively. The semi-structured interviews were not rigid, allowing study participants flexibility to articulate their salvation testimony in the vernacular, tone, and body language that embodies their cultural influences and cognitive reasoning.

The interview protocol's open-ended questions were drafted to ensure that participants' perspectives evolved during the 45-minute one-on-one interview between the researcher and the participant. The goal was to capture individuals' perspectives and reflections about their lived experience on the salvation testimony – the phenomenon being studied. Each research question asked for a personal response about the salvation testimony related to identity and connections to other Christian adherents. The researcher was allowed to ask each participant probing questions

to enhance the flexibility and depth of his or her response to interview questions. The researcher was in the complete participant role to "establish greater rapport with the people being observed." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 167). The study's open-ended research questions shaped the understanding of defining the phenomenon being studied personally and reflectively.

Research Instruments

The interview protocol was another essential instrument used for the research study. The protocol was necessary because it guided the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee through the data collection process. The document includes the following information needed to conduct the interview: (a) a brief description of the interview, (b) interview iteration, (c) interview start time, (d) interview end time, (e) interview platform, (f) interviewer name, (g) interviewee name, (h) assigned pseudonym, (i) document tag and number, (j) interviewee email address, (k) interview questions, and (l) closing remarks (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 191). The instrument's role in the research study is to collect detailed descriptions of the phenomenon from participants and, in their words, to reflect an accurate picture of their experience.

Participants needed to provide consent electronically to proceed with a 45-minute one-on-one interview. Next, a 45-minute videoconferencing interview on Zoom was arranged to meet one-on-one with the participants. The interview discussions centered on introductions, a review of the consent form for voluntary participation in the study, and requests for time to clarify questions about the specific questions discussed during the interview. The interview protocol (Appendix C) was used at each meeting to record prevalent data such as date, time, location, and questions. The tool kept each interview on track to answer the study's questions that describe their salvation testimony as African-American converts to the Protestant faith.

Research Procedures

The researcher drafted the consent form and the interview protocol for approval from the IRB (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The consent form included pertinent information such as the identification of the researcher, the sponsoring institution, the purpose of the study, benefits for participating, the confidentiality to participate, assurance that participants can withdraw from the study at any time, and the researcher's contact information. The PDF version of the consent form was sent via email to a participant for signature, either electronically or hand-written. Next, the researcher requested the signed consent form returned electronically within five calendar days. Creswell and Poth (2018) were examined to assist with the construction of the study's interview protocol, like the administrative data (e.g., date and time) and the purpose of the interview (p. 167). The protocol was provided at least three days before the one-on-one interview via email so the interviewee could ask for clarity about the proposed interview questions and the study.

The 45-minute one-on-one interview between the researcher and the participant is scheduled via email and occurs virtually on the arranged date and time between parties. The researcher provides the participant with a copy of the transcript for review within seven days to verify the dialogue's accuracy. The participant has five days to respond with corrections or request a second 30-minute one-on-one interview to clarify or amend responses from the first interview. If the researcher did not receive a response within five days following the initial interview, all responses were considered valid and reported in the research findings. Additionally, if the interviewee's salvation testimony did not align with the intent or requirements of the study, such as a salvation testimony based on Scripture, the researcher that data would be reported but not be used in the research results.

The researcher's reflection journal is an original document used to capture the researcher's reflections expediently and accurately throughout the study. These notes and observations provided context for the researchers' reflection and a bracketing approach. The journal was used a day before each one-on-one interview with participants and immediately after the second one (if necessary). The researcher's reflection journal was not provided to the interviewee; however, it became a part of the researcher's reflective audit trail items. The document and item tracking log (Appendix D) is an original spreadsheet constructed by the researcher. The spreadsheet included a tag number, an entry date, the document/item description, and additional comments (e.g., the date of the document or item sent or received). The construction of a consent form, an interview protocol, a researcher reflection journal, and an audit trail ensures that the study is ethical and safe for the researcher and participants.

The initial step in the research study was to receive IRB approval to conduct the study. Once approval was granted to begin the study, electronic files were created to document memos for bracketing the researcher's perspectives for an audit trail. The manual and electronic memos were dated and retained throughout the research process. Each participant's manual and electronic files were created for interview transcriptions. Manual and electronic notes or memos were secured in a locked drawer and stored on a removable thumb drive marked "researcher's memos." In addition, manual and electronic transcripts from each participant's interview were stored on a different removable thumb drive device marked as participants' interview. The data collected from the interview and notes were used for data analysis in developing codes for emerging categories and themes on the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith.

The researcher's first objective was to start the search for the study. The initial solicitation began through convenience and snowball sampling strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). Next, the researcher established inclusion boundaries for the population. Population inclusion criteria were listed as follows: (1) female and male participants, (2) ages 30 and up, and (3) express the nature of a salvation testimony concerning the spiritual identity and connection to other Christians in the Protestant faith that is drawn from the canonized Bible's gospel message of grace by faith through Jesus Christ, Son of God (Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:1-9). Boundaries for exclusion from the sample size are (1) African American and (2) Christian or Protestant convert. The researcher aimed to recruit 8 to 12 participants, keeping with the proposed phenomenological sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 76-159).

The researcher collected data online to save time and cost for the study. Each interview occurred via Zoom when the participant and researcher established an acceptable time. The researcher gains permission to contact for screening to participate in the study via email or text (e.g., phone, email, or a videoconferencing platform). The review of consent to participate indicates the purpose of the study, volunteer participation, and permission to record interview sessions via the pre-selected videoconferencing platform (e.g., Zoom).

The researcher received the signed consent electronically from each study participant. The consent clarifies that participation in the study is voluntary, and participants can withdraw without punitive repercussions. Also, no monetary value is associated with participation and the legal signature and date on the document (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 155). The researcher abided by association requirements (e.g., American Psychological Association (APA), IRB, and all federal, state, and local guidelines to protect the welfare and data collected and analyzed throughout the study. Other researchers insist that novice and experienced research studies

adhere to ethical and moral standards to ensure that research is valid, reliable, and trustworthy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Salmons, 2016). Finally, safety measures of masking names were used for confidentiality by implementing "aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places, to protect the identities of participants." (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 95).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves ordering, coding, and interpreting data simultaneously to develop a detailed composite description of the studied phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) determined that the analysis process flows "in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach." (p. 185). First, the researcher needed to organize and review interview texts and notes by the researcher, documents, and other audiovisual data. Next, sentences and phrases were coded on participants' transcripts. The categories and themes were developed using participants' transcripts. Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify three categories of surprising codes that emerge from participant statements to give the researcher flexibility to understand the phenomenon being studied. Also, Moustakas (1994) explains that a researcher's focus was to highlight significant statements, cluster meanings, and develop themes that contribute to the overall description or essence of the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith (pp. 118-119). Data analysis for Transcendental phenomenology requires researchers to support themes and the phenomenon's essence with what participants experience – textural descriptions – and how they experienced the phenomenon – structural descriptions in their realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78).

The researcher needed to commit time and effort to engage in the analysis process that is recurring and detailed to develop exceptional scholarly work. Conversation analysis,

Transcendental phenomenology coding strategy, and use of a qualitative computer-assisted program aided the researcher in the analysis phase of the study. These strategies were frameworks that guided the researcher in both the qualitative study's data collection and analysis phases.

Analysis Methods

The researcher implemented a Conversation Analysis strategy to transcribe and evaluate participants' text for understanding. Conversation Analysis is a highly interactive approach to transcribing data from recordings, including verbal and non-verbal cues in conversations and relationships taking turns (Given, 2008; Schegloff, 2007; Toerien, 2014). The researcher selected this analysis approach for the phenomenological study because the emphasis on recording interviews gave the researcher optimal space to transcribe relevant data verbatim and recognize non-verbal cues to understand participants' perspectives. Furthermore, Toerien (2014) recommended computer-assisted programs for data management to assist with his complex analysis strategy.

Another data analysis strategy was developing codes or categories for statements, phrases, words, documents, and audiovisuals to help organize and winnow data for the research study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) provide an eight-step outline to lead researchers through various iterations of compiling, reviewing, and assigning codes throughout the research process (pp. 197-198). For example, the researcher used Moustakas' Transcendental coding of statements and Conversational for data analysis in the study on the salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith.

The researcher implemented Moustaka's coding process. Steps in the process include organizing data to "highlight 'significant statements' (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79) to build

structural descriptions which lead to themes – meaning clusters – which in turn establish the *essence* [emphasis added] of the phenomenon that all participants in the study commonly experience. The researcher choose this analysis approach because it is the signature coding and analysis process for Transcendental phenomenology.

The final step in data analysis was the activity of developing tables, diagrams, or figures to represent data. The researcher developed manual data using a "think display" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 197) with preliminary sketches with various shapes and relationship connectors (e.g., lines or dashed lines). During the data analysis phase, these preliminary sketches and table formatting were discussed with the researcher's dissertation committee's supervisor. Also, the researcher considered purchasing a computer-assisted program used for qualitative studies (e.g., QDA Miner) because of the ability to upload handwritten data or develop computerized charts to represent the study's data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is critical in academia and field research studies that apply quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method designs because it shows commitment to quality and restraint in presenting inaccurate research results. Researchers must present a genuine effort to show valid and reliable research throughout the study to ensure trustworthiness. Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that "epoche or bracketing" (p. 78) is relevant to the research methodology to allow a *fresh* [emphasis added] understanding of the phenomena to occur naturally and without preconceived notions.

Credibility

Credibility builds trust, rapport, and confidence in a research study. Credibility is an explicit discussion of the researcher's experiences and foreknowledge about the phenomenon

being studied through reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183). The strategy to bracket out the values, biases, gender, and history related to interacting with the phenomenon of a salvation testimony indicates reflexivity in the research. Additionally, the researcher used member checking to describe participants' realities accurately. Member checking involves "taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). Finally, triangulation is implemented in the study to show multiple sources used to generate quality descriptions of activities surrounding the study's processes and procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). Reflexivity, member checking, and triangulation are strategies to validate the research's credibility and build rapport with its participants.

Dependability

Dependability deals with the idea that the original research can be validated. The study's themes and descriptions of the phenomenon's essence require thorough documentation of the researcher's voice, participants' perspectives, and details about procedures that the target audience or readers understand. Validity strategies for the research are as follows: memos on the researcher's perspectives about biases and reflections, member-checking to verify participants' voice is accurately represented, and incorporating positive and negative perspectives in the final report for a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the researcher proposed that a second virtual interview would be permissible if amendments or corrections were necessary following the initial 45-minute one-on-one interview as necessary.

Confirmability

Confirmability indicates that the data collected and analyzed in the original research is viewable by external entities such as the IRB and other researchers who request access. Therefore, the researcher planned to keep all handwritten observation memos – including sticky notes – and electronic files with time and date stamps to ensure a chronological review of processes in the study. In addition to ensuring interactions are confirmable, the researcher utilized the member-checking strategy. This strategy allows the researcher's work to be verified and reviewed by those participating to ensure their voices are recorded and reported accurately. The researcher's original audit trail spreadsheet was a resource to verify the accuracy and timeliness of data collection (e.g., consent forms) and data analysis (e.g., coding notes and researcher's memos) from the beginning to the end of the research. The audit trail is appropriate because the document provided transparency and confirmability that the data collected and analyzed is actual and a reason for using specific procedures or steps. s and steps in the research process could be examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher intended to keep all data collection and analysis items in locked storage for the recommended five years for review as necessary for external review as requested to verify the confirmability of the research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 90).

Transferability

Transferability is a quality characteristic of a research study that can be useful in a discipline or context other than the original study. Fisher (2020) shows the use of exclusion and inclusion boundaries to generate opportunities for transferability in another context because of the original research study's limitations. Also, detailed descriptions and precision writing details and procedures within the study can enhance transferability (Creswell &

Poth, p. 263). The researcher continually refined steps and procedures to ensure readers and other practitioners can use data collection and analysis strategies in a different context.

The research may not be transferable in the public sector because of varying faith belief systems and denominations that inherently accompany an individual or group in public places. The study may not transfer to non-Christian religious traditions or denominations that do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the sole person who imputes salvation to converts. Also, individuals may not choose to reflect intentionally on their salvation testimony because of trauma or sad memories surrounding the testimonial.

The research's value added to the discussion surrounding the topic of conversion. Also, the value was its contribution to current literature evaluating the formation of Christian identity and church polity and connecting with other converts in an individual's preferred faith tradition. Furthermore, the research was curated to impact Christian education, focusing on witnessing aligned with the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19-20; Luke 1:1-2). Finally, the value of the research added to the literature on African-American ministry, culture, and faith traditions in the Protestant faith. The researcher's responsibility was to ensure data collection and analysis were detailed, with steps taken throughout the study for researchers to duplicate processes for transferability.

Chapter Summary

Spirituality is an ambiguous concept that influences an individual's perspective and behavioral responses. The central research focus explored the understanding of the phenomenon of a salvation testimony of African-American male and female converts in the Protestant faith. Phenomenological research aims to "describe the common meaning for several individuals of the life experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75) within participants'

cultural backgrounds. The salvation testimony involves an intentional, conscious reflection of the lived experience; this is why the phenomenological approach is an excellent fit to study the phenomenon – a salvation testimony- in the lives of African-American converts in the Protestant faith. The study's primary data collection method was a semi-structured interview with each participant. The researcher's responsibility to address ethical concerns about the nature and protection of the study's participants was to gain each one's consent. Participants' signed consent forms showed that individuals acknowledged participation voluntarily and without compensatory benefit. Semi-structured virtual interviews provide opportunities to establish rapport between the researcher and participants. The interview protocol provided structure to the data collection. Member-checking allows participants' voices to be accurately recorded and represented in the study. Conversation analysis was the method to analyze data collected to identify the phenomenon's essence for this phenomenological study. The research study aims to understand the phenomenon of salvation testimony of African American male and female Protestant converts from their perspectives and context.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African American converts in the Protestant faith and its interaction, if any, with the identity and engagement with other adherents. The study focuses on understanding the personal narrative of African-American male and female converts' salvation testimony in the context of Protestant faith traditions. The study aims to answer a total of four questions. They are as follows:

RQ 1. How is the salvation testimony described by African-American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ 2. How does reflection on the salvation testimony, if any, impact the personal identity of African-American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ. 3. What activities, if any, validated the salvation testimony of African American converts in their preferred Protestant faith tradition (e.g., New member and or Baptism courses, First Communion, or a mentoring period)?

RQ 4. What spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach Ministry, or Corporate Prayer), if any, interact with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for African American converts in the Protestant faith?

Chapter Four includes a Compilation Protocol and Measures, Data Analysis and Findings, and an evaluation of the study. The study explored the dynamics of participants' memories throughout their lives concerning the salvation journey. Introspection by the researcher and self-reflection by participants are the foundations of using the phenomenological design to explore the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis are topics included in the Compilation Protocol and Measures section. The researcher's role was to offer context about the plan to implement the research and reflections throughout the process. The data collection discusses the Interview protocol instrument that includes four research questions and ten sub-questions, and the data analysis portion provides information about the measures to formulate and safeguard the study's data.

Role of the Researcher

The study followed guidelines indicated in the research methodology and approval received from approved by IRB. The researcher was a primary instrument in the study's data collection and analysis phases. The bracketing strategy used in the research framed her reflections and interaction with the phenomenon studied, the salvation testimony.

The researcher acknowledged that she is a professing Christian with a salvation testimony in the Protestant faith. The admission of previous interaction with the phenomenon caused the researcher to postpone her reflexes and knowledge about a salvation testimony to become open to the authentic and individualized experiences of the study participants. This approach allowed a “fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination.” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). The researcher annotated her pre-field study research perspectives, pre-interview reflections, and post-reflections in their reflection journal. After completing entries, the reflection journal was safeguarded with other data collection materials in the locking file cabinet.

Data Collection

The data collection phase began with requesting participant referrals from individuals known to the researcher (Table 1, the Gatekeepers Referral matrix). The researcher provided

each gatekeeper with a copy of the IRB-approved Participation Letter (Appendix E) via text or email, depending on the gatekeeper's preferred method of communication to offer more information about the study's parameters.

Table 1
Gatekeepers' Referrals for Study Participants

Gatekeeper	Sum of Number of Referrals
Contact 5	36.84%
Contact 3	10.53%
Contact 6	10.53%
Contact 16	10.53%
Contact 4	5.26%
Contact 11	5.26%
Contact 15	5.26%
Contact 1	5.26%
Contact 13	5.26%
Contact 17	5.26%
Contact 12	0.00%
Contact 8	0.00%
Contact 7	0.00%
Contact 10	0.00%
Contact 9	0.00%
Contact 14	0.00%
Contact 2	0.00%
Grand Total	100.00%

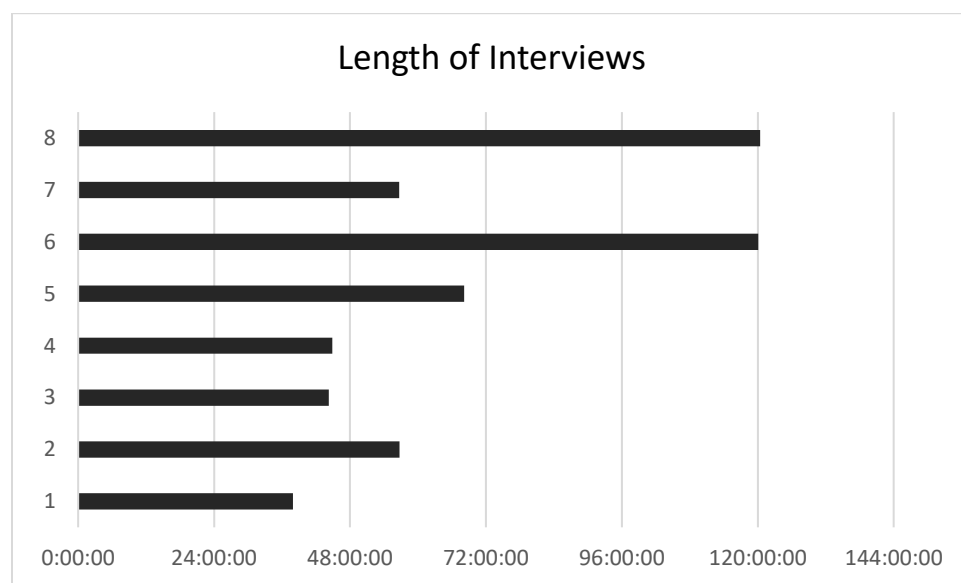
Note. The researcher requested referrals from 17 known Gatekeepers, which yielded 19 individuals in the population. The sample size of eight study participants comes from contacts 1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 15, 16, and 17.

The researcher communicated with each individual referred by a gatekeeper through school email, providing an introduction, the initial participation letter, and a consent form (Appendix B). Eight individuals in the population responded to the email and provided a signed consent form. Five individuals in the population did not respond to the initial email or follow-up

email. One individual responded but did not meet the age requirement and was excluded from the study. One individual rescinded their consent before scheduling an interview for inclusion in the study's sample group. Two individuals did not respond to follow-up emails and texts. An individual was contacted via text but was excluded due to time zone differences and study constraints. Then, one individual responded to the initial email and declined to participate for personal reasons.

A virtual video-conferencing meeting was scheduled on Zoom with each participant in the sample group at the mutually agreed-upon time (Table 2, Length of Interview with Study Participants). The meeting was scheduled for a minimum of one hour instead of 45-minute increments as designed by the Zoom platform used to conduct the interview. A follow-up email was sent to each participant with a copy of the transcript, video recording, or both, requesting consent to proceed with recorded responses to use in the study. The researcher documented each communication via email, phone, or text in the Contact and Document Log (Appendix D).

The log is an original document created by the researcher in an Excel format to allow quicker access to sort and track items accumulated for the study. Each item received a tag number that adhered to the item. Additionally, the researcher regularly documented when an item was added to the contact and document log. The tag number for the removable hard drive is indicated clearly on the device to keep the data organized. All electronic transcripts were stored on the removable hard drive and were locked in the file cabinet to secure the files.

Table 2*Length of Interviews with Study Participants*

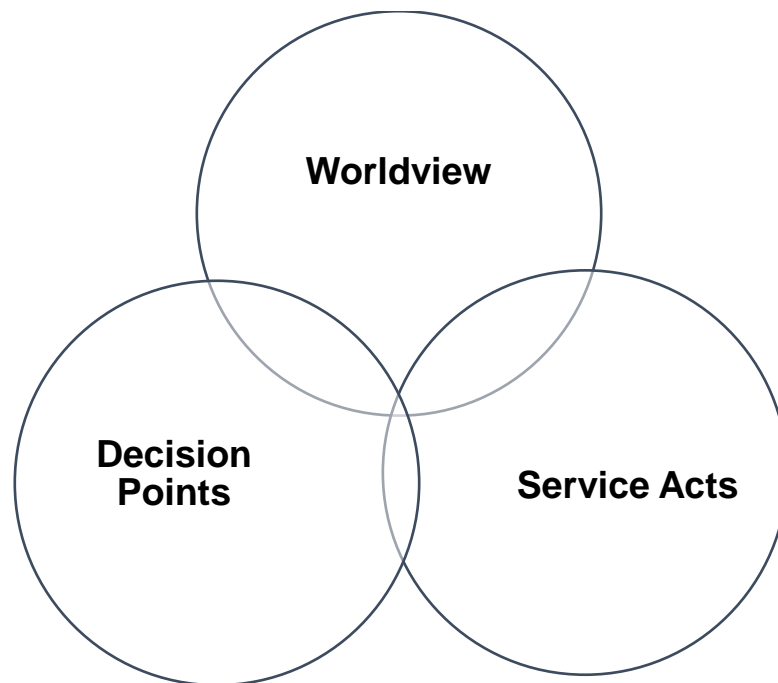
Note. The y-axis indicates the number of participants interviewed in the study, and the x-axis indicates an interview length spanning 24-minute increments. The average interview time is 68 minutes and 38 seconds.

Data Analysis

The data analysis phase took place over several iterations while storing, organizing, and compiling data into thematic categories. The steps taken to organize the data included the following: (1) identify the researcher's reflection journal, (2) create a binder to store interview notes, printed interview protocols and consent forms, and follow-up notes of dates and times regarding communication with study participants, (3) created the design of the document and tracking log (Appendix D), and (4) developed the tag and numbering system for both electronic and manual items/notes used throughout the data collection and analysis phase. All items were stored in the locking file cabinet in the designated office space after using data items.

Phase One – Manual Coding

The data analysis began with creating an electronic data analysis file on a removable hard drive. Next, the researcher retrieved each interviewee's audio and video recording made available through Zoom and stored it on the hard drive. A Word document was created for each participant from the downloaded audio recording to create an individual transcript for coding purposes. After each participant's transcript was coded, another document examined codes side-by-side (two per page). Documents showing side-by-side coding for each participant are adhered to poster boards for another iteration of refining codes. The initial analysis phase framed the image of three areas: worldview, decision points, and service acts, which are interconnections involving the internal and external dynamics that form a salvation testimony (Figure 1, Salvation Testimony Categories). These areas offered indications of spiritual regeneration and represented the continuous and simultaneous activity relating to the intentional recall and articulation of study participants' salvation testimony or salvation story.

Figure 1*The Salvation Testimony Categories****Phase Two- QDA Miner Lite Coding Program***

The researcher downloaded the QDA Lite Version (<https://provalisresearch.com>) program to assist with organizing, sorting, and analyzing data from participants' interview transcripts. These are steps taken to incorporate the software with the study:

1. The audio transcripts are uploaded to establish a project within the program.
2. The preliminary codes are added to the project for future data statement retrieval and analysis.
3. The coding of themes from the Interview Protocol (Tables 3, 4, 6, and 7) to the participant's transcript.

Demographic and Sample Data

The study's demographic data included a sample size of 8 participants. There were six females and two males. Each participant was over 30 and identified ethnically as an African

American, as determined by consenting to participate in the study. Each participant attested affiliation with one or more Protestant faith traditions or denominations. Also, each participant acknowledged that their salvation experience occurred ten years before the start of the study as designed by the study's criterion requirement.

Data Analysis and Findings

The Data Analysis and Findings section includes three parts. The first part discusses each research question and its corresponding table. Then, narratives about each interview question from participants were presented. In the final section of Data Analysis and Findings, the researcher discussed themes for each research question utilizing data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the interview protocol—the Interview Protocol (Appendix C). The protocol includes four research questions, ten interview questions, and nine sub-part questions.

Research Question 1

Research question one: “How is the salvation testimony described by African-American converts in the Protestant faith?” The question captures participants’ understanding of the biblical topic of salvation and reflections about their salvific experience in their lives (Table 3, Research Question One - Interview Protocol, Themes and Descriptions).

Table 3*Research Question One – Interview Protocol, Themes, and Descriptions*

Interview Research Questions	Preliminary Codes	Themes	Theme Description (combined)
One: Which Christian denomination are you affiliated with (if any)?	Raised in the Church, Jesus follower, Follower, Christian, Bible-based	Christian Raised in Church	The existence of God through religious excursion and Christian identification
Two: How do you define Salvation?	Grace, Reward, Eternal consequences, Biblical contextualization, Everlasting life, Feeling, Confessing, Believing, Lifestyle choice, Saved, Jesus' Atonement, Belong to the Body of Christ, Deliverance, Sin, Personal belief, Faith.	Grace, Faith, Believing, Biblical contextualization, Lifestyle choices	
Three: How do you describe your salvation testimony?	Generational Faith, Prophetic voice, Divine direction, Personal inquiry, Adversity, Discontentment, Talk with God, Listening to God, Trusting God, Surrender, Conviction, Desire to learn, Reading the Bible, Reality of God, Knowing, Not perfection, Heart matter, Self-awareness, Growth, Feeling.	Generational Faith, Surrender, Talking with God, Decision Points, Divine Direction, Self-Awareness, Heart matter, Personal Inquiry, Hearing from God, Encounters	
- A. Instant Changes	Desire to connect with God, Exercise spiritual gifts, friendships changed, loneliness removed, forgiveness, prayer	Lifestyle changes	
- B. Changes Overtime	Inclusive mindset, knowledge of biblical truth, lifestyle choice, more trust, moral behavior, language choices, hearing from God, Prayer life, reading the Bible more	Spiritual Formation	

Note: A discussion for interview question three, parts A and B, followed by the preceding questions.

Interview question 1

The first question posed to participants was, “Which Christian denomination are you affiliated with (if any)? The question was used to clarify that participants understood the

foundational parameters or boundaries of the study. The researcher used the Christian denomination interchangeably with the Protestant denomination to define a broad religious label.

Participant 1, “Pink Jones,” explicitly identified the Church of God in Christ as their affiliated denomination. Participant 2, Ebony Focus, also directly responded to the question of their denomination or church affiliation as Non-Denominational. Neither participant elaborated on the question any further.

Four participants identified a specific Christian denomination (e.g., Missionary Baptist Church, Holiness, and Non-Denominational); however, their responses included information about their various denomination affiliations. Participant 6, Amber Thomas, shared, “I’m affiliated with holiness. Holiness, denomination and the reason for that, because I did some study, I came from the Baptist background.” Participant 7, Golden Allen, denomination affiliation is currently Non-Denominational. She adds, “But I was raised up until. I guess when I left for college in COGIC (Church of God in Christ).” Participant 5, Teal Smith, asked if his denomination affiliation history should be shared:

I was raised in the CM Church. All the way through high school and [pause]. Into college, you know, fell away from church a little bit during those following years. When I came back into church, I came back into the Baptist. Well, I guess I have to modify that 7th Day Adventist brought me back into church, but I wasn’t in there very long ... So I ended up looking for a church and settled in a Baptist Church. Only that church became non-denominational, so that’s where I am now, you know.”

Participant 4, Almond Rose, continues with the pattern of addressing the question with specific identification of a denomination affiliation and background about exposure to other

denominations across their life. They shared, “So I so I actually go to the Baptist Church. I am Christian. Ok, So I was raised actually in the Pentecostal church.”

Finally, two participants answered the question with biblical undertones. Participant 8, Cerulean King, provides a cerebral explanation of the question about denomination affiliation. “So when it comes to denominations, I just say I’m a Christian. That’s all I say that I am. I just say I’m a Christian. I’m a follower of Christ. But if you want it to be technical. I’m Missionary Baptist Church.” Participant 4, Yellow Greene, shared, “Well, I am, but I have for a long time consider myself non-denominational. I’m word base. If the pastor or teacher preachers, speaking from the word from the Bible, then I’m in.”

Interview Question 2

The next question is, “How do you define salvation?” This question discussed the participant’s personal and theological commentary on a bedrock Christian or Protestant Faith principle. Participants referenced the Bible in part or whole. For example, Yellow Greene explains, “well, salvation means to me that I believe, and I trust, and I have faith in a greater power which to meet a greater power. Is God, God, Elohim, Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth.” Pink Jones and Golden Allen shared about Christ's atoning work that defined. Salvation is defined as a free gift from Christ: “What came out to me is Ephesians [2:8-9] for by grace or ye saved through faith. And that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God,” by Amber Thomas. Salvation is a choice when “deciding to pick Jesus as Lord,” as explained by Almond Rose. Salvation was defined as an “ultimate reward” by Cerulean King, and Teal Smith speaks of salvation in the context of deliverance and heavenly eternal life. Ebony Focus states, “The simplest definition is someone who now belongs to the body of Christ for me.”

Interview Question 3

The final interview question for the Research Question 1 section is “How do you describe your salvation testimony?” The primary function of this question is to allow participants to reflect on the salvific experience that culminates with the decision to accept the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ to redeem humanity back to God based on Romans 10:9-10. Recalling events or circumstances of a salvation testimony framed implicitly and explicitly across the participants’ interviews.

Pink Jones frames their salvation testimony regarding personal accountability to align their lifestyle after confession. She stated:

I knew about Christ before I was saved, like I knew he existed, and all of that. But I’d be truly get saved until I was 30. That I just really didn’t understand what I was confessing to, and I didn’t necessarily see the transformation until I was 30.

Other participants respond to the interview question about their salvation testimony in terms of a conviction of the heart. Golden Allen reflects by sharing, “I feel like my story is traditional in a person who grew up as a child in a COGIC faith. I feel like I gave my life to Christ at a young age because that is kind of how the environment is set.” Then, Yellow Greene remembers, “First grade, and I still feel that’s where I met the Lord I met the Spirit of God, because I feel as though in my heart.” Ebony Focus recounts, “I refused to run and fake shouting when I’m like Jesus knows my heart and soul. Now that I know better. I did accept Jesus wait at the age of eight,” following experiences of the Christian ritual of the “Moaning Bench.”

The explicit recall of the salvation testimony from participants in the study included elements of supernatural encounters and metaphoric language. “Amber Thomas describes her testimony explicitly “as the deliverance ... Delivered me in my bedroom and when he delivered

me, I went through it.” Cerulean King’s salvation testimony includes specific details about an encounter with a stranger while walking:

So we started walking. Then the spirit. And the reason why I say that is cause we wasn’t talking, but we stopped at the same time. Now I’m crying and I turn and look at her and say, what did he tell you to tell me? And she said quit running. And I said OK and that following, Sunday, I accepted my calling to preach.

The prophetic voice of a guest minister at a church service altar call is an explicit memory of Almond Rose’s salvation testimony. Teal Smith uses metaphoric depicting details of his salvation testimony, stating, “There was a point in time when I was coming back into the church that I was reading the Bible and I read that Scripture [1 John 1:1-14] opened up my head my it was almost like a a a acid chip. I mean, it’s like everything just kind of faded and changed.”

The Summary of Participants’ Changes Following a Salvific Experience. The subparts of interview question 3 were divided into two categories. Participants examined whether changes took place instantly or over some time following the memories of their salvation testimony. The researcher explained that the “change” element in the question refers to mental, physical, and spiritual changes in the individual’s life. Part A asks whether an instant change occurred following the memories of their salvation experience, and responses show that six of the eight participants claim the change was instant. On the other hand, all eight participants recall change occurring over time.

Research Question 1 Theme and Analysis

The existence of God’s Presence through Religious excursion and Christian identification is the theme for research question 1. The existence of God’s Presence is from interview questions

1 and 2. These questions delve into the participants' recollections of the salvation testimony, their identity journey from childhood to adulthood, and the impact of circumstances and individuals who marked their way. These experiences varied from one individual to the next. Their testimonies recognized both natural and supernatural encounters leading to the moment of their spiritual rebirth. The two sub-questions did not provide a firm indication that instant change or change over time following a salvific experience weighed on participants' memories and ability to communicate their salvation testimonies. Therefore, instant versus prolonged change after a salvific experience that leads to spiritual regeneration towards a converting life requires further study. In summary, The design of interview question 3 allows participants to intentionally reflect upon their salvific experience(s) through personal narrative in retrospect of Christianity and their lives.

Research Question 2

The following research question is “How does reflection on the salvation testimony impact identity for African American converts in the Protestant Faith? Research question two addresses concerns about the impact a verbal confession of faith (i.e., a salvation testimony) has on forming a Christian identity. Additionally, the question seeks to examine whether changes in identity were instant or incremental (Table 4, Research Question Two – Interview Protocol, Themes, and Descriptions).

Table 4*Research Question Two – Interview Protocol, Themes, and Descriptions*

Interview Research Questions	Preliminary Codes	Themes	Theme Description (combined)
One: How does the salvation testimony affect your identity (if any)? A. Were there changes in your identity? If so, can you describe it?	Discipleship, Witnessing to others, Self-awareness of a new identity, interpersonal behaviors, always belonging, knowing, kingdom mindset, teaching and advocating for biblical truth messaging, responsibility	Discipleship, Witnessing to others, Biblical morality, Self-awareness of a new identity	Exposure to Christian faith traditions and customs
- i: Were there changes in your identity instantly? If so, can you describe it?	Discipline, Focus on God, New identity, Language	Inward Focus	
- ii: Were there changes in your identity that took place over time? If so, can you describe it?	Growth, Maturity, Forgiveness, Attire, Commitment, Spiritual understanding	Outward focus	
Two: Did anyone influence your salvation decision?	Parent(s) or parental figures initially, religious leaders, Initial influence, role models, other adherents	Family Influencers and Religious figures	
- A. If so, who influenced your decision?	A sister, children, grandfather, grandmother, preachers, pastors, various individuals, an uncle, a father	Family Influencers and Religious figures	
Three: Do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony?	Witnessing, lifestyle choices, serving, discipleship activities, in adversity, about purpose, sermons, bible teachings	Sermons, Discipleship, Personal Growth, Witnessing	
- A. If so, how often do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony?	<i>Varied responses (inconclusive)</i>	–	
- B. When do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony?	<i>Varied responses (inconclusive)</i>	–	
- C. In what way(s) does reflection impact your salvation testimony impact your identity (if any)?	<i>Varied responses (inconclusive)</i>	–	

Note. The research question discusses the impacts of a salvation testimony and identity.

Interview Question 1

The first interview question asks, “How does the salvation testimony affect your identity (if any)? Overall, participants confidently recognized a shift in their identity that aligns with their confession of faith from an external and personal perspective. Pink Jones exclaims, “I believe it really affects the way that I treat other people. ... And because I have confessed Christ into my life. There are certain ways that I’m supposed to walk because I have claimed a new identity.” The characteristic of modesty is the impact that affected Amber Thomas’s identity, which was that her attire and language changed. For instance, she says, “My my dressing it took place over time the way I dressed. I didn’t have the, you know, the the clothing, ... but God he placed people in my life to bless me.” Additionally, Ebony Focus acknowledges that her role in advocating for others in Christian settings or services is the impact that her salvation testimony has on her identity: “I found myself on this mission to educate as many African-Americans as I can about what salvation really means, what it entails, and how it is simply involved in Romans 10 and 9.”

Almond Rose emphasized the impact on their identity from a biblical context described and noted in their language. “I know who I am now. I’m a child of the highest. I take Kingdom authority.” Furthermore, Teal Smith stated, “Well, I, you know, I look at myself as a child of God.”

Two participants confidently embrace their life’s purpose of service in ministry. “So, the testimony, I think makes me comfortable in discipleship in a variety of spaces. So I’m not really afraid to share my faith or be identified by my faith,” declares Golden Allen. Then, Cerulean King explains,

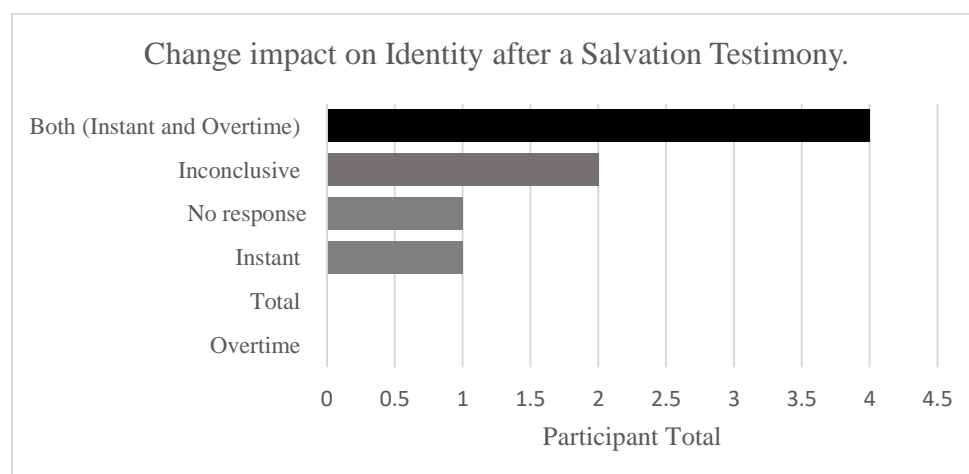
So growing up, I was always growing up [and] I was the drummer and also the youth president. So I was the one who always did the welcomes. I was the one who always had the longest speech. I was the one who always, so this is always pretty much been me.

The impact of a salvation testimony and an individual's identity was not cerebral alone. However, a personal longing to contend with the inquiry of the purpose of life brings clarity to identity in relationship to a profession of faith through a salvation testimony. Yellow Greene explains, "So I didn't grasp that [an identity in Christ] until When I was asking God, why am I here? What is this all about? So? I finally inquired to ask him, you know, who am I?"

The Summary of Participants' Identity Changes After a Salvific Experience. Parts A and B of interview question one offered insight into the participants' determination if changes in identity were instant or over some time following a salvific testimony (Table 5, the Change Impact on Identity After a Salvation Testimony). The table describes responses to the follow-up questions from interview question 1. Participants could ask for clarification or interpret the follow-up questions as they perceived them to be answered.

Table 5

Change Impact on Identity Following a Salvation Testimony



Note: The chart indicated that identity change favors Both in participants' experiences.

Interview Question 2

Next, the question posed to participants is, “Did anyone influence your salvation decision?” This question is to determine exposure to the biblical concept of salvation. The question's relevance coincides with an individual's worldview surrounding secular and spiritual ideals (Hiebert, 2008). Participants provided various responses about when and who influenced their decision to seek salvation. Notably, Cerulean King states, “I wouldn’t say influence is the right word. I would use more of role models. I seen was people preaching, and I just knew that’s what I want to do. ... So that’s why I would probably use influence right there.”

Three participants specifically recognize the maternal grandmother's influence on their salvation decision. Golden Allen emphasized, “Yes, my grandmother was. Period. That’s it. No more.” Furthermore, Amber Thomas recalls:

Yes, my mother, my mother, [sic], my *grandmother* [emphasis added], and my children. Because [God] ... called my mom home first, then my grandmother, he placed her with me. And the funny thing about it is my grandmother still had her own apartment and everything.

Ebony Rose shares, “I would say that was my grandmother, ... She embraced my salvation decision She is like you believe what you believe. [sic] And I believe it with you and I support you.”

Other family members such as a father and uncle – identified by Almond Rose, a sister – identified by Yellow Greene, a grandfather – identified by Pink Jones, and pastors, teachers, and other adherents – identified by Teal Smith – are vital figures who influence the salvation testimony of participants in the study. Discussions led the researcher and participants along their

life journey, spiritual exploration, and engagement of salvation as seen, lived, and experienced to their salvation decision.

Interview Question 3

The final interview question in Research Question 2 deals with reflection on the salvation testimony and its impact on identity. The question is, "Do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony? During discussions, reflection on the salvation testimony becomes instinctive rather than intentional. For example, "If there is a certain message that's being preached, like if they're preaching the message of salvation [sic]. You also have to go back to what Jesus did for you." As told by Pink Jones. Furthermore, Teal Smith's sentiment is that "whenever I pray, you know, I'm reflecting on that [the salvation testimony] because I'm connected to the one who drew me to him through my salvation." Then, the times of life's adversity cause introspection about one's salvation testimony. Amber Thomas proclaims, "I'll reflect on it a lot when I'm going through something, I fall back on it. When I'm dealing with something that [the salvation testimony] keeps me encouraged and knowing of how powerful God is."

On the other hand, reflection on the salvation testimony concerning identity is explicit during service to others. "If there's a child involved that their voice is heard. And and so I make that my mission if a if a child is going through salvation, they believe what they believe. I'm their advocate," says Ebony Focus. Discipleship is the forum that allows Golden Allen to reflect on their salvation testimony, citing, "Because I constantly interact with believers of different walk different stages of their walk, I have to think. How I came to me, how they're coming to be, how I can tell them how I came to be."

The Summary of the Impact of Reflection on the Salvation Testimony and Identity.

Parts A, B, and C attempt to extend the dialogue about reflection and its interactions between the salvation testimony and identity. Parts A through C aimed to discover intentionality to reflect on participants' salvation testimony in connection with identity. However, responses were inconclusive, and the research could not provide clear evidence.

Research Question 2 Theme and Analysis

The theme for Research Question 2 is exposure to Christian or Protestant Faith Traditions and Customs. The theme focused on exposure to various faith traditions. It emphasized participants' affiliated Protestant faith traditions that are detailed or broadly remembered and related to their salvation testimony. The theme highlighted the influence of specific individuals like a grandmother or uncle whose lifestyle and words framed participants' memories and behaviors to identify with Christianity. Participants' interaction with interview question one showed that identity is impacted both instantly and over time. The results for the research question two and interview questions offered insight into the discussion on the complex nature of spiritual regeneration that occurs by the divine influence of the God-head that is instant and the ongoing formation of identity through living a sanctified life as a child of God.

Research Question 3

The third research question is “ What activities, if any, validate the salvation testimony of African American converts within their preferred Protestant faith traditions (e.g., New Member and or Baptism courses, First Communion, or a mentoring period)? The question examines external activities or actions that affirm or corroborate the validity of the participant's salvation testimony by following a normative or descriptive process based on their preferred faith tradition or denomination (Martin, 2009b). Additionally, the research question focuses on determining

whether participants relied on the affirmation of others and physical evidence to validate their salvific experience from their testimony (Table 6, Research Question 3 – Interview Protocol, Themes, and Descriptions.

Table 6

Research Question Three – Interview Protocol, Themes, and Descriptions

Interview Research Questions	Preliminary Codes	Themes	Theme Description (combined)
One: What activities are assigned by the denomination to validate your salvation testimony (if any)?	Fasting and praying, Baptism, New member course, foot washing, prayer, preaching, teaching, leadership appointment, Communion, fellowship	Baptism, Communion, Bible teaching, Outreach, spiritual obedience	Service Acts
- A. If so, can you describe those activities assigned by your denomination to validate your salvation testimony?	<i>Varied responses (see list above)</i>	–	
- B. If not, did you design activities that validated your salvation testimony? ○	<i>All responded in the affirmative (see list above)</i>	–	

Note. The participants are to consider denomination influence that affirms a salvation testimony.

Interview Question 1

The interview question for this section is, “What activities are assigned by your denomination to validate your salvation testimony (if any)?” The researcher presented the participants’ responses addressing denominational influence and the external elements (e.g., individuals or physical evidence) to validate their testimony to salvation. For clarity, physical evidence refers to an object or item such as a certificate, memento, or ceremony.

The aspect of validating participants’ salvation testimony based on denomination influence varied. Participants specifically reference the normative activity of baptism as a crucial step in the process of validating their salvation testimony:

- “Well, of course, I experienced the traditional thing like getting baptized.”
- “Baptism by water.”
- “The very top of the list would be baptism.”

Other participants commented about the unique salvific experience and the influence of denominational practices in their salvation testimony narrative. Ebony Focus recalls the conflict of personal convictions and doctrinal teachings surrounding the biblical command to baptize Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 18:19). “The Bible just said Jesus went into the temple at age 12 and did not say that Mary bore his sins at age 12. [F]rom what I understood that we [sic] Jesus bore our sins when he died on the cross.” Ultimately, Ebony Focus participated in the Christian custom of baptism multiple times to fulfill personal convictions rather than doctrinal teachings alone.

The discussion surrounding denomination or doctrinal influence for validating the salvation testimony reflected in a descriptive process applies to participants’ responses. Pink Jones adds, “Really, there are no other steps. Usually after salvation. The other thing you seek is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit because you need the Holy Spirit as your God.” Cerulean King explains, “It’s not technically the denomination. But I would say it’s the church. ... Where I teach Sunday school three times a month and I preached 2 times.” Their perspective gives credence to the congregational body, allowing them to exercise their gifts – preaching, and teaching – and being a leader not as validation but as a position afforded due to their salvation testimony.

Almond Rose speaks of personal commitment to prayer to solidify their salvation testimony. “[M]y salvation is built upon a relationship with me being with God, right? And so prayer and intercession is straight communication, right?” Amber Thomas pointedly declares, “The

denomination may not have to valid [or validate]. Everybody has a different, you know interpretation of what is important in their process of change and the process of deliverance.” Their reflection upon the narrative of their salvation testimony with the exposure of multiple faith traditions rests on the embrace and practice of sharing their salvation experience to the masses over the doctrinal activities (e.g., baptism) to affirm or validate their salvation testimony. Although they participated in denominational activities such as new members class and baptism, Amber Thomas shares, “I didn’t get validated by church by denomination this was just my change moment.”

The study participants did not mention the relevance of others affirming their salvation testimony in discussing this section’s interview question. Furthermore, no value is placed on physical evidence to validate the salvation testimony. The following section presented research question four and subsequent interview questions.

Research Question 4

The final research question presented in the Interview Protocol asks, “What spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate prayer), if any, interact with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for African American converts in the Protestant Faith? The purpose of the question is to identify whether the salvation testimony interacts, prompts, or promotes an intentional engagement with spiritual activities on both a personal and communal level. The researcher listed various spiritual activities in the conversation, but the list is not exhaustive for Protestantism.

Table 7*Research Question Four – Interview Protocol, Themes, and Descriptions*

Interview Research Questions	Preliminary Codes	Final Codes	Theme
One: What spiritual practices inform your salvation testimony (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate prayer)?	Bible study, seeking indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Last Supper, worship and praise service, sermons, fellowship, Bible Reading, Sunday School, Volunteering, helping family, outreach service, corporate prayer, and small groups.	Individual growth, personal focus	Service Acts
Two: What spiritual practices influence, if any, your engagement with other adherents (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate prayer)?	Prayer, Communion, choir, Bible Study, Corporate prayer, sermons, Sunday School, Witnessing,	Church Service(s) and Fellowship opportunities, participation	
Three: Is there anything else you would like to add about your salvation testimony that might benefit you [or the study]?	A resurrected life, focus on God's word, sharing the love of God to all, peace, Jesus giving a better life, sin remedy, engagement, church size correlations, Salvation importance, state of the Church inquiry.	A biblical focus, a better lifestyle, and the state of the Church	Changes with church fellowship and Christian adherents

Note. The participants are focused on spiritual rituals or acts that undergird their salvation testimony and influence them to join and participate with other Christians.

Interview Question 1

The first interview question is, “What spiritual practices inform your salvation testimony (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate prayer)?” The question aims to have participants reflect on spiritual activity or activities they are personally involved with based on their testimony of salvation. The responses by study participants invoke the idea that active participation in spiritual activities on a personal level revolves around a “knowing” that there is communication with God

– the Trinity, and a service-representative mantle that stems from their confession of faith, also known as salvation testimony. Almond Rose explains, “Communion is big. Because every time I have Communion, I remind myself of the gift of Christ. And what he laid down for me.” Amber Thomas comments, “I love Wednesday night Bible study because that’s that’s where I receive knowledge and wisdom.”

Additionally, Yellow Greene says, “It [their salvation testimony] created a desire for me to download of or go through reading the whole Bible. ... you know I’m taking timeout throughout the whole day, and now I hear the Holy Spirit again.” Ebony Focus continues,

And now to bringing it to present day. ... It is for me is about the worship, the praise and worship, It’s about receiving the sermon, and it’s about the fellowship and corporate prayer and those activities. But it is not because it’s mandated, its because it’s something that I do because I feel empowered by doing it, not because it’s regimented.”

Other participants presented a service-representative mantle perspective about spiritual practices that informed their salvation testimony. For example, Pink Jones mentions foot washing, fasting, and praying as essential spiritual activities that inform her salvation testimony. For Golden Allen, “The serving that might be under your outreach. So kind of you know, serving in the ministry” is a spiritual activity that informs their salvation testimony. The spiritual activity of worship or singing informs Teal Smith’s salvation testimony because they shared, “I’ve sang it [*sic*] in choirs all the time. So music is an important part of Christian music is an important part of my life.” Finally, Cerulean King shared volunteerism as a spiritual activity they were involved in “every Thursday at 2:00 pm and teach Bible study to the elders at the rehabilitation” facility in their community.

Interview Question 2

The second interview question asks, “What spiritual practices, if any, your engagement with other adherents (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate prayer)?” The primary purpose of this question is to identify spiritual activities that participants refer to in a discussion of engagement as a member of Christ’s kingdom (Romans 8:12-17; 1 Peter 2:9-10) within Protestantism. The participants' responses overlapped with the previous interview questions.

Teal Smith recognized his commitment to “singing praises to God, I guess, would be what that’s called [a spiritual practice], in in fellowship with other believers.” Other participants identify traditional spiritual practices, including the following: “sermons” by Cerulean King, “Communion” by Almond Rose, and “prayer” by Pink Jones. Golden Allen adds “small groups” to this section's list of spiritual practices that prompt their engagement with other adherents.

Two participants provide the unique perspective of listening as a spiritual practice facilitating engagement with other adherents. Their responses are as follows:

- “So I have learned how to interact with other denominations, you know, be a good listener and then share with what I have learned and listen to them and then I’ll allow God’s word to do the rest.” Amber Thomas.
- “I’m constantly looking for Christian content, you know, and speakers, and I stop and listen. You know. So anything that comes across about Jesus or about the word. I’m listening.” Yellow Greene.

Then, there is the spiritual practice of love as a means of engaging with other Christian followers and all humanity. “But because of grace, because of mercy and his love and what Jesus done. There, there’s hope for every last one of us, and we owe it as his kids to reflect his DNA in

the earth, even when it's not convenient." Ebony Focus. In the end, responses by participants regarding spiritual practices and engagement with others – fellow believers or not – are broad and vary.

Interview Question 3

The last question on the Interview Protocol is, "Is there anything else you would like to add about your salvation testimony that might benefit you?" The purpose of the question is to give participants time to add or omit their responses during their interview session. Participants' responses were outside the scope of the research; therefore, the researcher did not present the data.

Research Questions 3 and 4 Theme and Analysis

The theme for both research questions, three and four, is lifestyle choices. Research question three focused on the individual and their intentionality to participate in spiritual practices that nurture their confession of faith or salvation testimony. Next, research question four guided participants in examining spiritual practices and engagement with other adherents based on their open confession of a salvific experience and salvation testimony. Participants' responses represented individual choices that create personal and interpersonal impact in their lives, faith community, and others.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The section incorporates two parts: (1) an evaluation of the phenomenological research design and (2) an evaluation of the research design's strengths and weaknesses – including research questions. The study implemented a phenomenological design for this qualitative study. The phenomenological design "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The

phenomenological design was functional due to its embedded use of reflexivity for the researcher, and its open-ended questions fostered diverse discussions and context about the salvation testimony for participants. The following section discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the research design of the study's research questions.

Research Design Strengths

A strength of the research design is that the male and female perspectives on salvation testimony were present in the research. Additionally, including multiple Protestant faith traditions adds diversity to the discussion about salvation, and the individual's testimony is a strength of the research design. Another strength of the research design is offering African-American Christian converts a platform to reflect on their faith and life journey.

Research Questions Weaknesses

Research questions two, three, and four needed revisions. The researcher examined the Interview Protocol's format and design of those questions. For Research Question Two, the third interview question would work better if drafted to initially obtain a yes or no response. Then, it depends on whether to proceed with sub-questions. Furthermore, sub-questions a and b are similar. A suggested improvement would be to remove sub-question a and rewrite question sub-question b to read as follows: "Where do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony? Also, the researcher could allow participants to request clarity and restate the question. "

Research questions three and four provided better conversational flow if combined. These questions build a discussion around the influence of a participant's preferred denomination or faith tradition and its spiritual practices – not an exhaustive list. The recommendation is to incorporate Research Question Three's interview questions with Research Question Four's

interview questions and restate the question to clarify. Also, the researcher recommended omitting the third interview question to stay within the scope of researching the study's phenomenon – a salvation testimony. Finally, the researcher did not explicitly utilize the interview protocol to request documentation like a baptismal certificate during the initial 45-minute one-on-one interview with participants. Therefore, this is a weakness and a misstep in the study because the researcher did not consider adding the request to the initial contact email for participation or on the interview protocol, which would have ensured an opportunity to collect the data that could have contributed to the context of participants' salvation testimony.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The chapter includes five sections centered on the research conclusions about the Salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith. The sections are as follows: research purpose, research questions, research conclusions, implications and applications, research limitations, and further research. The following section identifies the purpose of the research.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African-American males and females in the Protestant faith.

Research Questions

The research questions that aid the researcher in exploring study participants' personal narrative or salvation testimony relating to their salvific experience are:

RQ1. How is the salvation testimony described by African-American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ2. How does reflection on the salvation testimony, if any, impact the personal identity of African-American converts to the Protestant faith?

RQ3. What activities, if any, validate the salvation testimony of African American converts within their preferred Protestant faith tradition (e.g., New member and Baptism courses, First Communion, or a mentoring period)?

RQ4. What spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer), if any, interact

with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for African American converts in the Protestant faith?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African American males and females in the Protestant faith. Exploration of the salvation testimony of African-American converts in the Protestant faith was achieved by implementing the phenomenological design for qualitative research. Recruitment for participation in the study began following Liberty University's IRB approval.

The researcher applied the snowballing strategy to acquire the sample group for the population. The study design included open-ended questions on the Interview Protocol (Appendix C). Additionally, the researcher intentionally reflected on her interaction with the phenomenon studied – the salvation testimony – by capturing pre-interview and post-interview mental reflexes with participants in the researcher's journal. The section captures conclusions, implications, and applications revealed through the implementation of exploring the salvation testimony of African-Americans – males and females – in the Protestant faith.

Conclusions

The study aimed to explore the salvation testimony of African-American males and females in the Protestant faith. The research conclusions were derived from the semi-structured interviews with the sample group of eight participants. Each study participant evaluated their lives to determine the event(s) surrounding their salvific experience in the context of culture and Christian traditions. The researcher concluded that exposure, experience, and an individual response are components of the salvation testimony's essence.

Exposure

Exposure to the existence of God does not neglect humanity's diverse ability to interpret the existence of god(s) in the context of their worldviews and societal norms. Individuals' presuppositional lens impacts their encounter with God or god(s). Heibert (2008) provides the framework to understand worldviews that offer "mental models of deeply ingrained assumptions, generalization, or pictures and images that shape how we understand the world and how we take action (p. 29)." The researcher concluded that exposure to religious or faith customs and traditions is the foundation for understanding and receiving the biblical precept about salvation. a salvific experience.

The research study centered on the biblical construct of salvation. The researcher pointed out in previous literature that salvation is the foundational principle that embodies the new covenant fellowship with God through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, Incarnate (Bergel, 2019; Coulter, 2008; Dembele, 2001; Mdingi, 2016; Oliver, 2018). The researcher found that it was relative that exposure to the biblical construct of salvation based on the Canon creates the worldview to perceive the existence of God. Although the Protestant faith has various doctrines and practices, aligning those teachings with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is critical because the Bible declares there is no other way to salvation or being regenerated towards a redemptive life (John 14:6; Romans 8:9-10).

Proximity

The proximity of the demonstration of faith is a part of the experience in the reflection and narrative of a salvation testimony. For example, a mother, father, or grandmother's intentional exposure and witness about church and salvation are essential in the personal journey towards their salvific experience. Teal Smith recalls, "So seeing me it, it never was a draw for

me except my parents made me go and I'm glad they did because that's where I got my basic foundation in Christianity.” Amber Thomas explains, “While my grandmother was there [residing with her], God used her to show me a lot to show me how to pray.” Also, Pink Jones shares, “We [she and her grandfather] just always sat and talked about having a prayer life and how important it is to. To stay connected and not lose the faith.” Then, Cerulean King adamantly shares,

So, it's like you see other people doing what they're supposed to do. ... It's because it influenced me to say that's what I should be doing. ... So I'm always around and it's always you have to do this.

These instances indicate the impact of the proximity of demonstration of faith and exposure to Christianity and its customs in forming a salvation testimony. From a biblical perspective, Jesus presents the question of His identity to those close to His earthly ministry – his disciples (Matthew 16:13-20). They needed to accept God's witness about Jesus to solidify their testimonies to declare Jesus as the Savior to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:16-20). The researcher concluded that accepting the witness of those close to them who demonstrated their faith and knowledge about salvation was a significant reference point in the memories and articulation of participants' salvation testimony.

Response

The response is the continuation of the acceptance of the witness about salvation and church – the structural, denominational design of fellowship for Christian adherents. The researcher concluded that a paramount response is the decision point in forming a salvation testimony and inception of Christian identity. First, the researcher identified the study by Cole (1996) that favors the dialectic approach examining language's power to identify the rate and

direction of change. “The dialectic can tell us that a given structure will change, but it is still more valuable if it can be used as a predictive instrument” (Cole, 1996,p. 57). The following paragraph highlights the sample group’s responses about the decision point depicted in the language of their statements.

The reflective statements about the decision point in participants’ salvation testimony are:

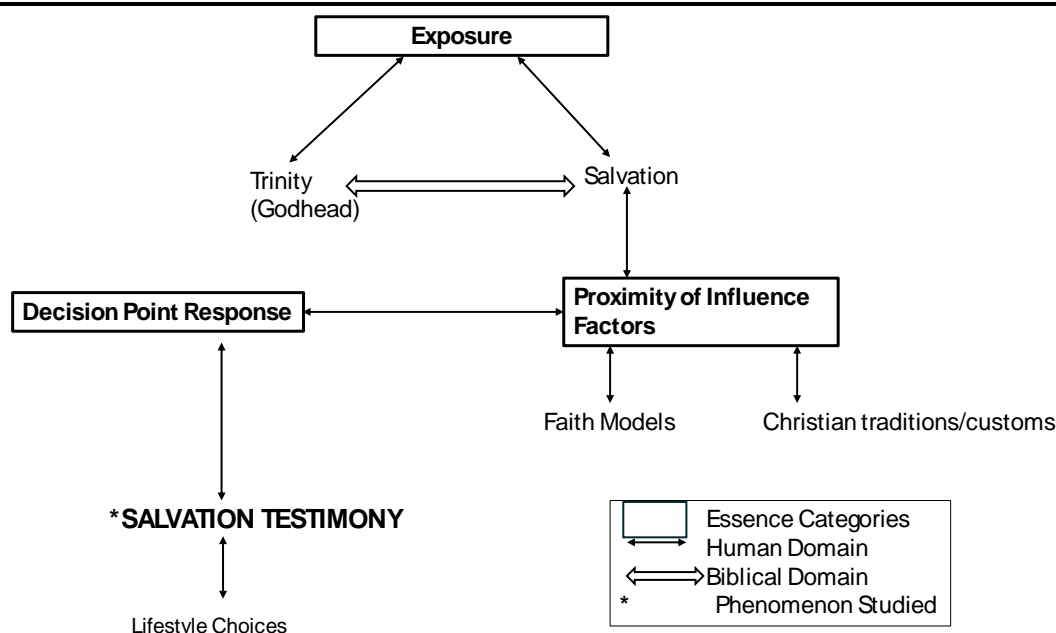
- “I think we make the decision one time. Initially, I think we initially make that decision, but I think it's a progressive decision.” (Ebony Focus).
- “But the blessing that came out of that situation was the church that she [their Aunt] took me to was the church I got saved at. And it was that in that moment, there was an alter called [call].” (Pink Jones).
- “Being able to stop and say what is my salvation story ...because there's other people you know and I and I disciple them and I'm like, no, there's a moment girl. You were out there and now you're in.” (Golden Allen).
- “That Scripture [John 1:1-14] led me to realize who we really talking about, you know, and that’s the point at which I really began my current walk.” (Teal Smith).
- “I cry like a baby because I knew at that very moment. It was over.” (Amber Thomas).

The statements above reflected a declarative position about the participant’s reality of being regenerated or experiencing a new *spiritual* [emphasis added] birth through Jesus Christ’s salvific grace described as a testimonial or salvation testimony. The researcher concluded that the salvation testimony is the incipient instrument that contributed to forming Christian identity and connectedness for African-American converts of the Protestant faith.

Lifestyle Choices. The effect of the decision point in the narrative of a salvation testimony is fortified within the change topic. The researcher reflected on the Structural-Functional Theory or Neofunctionalism (Ryan, 2005) that employs structural conformity and identifies a change that potentially places society in disequilibrium (Cole, 1966; Izadi et al., 2020). The study enacts this theory to point out the disequilibrium an individual contends within their lifestyle choices after the decision to accept salvation communicated in their salvation testimony.

For example, Yellow Greene admits, “Being grateful for the progress that I’ve made, not saying I don’t have a long way to go, ... but I’m just glad I’m back on track. And live on more for God’s will and not mine.” Pink Jones recognizes change and growth, stating, “I wanted to be connected with God because at that point, I was starting to develop into the person he wanted me to be instead of who I wanted to be.” Almond Rose emphasizes the role and responsibility of participating in the change process once acceptance of Jesus’ salvation sharing, “Then I have to then take necessary steps to make him Lord of my life.”

The researcher applied Symbolic Interactionism Theory, specifically Blumerian Symbolic Interactionism Theory (Blumer, 1969b; Low & Bowden, 2020), which recognizes the intentionality to conform to personal and societal beliefs through practice and participation in sample responses presented. The researcher concluded that lifestyle choices following a decision to accept Jesus Christ through a confession of faith or salvation testimony are dynamic and personal. The following section discusses the implications of the research on the phenomenon of salvation testimony.

Figure 2*Salvation Testimony Essence Flowchart*

Note. The figure does not indicate that the salvation testimony is a linear process; instead, it shows humanity's roles interacting with the makeup of a salvation testimony.

Implications

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African-American males and females in the Protestant faith. The study's implications are threefold. First, the study's implications are for bridging other disciplines, such as psychology, with Christian education. Yount (2010) adds, "God calls us as disciples to shape our learners – their thinking, values, and behaviors – by His power, toward His ends, through His Word." (p. xii). The focus is on being "called" to be God's disciple. This role can be the leading perspective when incorporating secular theories and other disciplines with biblical content, not as competing rivals but as a means to share Jesus' salvation that is offered freely to humanity (John 3:16; 1 John 4: 8 – 9, 14).

The second implication of the study reflected a connection between salvation testimony and discipleship. The eleven disciples were commanded to go throughout the earth to share testimonies about the gospel of Jesus (Matthew 28: 16-20). Through those salvific experiences and testimonies, others were drawn to become his disciples. The researcher concluded that the activity of disciplining is relevant and a priority both inside the physical structure of the church and in every facet of his follower's lives because "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." (New King James Version, 1979/1985, Hebrews 13:8).

The final implication of the study is the notion of servanthood following the salvific experience and articulated through reflection to form a salvation testimony. The study indicated that a salvation testimony adds motivation and accountability to participate in the kingdom of God by involvement with outreach ministry – personally or in a ministry -teaching, mentoring, or pastoring. Howell (2003) discusses servanthood as a positive characteristic of biblical leadership exhibited by the ultimate leader, Jesus. Jesus did not merely share with his followers to serve, but he performed service in humility and grace (John 13:1-17). His example implies that as Christian converts, mindfulness is needed to serve in word and deed.

Applications

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the salvation testimony of African American males and females in the Protestant faith. The applications section covers four areas: (1) the biblical construct of salvation, (2) providing opportunities to practice, (3) embracing diversity in a salvation testimony, and (4) honoring the holistic design of the salvation testimony. The order of topics does not indicate a hierarchy but rather an outline for the section.

The Biblical Construct of Salvation

The biblical construct of salvation is the foundation adhered to in studying the phenomenon of a salvation testimony. Next, the researcher pointed to the biblical text between Jesus and Nicodemus: “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (New King James Version, 1985). The referenced text is incorporated to understand Jesus’ salvific work and humanity’s choice to accept and reconcile with God: The theological framework is the foundation for the researcher’s biblical worldview that guided the direction of the study. For instance, in the discussion on Trinitarian Theology, the perspective of Dunne (1984) considers salvific events in relationship to human choice to adhere to the Gospel message towards change in concert with the Holy Spirit or rejecting the Gospel message with a probable different outcome.

Study participants defined salvation as “deciding to pick Jesus as Lord.” (Almond Rose), “Jesus’s blood that cleanses and washes away the sins.” (Pink Jones), and “acknowledgment of of who I am as a man born in the earth sinful in nature. And the wages of sin being death, being lost and through the sacrifice of Christ being delivered from death into eternal life.” (Teal Smith). The necessity of applying a biblical construct of salvation ensures converts are rooted in the teachings of Jesus and the Canon to lead others to God through the salvific work of his Son, Jesus (John 14:6).

Providing Opportunities to Practice

The necessity of providing opportunities to practice or recognize the salvation experience through framing a salvation testimony is an implication revealed through the research. The Speech Acts Theory is relevant to this research exploring a salvation testimony. Briggs shared, “[t]he speech act of confession grounds the utterance of the words in the lifestyle which gives

them backing.” (p. 191). Furthermore, the study's implication, sample group comments, and the Speech Act Theory indicate it is important to give Christian converts – novice and *seasoned* [emphasis added] – opportunities to acknowledge and practice sharing their Salvation testimony in various settings. The sample group’s participation in sharing their testimony brings the reality of their confession of faith.

The researcher determined that the element of self-involvement would build upon the notion that the salvation testimony is an incipit mechanism that frames Christian identity and connections to others in the faith community. Golden Allen explains, “Because I constantly interact with believers of different walk different stages of their walk, I have to think. How I came to be, how how they’re coming to be, how I can tell them how I came to be.” Furthermore, Amber Thomas recounts the impact of sharing her Salvation testimony in the church: “I was able to share my testimony ... of what had happened. For me and and and different ones there they they received it because there was a lot of ones there who has been delivered” similar to their salvific experience.

Embrace Diversity in a Salvation Testimony

The acceptance of Salvation recalled through a Salvation testimony incorporates the underpinnings of conversion. Spiritual conversion is a complex and dynamic topic because the experience varies from person to person and the social context of the experience(s). In the research, Martin’s (2009) Synthetic Model adds to the discussion of denominational preference alongside the social science discipline to celebrate the diversity in the body of Jesus Christ. Study participants are encouraged to share their denominational associates as an interview question (What Christian denomination are you affiliated with (if any)?) The pointed question allowed both the researcher and participants to discuss normative and descriptive activities

within their stated faith traditions, such as baptism (Teal Smith), Communion (Almond Rose), Bible Study (Cerulean King and Amber Thomas), and Worship Services (Yellow Greene). The researcher would encourage the application to embrace diversity in a Salvation testimony and denominational association matters in the lives of Christian converts or adherents.

Honoring the Holistic Design of a Salvation Testimony

The heart and mind are bound together physiologically and spiritually (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:30). The Bible admonishes its readers to exercise cognitive strength and heart connections to align God-like thoughts and actions based on His guidance for a better life. The physiological connection between the mind and the heart is through the Limbic system, which includes the Amygdala, Hippocampus, and Temporal Lobes, which are associated with the brain hemisphere connected to human emotions (Ashbrook, 1996; C. Smith, 2015; Vaillant, 2013). Vaillant shows that “mystical experiences is firmly rooted in the limbic system.” (p. 592) and enhances the understanding of where and how intense emotions and memories are processed in the brain. A salvation testimony and salvific experience are mystical, spiritual experience that impacts the convert. The researcher concluded that the heart and mind are simultaneously operating together to lead the actions of an individual based on their biblical worldview. Golden Allen describes the nature of their salvation testimony as a conviction sharing, “I felt convicted that I was It’s [sic] supposed to be living a different walk of life, you know? I mean I always knew that I was not like everyone else.” Ebony Focus profoundly states, “I remember very, very vividly at the age of 8. And I was like, well, I just want my heart to get to Jesus” rather than going the outward expressions imposed by church customs and practices. The researcher suggests that it is essential to honor the holistic design of a Salvation testimony that

includes cognitive and emotive components based on sample group excerpts and theoretical literature about the Limbic System.

Biblical Application Reflections

The salvation testimony acknowledges Jesus Christ as the individual's savior; knowing him is to receive his grace. The Bible encourages his followers that "since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (New King James Version, 1979/1985, Hebrews 13:28).

Therefore, the salvation testimony is an expressed offering of gratitude to receive the unmerited favor of deliverance that extends to all who accept, confess, and believe in Jesus Christ's salvific work on the earth to redeem humanity (1 John 2:1-2). The demonstrated kindness and gentleness exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ towards others is the same kindness and gentleness necessary to show other brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God and others who are in need of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, there is no right or wrong way to express an individual's salvation testimony. The memories and articulation of the salvific experience are considered the safe place that brings comfort and joy to the believer's life. The salvation testimony celebrates new life now and throughout all eternity (John 3:16- 17).

Research Limitations

The research limitations for exploring the Salvation testimony for African American converts in the Protestant faith surround the demographics, minimum age requirement for participation, and the faith tradition. The research centers around the perspective of one ethnic group, African-Americans. The focus on one group limits the range of discussion on the Salvation testimony. Next, the minimum age requirement for participation in the study was thirty

years old. The requirement does not include perspectives of other Christian adherents below the minimum age. It is not considered a minor but has a Salvation testimony that could contribute to the research. The specificity of focusing on one faith tradition, Protestantism, limits the research on the Salvation testimony, thus limiting the voice of other Christians with a Salvation testimony.

Further Research

The researcher suggests other areas of further research on the Salvation testimony. Future research could use different demographics regarding ethnicity (e.g., Multiracial, African, or Caucasian). Additionally, the research could be applied to one or more polity structures (e.g., Congregationalist). Another option is applying the narration of a salvation testimony with neuroscience field research related to the Limbic System. Also, a suggestion for further research is to conduct a comparative study among various age groups in the Protestant faith.

Leadership and Culture

Culture matters in business spiritual arenas, and equipped leaders can navigate its intricacies. Livermore (2015) recommends that leaders develop four capabilities to increase cultural intelligence (CQ) and productivity to function efficiently in a culturally diverse business environment. The four capabilities, CQ Action, CQ Drive, CQ Strategy, and CQ Knowledge, are not static but dynamic and evolutionary. This intelligence "allows you to develop and apply your interpersonal and problem-solving skills when working in culturally diverse situations." (p. 34). Therefore, it is essential to create adaptive behavior for every encounter, from a genuine place of personal development and success to a specific objective.

In the spiritual arena, CQ remains relevant in leadership. In the book "Great Leader Great Teacher: Recovering the Biblical Vision for Leadership" (Bredfeldt, 2006), the prompt is to remain consistent with sharing the infallible word of God and leading with Christ-like intentions that bring honor to God. Bredfeldt considered being culturally aware to achieve the mission to minister and develop God's people. He stated, "Churches have their own personality [cultural influence]... By understanding a church's spiritual style, the leader-teacher can first match their leadership style to the church and then, over time, guide the church in innovative directions." (pp. 151-152). This mindfulness shows the leader is self and emotionally aware to lead with humility and grace.

The salvation testimony is a personal reflection anchored in the heart, shaping an individual's reality. The Scripture advises readers to "Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life." (AMP version, 1954/1987, Proverbs 4:23). The instruction admonishes an individual to be self-aware and emotionally attuned. The researcher recommends that the guidance applies to the Christian leader designated to labor in the kingdom of God, serving a culturally diverse community of believers. The assignment to share the gospel of Christ that leads to the regenerated life in him is delicate and strategic, as God foreknew.

The theological view of Jesus' deity and human form is the nature of his hypostatic union, establishing his omnipotence and power of grace in the believer's life by the Holy Spirit (Davis, 2017; Nutt, 2018). Furthermore, the Bible, being the inspired truth from God, indicates his fellowship with Jesus that transcends time and space (John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). In the infinite wisdom of Jesus, he was careful and intentional in preparing and positioning culturally aware leaders to fulfill his command through his disciples and followers

who shared their testimonies or salvation testimonies with their communities (Matthew 28:18-20). For instance, the apostles' direction was to testify about Jesus to the Jewish community at the appointed time, and Paul declared his commission extended to the Gentile community (Matthew 10:5-6; Galatians 1:15-16). Finally, the divine encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman whose witness or salvation testimony transformed her community (John 4:39-42).

The study of the phenomenon of the salvation testimony examines the reality of being born-again into the identity of being known as a child of God in his kingdom on earth and heaven (1 John 3:2; 1 Peter 2:9-10). The salvation testimony is a personal experience articulated and wrapped in the memories of their cultural context that ignites a relationship with the God-head and other Christian believers in the faith community. Ultimately, nestled in a salvation testimony is to receive and share hope for today and tomorrow.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Documentation

[External] IRB-FY22-23-779 - Initial: Initial - Expedited

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Fri 3/17/2023 1:01 PM

To: Jackson, Deidra (School of Divinity Instruction) <djackson78@liberty.edu>; Cook, Tenielle <tcCook47@liberty.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 17, 2023

Tenielle Cook
Deidra Jackson

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-779 The Salvation Testimony of African American Converts in the Protestant Faith: A Phenomenological Design

Dear Tenielle Cook, Deidra Jackson,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: March 17, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Title of the Project: THE SALVATION TESTIMONY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CONVERTS IN THE PROTESTANT FAITH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Principal Investigator: Tenielle Jones Cook, Researcher/ Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an African American male or female, 30 years old, affiliated with the Protestant denominations, and can articulate your salvation testimony. Also, to participate, access to the internet access is mandatory. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore African Americans' salvation story or testimony in the social context of the individual's denomination affiliation.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. First, the researcher will contact the participant via email to schedule a 45-minute one-on-one videoconferencing interview. The communication will be saved on the researcher's removable thumb drive designated only for the research study.
2. Second, the researcher will conduct the 45-minute one-on-one videoconference interview session with the participant at the scheduled time. The researcher will conduct the virtual interview in private at her home office. The participant may select their interview location. The researcher will share that the interview session's audio and video will be recorded for future use in the study.
3. Third, the researcher will provide a copy of the interview transcript to the participant following the 45-minute one-on-one videoconference interview session seven days after the session. The participant will have five days to respond with corrections or request a second 30-minute one-on-one videoconference to clarify or amend responses from the first interview.
4. If the researcher does not receive a response within five days following the initial interview, all responses will be considered valid and reported in the research findings. However, if a request is made for a second 30-minute one-on-one videoconference to clarify or amend responses from the first interview, it will be arranged within three days.

In addition, the researcher will share that the audio and video will be recorded for future use in the study.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing content to highlight the religious value in the lives of African-American Christians in the broader context of what represents this culture. The study will benefit the study on conversion, identity, and social theories for field practitioners in various disciplines.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Interview(s) will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer/in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and/or all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for [three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, and then deleted. The researcher, the researcher, and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at

Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Tenielle Jones Cook. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at _____. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Joseph Butler, at _____.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Interview Brief Description: The qualitative, semi-structured interview is used to understand the phenomenon of an individual's salvation testimony and its impact on spiritual identity and connectedness to other adherents of the Protestant faith.

Interview: (please specify with a check mark) ☐ **One** (or) ☐ **Two**

Start time of interview:

End time of interview:

Date:

Platform:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Assigned Pseudonym:

Document Tag and #:

Interviewee Email Information:

One-on-One Interview Agenda

A. Introductions

B. **Research Question One:** How is the salvation testimony described by African American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ One Interview Questions -

1. Which Christian denomination are you affiliated with (if any)?
2. How do you define salvation?
3. How do you describe your salvation testimony?
 - a. Were there any instant changes? If so, can you describe it?
 - b. Were there changes that took place over time? If so, can you describe it?

C. **Research Question Two:** How does reflection on the salvation testimony, if any, impact the personal identity of African American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ Two Interview Questions -

1. How does the salvation testimony affect your identity (if any)?
 - a. Were there changes in your identity? If so, can you describe it?
 - i. Were there changes in your identity instantly? If so, can you describe it?
 - ii. Were there changes in your identity that took place over time? If so, can you describe it?
2. Did anyone influence your salvation decision?
 - a. If so, who influenced your decision?
3. Do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony?
 - a. If so, how often do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony?
 - b. When do you find yourself reflecting on your salvation testimony?
 - c. In what way(s) does reflection impact your salvation testimony impact your identity (if any)?

- D. **Research Question Three:** What activities, if any, validate the salvation testimony of African American converts within their preferred Protestant faith tradition (e.g., New member and or Baptism courses, First Communion, or a mentoring period)?

RQ Three Interview Question -

1. What activities are assigned by your denomination to validate your salvation testimony (if any)?
 - a. If so, can you describe those activities assigned by your denomination to validate your salvation testimony?
 - b. If not, did you design activities that validated your salvation testimony?
 - i. Can you describe those activities?

- E. **Research Question Four:** What spiritual practices (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer), if any, interact with the salvation testimony and influence engagement with other adherents for African American converts in the Protestant faith?

RQ Four Interview Questions -

1. What spiritual practices inform your salvation testimony (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer)?
2. What spiritual practices influence, if any, your engagement with other adherents (e.g., Communion, Baptism, liturgical songs and readings, Sunday School, Worship Service, Outreach ministry, or Corporate Prayer)?
3. Is there anything else you would like to add about your salvation testimony that might benefit you?

- F. Closing Remarks or Comments

- G. Close the interview.

[illegible]

APPENDIX E

Study Participation Letter

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership Doctoral Program/John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as a part of the requirement for a Doctor of Education degree in Christian Leadership. The purpose of my research is to explore what determines the inception of Christian identity and connection with a convert's faith community for African American converts in the Protestant tradition, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 30 years of age or older, be an African American male or female, be affiliated with the Protestant denominations, and can articulate their salvation testimony or story that occurred ten years before the start of the study. Also, to participate, you must have access to the internet to send and receive correspondence about the study. Participants, if willing, will be asked to schedule a one-on-one videoconferencing or telephonic interview. Next, an email will be sent seven days following the interview with transcripts and notes to ensure content and perspectives are captured accurately. Finally, an email response will be requested within five days of receipt of the interview transcripts and notes to confirm the accuracy or a request for a second interview to amend the transcripts. If a response is not received within five days, the information documented will be considered valid and used for the study. It should take approximately 45 minutes to conduct the initial interview and 30 minutes to conduct a follow-up interview (if necessary). Names and other identifying information will be requested as a part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email or will be emailed to you. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, sign the consent document and return it to me prior to the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Tenielle Cook
Doctoral Student

[REDACTED]