

PRAY, PLAY AND PARTICIPATE: SPORTS MANAGEMENT IN THE WORSHIP SPACE OF SELECTED CHURCH DENOMINATION IN KABWE, ZAMBIA

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Abstract

Within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 targets is a section dedicated to sport development. The section emphasises the need to promote sports development to improve the citizenry's physical and mental health and well-being; encourage educational institutions to offer innovative courses that support the sports industry; promote social cohesion; and strengthen sports governance. Zambia's national sport policy was reviewed in 2016 to align the sport policy direction with the country's development priorities, to fully maximise the potential of sport in the national development (Sustainable Development Goals of Sports, Zambia). Although there have been massive achievements regarding incorporating sport in education and other social sector institutions, much more effort seems to remain undone at religious institutions. In this discourse, we explore the views of the body of believers from selected church denominations dotted across Kabwe Urban in Zambia, to determine how sports have been incorporated into their worship space, and reveal their perceptions of the relationship between religion and sport, and how this is related to their lives. Emerging from the study are invaluable themes such as (1) the Participation of youths in sports at Church, (2) Sports as a tool for evangelism and fellowship (3) Sports for leisure and socialisation, (4) Sports for health, and (5) The relationship between religion and sports. The findings contribute to the realisation of the SDG agenda through advocacy for the need to incorporate sports administration in church programmes.

Keywords: Religion and sports, Sports in Churches, physical exercise, mental health, Sports in Zambia.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, religion has played a pivotal role in sports activities. According to Brasch (1972), the rainmaking priests of the primitive tribes were the first team of professional players whose sole task was to join in games of chance which they believed would force nature to precipitate rain. Brasch (1972) further asserted that rules in primitive ball games were religiously observed to direct the winds, the bringers of life. The two teams represented earth and sky; as no one would dare to cheat the gods, an umpire was unnecessary (Brasch, 1972). In short, sport was perceived by a primitive man as divine and a gift of the gods. As such, for a primitive man, to play the game meant to accelerate the revival of nature and the victory of negotiation (Brasch, 1972).

Concerning traditional African society, sports and religion were one functional unit. Achebe (1980) reported the wrestling contests of the Ibo of West Africa which could not take place before the oracles of

the hills gave their consent through the priests and priestesses of the clan. According to Achebe (1980), the elders of the two communities involved in the wrestling contest visited the shrines and consulted their gods, offering sacrifices led by their priests and priestesses for blessings to ensure they won the contest. Achebe further asserted that during the contest, the drummers beat their drums like those possessed by spirits and this signified the presence of the spirits who were the determinants in the results of the contest.

This historical link between sports and religion justifies the need for religious rituals that have characterised modern sporting activities in many countries in Africa and Zambia in particular. Therefore, it is not too much of a task to expect churches to join sports team managers, coaches and referees in the administration of sporting activities at different levels.

In Zambia, the national policy on sports was reviewed in 2016 to make it responsive to the *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 targets* by aligning its direction with the country's development priorities, to maximise the potential of sport in the national development fully (*Sustainable Development Goals of Sports, Zambia*). In the authors' view, there have been immense achievements concerning incorporating sports in social sector institutions such as education, while neglecting religious institutions such as churches. In the current study, the authors explored perceptions of congregants in Kabwe urban churches on the relationship between religion and sports, and how this is related to their lives.

1.1 The Problem

The importance of sports to the life of a believer can be viewed from the holistic approach to faith where physical exercising is taken to encompass the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of an individual. Despite the much-highlighted importance of sports at societal and individual levels, the significance of its inclusion in the worship programmes among the body of believers in Kabwe, in the researchers' view, is not adequately highlighted. The knowledge of the value of sports among the congregants was not known either.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- a) To find out how sports have been incorporated into the worship space in Kabwe urban.
- b) To describe the perceptions of Christians in Kabwe urban churches about the relationship between religion and sport.
- c) To analyse the views of selected Christians in Kabwe urban, about the relationship between sports and their personal lives

1.3 Theoretical Underpinning

1.3.1 The Institutional Theory

This study is based on the Institutional Theory. One of the renowned contemporary scholars in the application of the Institutional Theory is Richard W. Scott. Highlighted by the visualisation analysis, the Institutional theory happens to be one of the mostly used theoretical frameworks. This theory analyses the organisation forms and explains the reason behind a homogeneous organisational structure of organisations operating within the same corporate field (Scott, 1987). The Institutional theory considers organisations to work within a given set of values norms, and assumptions which constitute a reasonable social behaviour. Since Institutional theory considers an organisation a subset of society, it links corporate operational practices to the standards and values of a society. The theory is widely used by researchers working in the field of sustainability to understand the relationship between socially responsible movements and institutional change (Avetisyan and Hockerts, 2017; Brammer *et al.*, 2012; Tamimi & Sebastianelli, 2017).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Religious Background of Sports

Historically, sport appears to have a background in religion. According to Obare (2000), sporting activities in the mediaeval period tended to remain part of the religious feasts and festivals until the Middle Ages in about AD 1000 to AD 1450, when sporting competitions began to be pursued regularly outside the control of religious leaders. For many centuries, sports and games were under church control because they were concerned for the body and soul. Obare (2000) observes that in early cultures, sports competitions were permitted only on holidays associated with celebrations of religious rites or festivals such as births, baptisms, confirmations, and weddings. Obare's report gives the impression that in archaic cultures, sports competitions always formed part of the sacred festivals and were indispensable as health and happiness-actuating events.

According to Hoffman (2010), in recent years, the United States has seen an influx of Christian athletes and coaches into big-time sports, as well as a heightened importance placed on sports in church programmes and at Christian schools and colleges. However, a Christian vision of sport remains merely superficial-replete with prayers before free throws and praises after touchdowns but offering little, if any, alternative vision from the secular sports culture (Hoffman, 2010).

In Zambia, religious practices such as prayers and mantras used in football are not questionable. The findings of the study conducted by Ziwa and Hachintu (2021) established a common belief among Zambians that God takes sides even in sports. The duo contends that religious influence in sports is quite visible and religious practices such as prayer, mantras and hymns always precede the matches. They cite an example where, during the 2017 Under Twenty Africa Cup of Nations Tournament, the Zambian team was identified by its religious slogan, "*Bola naLesa*" which means 'football with God'. This agreed with Kachingwe (2017) who also asserted that football in Zambia was characterised by religious beliefs. Ziwa and Hachintu (2021) gave another example when at the Under 20 World Cup in South Korea, the junior Chipolopolo (name given to Zambia's Under 20 team) team made headlines for their rituals which included praying together with the mantra being christened football with God.

2.2 Sports Ministry

Hoffman (2010) observed that the term 'sports ministry' became common in Western countries around the 19th century where sports were used to attract masses of people for organised outreach preaching events such as crusades. The origin of sports ministry can be traced back centuries earlier to when the Greeks and Romans would chariot races and partake in other gladiatorial contests (Hoffman, 2010). It is worth noting that chariot racing dates back to 680 BC (Mann and Scharff, 2020). However, a collaboration of sports and religious ministry has been tried with mixed feelings in recent days. Scholars such as Connor (2003) felt that sports were becoming popular at the expense of faith, with many viewing sports as becoming a religion in and of itself. According to him, this caused the church to be on and off in its embracement of sports. At the same time, Connor (2003) argued that sports ministry was not a problem in itself, as he believed the problem rested in the managerial skills of those trusted with the responsibility of managing such programmes.

In the mid-20th century, with the United States of America (USA) leading the way, the church started to re-engage with the world of sports, recognising the potential of impacting the world for Christ through sports outreach. This rebirth gave rise to the term 'sports ministry' (Mason 2003). Factors that led to this re-engagement include the following: church-based sports and recreation ministries, celebrity sports, people being used to attract a crowd at crusades - sports mission teams travelling from the USA to other countries, specialised sports ministries being established to reach sports people with the Gospel and outreach taking place at major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cups (McCown and Gin, 2003).

As reported by Tucker and Woodbridge (2012), Churches in South Africa followed suit during the 2010 FIFA World Cup as they strategically used this event to evangelise to various people across South Africa. Churches went to far-flung areas and provided a platform for watching World Cup matches but before the kick-off of every match they could preach to the people. The 2010 FIFA World Cup provided a unique window of opportunity for renewed engagement between the church and the world of sport in South Africa (Tucker and Woodbridge, 2012). Like in other countries, sports in Zambia have become so popular that it can attract more masses than the church does. This should motivate the church to embrace sports and further engage in sports ministry through various avenues.

2.3 The Interaction between Religion and Sports in Zambia

Scholars have written on the interaction between religion and sport. For instance, William (2014) cites two examples in this case. The first one is the case of Timothy Richard Tebow commonly known as known as ‘Tim Tebow’. Tebow is said to be one of the players who had mixed religion and sports. He is a former quarterback in the National Football League (NFL) in the United States of America (USA), who is described as a proclaimed Christian who gained notoriety with his symbolic allegiance to his faith by the customary Christian act of kneeling on the field following any score made by his team to exhibit praise, thanks, and reverence to his given belief.

We can cite Ray Lewis’s case as the second. Lewis is a former NFL linebacker, who is described as another athlete who openly expressed his devotion of faith on the field as a testimony for using God-given talents. Ziwa and Hachintu (2021) contend that Lewis went so far as to run across the field after winning the Super Bowl in 2013 with a T-shirt that displayed the Bible verse ‘Psalm 93’, which read in part: “ The Lord reigns; he is robbed in majesty”.

The point here is that God always favours a team that He views to be doing the right thing in a football match as He has done in Biblical times. For example, in the Exodus story, God took sides with the Israelites and destroyed the Egyptians by drowning them in the Red Sea. Generally, society maintains that you can only win the game through hard work and when you are physically and mentally fit although luck does sometimes creep in.

2.4 Sports for Physical and Mental Health

Eighty-two per cent (82%) of Zambia’s population is said to be below the age of 35. The government has, therefore, utilised sport so as to target this category of young people to promote their physical and mental health and well-being, as well as build social cohesion within the country (*SDGs of Sports, Zambia*).

2.5 Emotional and Spiritual wellbeing of players

The need for the emotional and spiritual well-being of players cannot be overemphasised. As much as players, coaches and team administrators need physical well-being they also need emotional and spiritual support from the churches. Therefore, churches at different levels should go beyond the puppet to sports fields by training and appointing sports chaplains. According to Lipe (2006), the term “sports chaplain” is commonly utilized to define the role and function of a lay or ordained member of the clergy who provides spiritual care for sports players. Sport chaplains seek both a wholehearted, Christ-honouring life within sport and outside of sport. Their duty is evangelism and discipleship based on the individual’s journey with Biblical application in the sports experience for faith and life (Lipe, 2006). Such spiritual care helps players attain emotional peace thereby applying themselves wholeheartedly during competitions. In the case of Zambia, such administrative arrangements can address football players’ cries and call for *Bola na Lesa*.

2.6 Health Benefits of Physical Activities

Physical activity entails bodily movement that stems from the skeletal muscles, requiring energy expenditure. Physical activity is divided into two integral parts namely; aerobic fitness and strength and

balance. It has been recommended that all individuals perform at least 150 minutes of modest physical activity or 75 minutes of intense physical activity every week (or an equal combination of these each week)(PHA, 2011).

Physical activity tends to have both short and long-term positive effect on an individual and improve overall life's quality. Engaging in exercises or physical activities enhances good and sound health and lessens the possibility of spreading a lot of diseases including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes type 2 etc. Regular physical activities also assist in reducing the probability of heart attack, managing weight better, preventing arthritis, reducing the severity of asthma, combating cancer-related fatigue, and lower blood pressure. Regular physical activity also aids in a healthier state of mind. It improves memory and brain function of persons in all age groups and reduces feelings of anxiety and depression (*ibid*). Series of researches have shown that physical activity helps depression in one or more of the following ways; it can shelve away or stop unwholesome thoughts from permeating the mind, it provides one a chance for more social contact, it improves sleep patterns and lifts one's mood.

Physical activity might also affect the levels of chemicals such as endorphins and serotonin and other stress hormones in the brain (DHA, 2019). There are three major ways by which physical activities improve health. Firstly, Use of the body systems such as skeletal, respiratory, nervous circulatory, muscular and other systems compels them to get used to physical activities. That is to say making use of the body systems during physical activities makes it very functional and in turn improves one's ability to make use of the body anytime its needed in everyday life. Secondly, the response of hormone to body movement during physical activity ameliorates psychological health. Thirdly, physical activity raises metabolism for many hours even after the physical activity session has ended. As a result, there is a reduction in the possibility of getting many diseases we suffer from. Body fat levels are also reduced during this period of increased metabolism. Ultimately, physical activity improves the quality of life, due to increased mental and physical functionalities and this in turn increases the longevity of those involved in it (Onogimesike, 2022).

2.7 Mental Health Relationship with Physical Health

Positive mental health is a set of key domains encompassing well-being and positive states of mind. It influences the onset, course, and outcomes of both physical and mental illnesses. For example, research has shown links between depression and anxiety and cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases (Kuper, Marmot & Hemingway 2002; Carson *et al.* 2002). Psychological beliefs such as optimism, personal control, and a sense of meaning are known to be protective of mental health as well as physical health. Even unrealistically optimistic beliefs about the future may be health-protective for men infected with HIV. Similarly, physical health is a positive attribute influencing both mental and physical illnesses and their outcomes. The results of a recently released New York City Community Health Survey (a telephone survey of 10,000 New Yorkers, with representation from 33 communities) reveal that poor general health is three times more common among people who report significant emotional distress. The latter experience high rates of many chronic conditions that put them at risk for early death. They may also experience high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, asthma, and diabetes. As reported by New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health), responsible for public health along with issuing birth certificates, among other responsibilities, they often engage in behaviours that lead to increased risk for health problems, including sedentary habits, binge drinking, smoking, and eating a poor diet (NYC Health, 2003).

Thus, a body of evidence highlights the value of a holistic approach to health in terms of mental and physical health and illness. The natural consequence of such correlations is that promoting positive mental health may have been as significant in terms of health globally and both physical and mental disorders (Bunker et al. 2003). These interrelationships are encompassed in holistic concepts of health. Sport should therefore be encouraged in all spheres of life, religion inclusive.

2.8 Sports for National Development

In Zambia Sport is set to play an important role in helping promote social and economic development. Recognising and speaking on the importance of sport to contribute to national sustainable development priorities, the Director of Sport in Zambia's Ministry of Youth Sport and Child Development, said with the Commonwealth's support we reviewed our national sport policy in 2016 to align our sport policy direction with the country's development priorities to fully maximise the potential of sport. She remarked:

With such a large and growing young population, we have to make sure we have the right enabling environment so sports can make a real contribution to our country's national development (SDGs of Sports, Zambia).

The nation's sports ministry has identified four priority areas to maximise the impact of sport in Zambia. These include: improving physical and mental health and well-being and promoting social cohesion; creating job opportunities for young people; encouraging educational institutions to offer innovative courses which support the sports industry; and strengthening sports governance. The Sports Director further stressed the role of sports as follows:

Sport has an important role in promoting economic diversification and job creation, enhancing Zambia's human capital and creating a supportive governance environment captured in the revised sports policy aligned to latest national development plan, Zambia's Vision 2030.

Other aspects of the position of the Zambian government on sports, as contained in the Minister's view, is a focus on reducing development inequality, mainstreaming gender issues and protecting the rights of children and people with a disability. The Government's leadership has since provided a clear strategic focus and policy direction that highlights how sport can contribute to the country. Some of such strategies have been to work in partnership with sporting organisations, the private sector and civil society to ensure there is truly maximisation of the potential for sport to promote social and economic development in Zambia (We need to show reference here).

In making this possible, the Zambian Government has been privileged to have the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat which provides technical assistance to the ministry of sports and helps develop policies and strategies to maximise the contribution of sport to national development objectives. The Commonwealth has further assisted in the much-needed expertise and human resources to assist. All this has been easily realised through aligning national sports policy to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The result has been that the sport, at the national level, has been utilised as a tool in strengthening governance, gender equality and the protection and promotion of human rights at all levels of human development. (*SDGs of Sports, Zambia*)

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The current study utilised the descriptive qualitative research design to explore the experiences and perceptions of participants on the relationship between religion and sports, and how it related to their lives. This research design enabled the researchers to describe and explain the relationship between two groups or outcomes. It was also appropriate for this study in the sense that it revealed respondents' values, interpretative schemes, mind maps, belief systems, and rules of living so that their reality could be understood (Cavana, *et al.*, 2001; Mongia, 2013). The choice of the descriptive qualitative approach was in tandem with the objectives of the present study which sought to analyse and describe the phenomena.

The study population constituted Christians drawn from Kabwe urban. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the representation of participants with diverse denominational affiliations, namely the Seventh-day Adventists, Roman Catholic, United Church of Zambia (UCZ) and New Apostolic. A

sample size of 24 participants (Six from each church denomination) was considered suitable to allow for saturation of the themes and meaningful insights.

Interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information, using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses. Data analysis was done thematically, preceded by an appropriate coding system, categorisation of data, and theme identification to uncover patterns that allowed for the deriving of meaningful insights in the data. Ethical consideration was sought by obtaining informed consent from participants, assuring confidentiality and anonymity.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from the research and discussion thereof. For ease of analysis, the flow of the presentation has been organised according to the questions from the interview guide, and emerging themes and patterns from participants' responses.

4.1 Analysis of the Participation in Research and Church Attendance

The research involved intensive interviews with 24 participants drawn from four different church denominational affiliations across Kabwe town, namely the Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist (henceforth referred to as S.D.A), Pentecost Assemblies of God and the New Apostolic Church. Of these, 11 were males and 13 were female, with ages for both categories ranging from 15 to 77 years.

Concerning their dedication to church attendance, seven out of the twenty-four participants said they were dedicated members of their respective church denomination who participated very actively in all church programmes. However, the majority (10 out of 24) of the participants maintained that while they often attended church services, they were not very active at church. The last category of 7 participants said they were passive members who rarely gathered to worship with their fellow church members.

When asked whether it was in their considered view that the church should incorporate sport activities in their worship programmes, all participants responded in the affirmative, citing many reasons in backing their views. One of the recurring themes from the interviews with participants was the participation of Christian youths in sport.

4.2 The Youths' Participation in Sports at Church

Participants observed the need for the church to appreciate the presence of the youth in the church, who according to them, constituted the majority among the church-going age groups. One participant narrated:

Because the youth category constitutes the majority among the church-going age groups in Kabwe, It is important to appreciate the efforts made by the government and some religious bodies in bringing sports activities to the church being the closest socialisation sport to them. This will keep them within the believers' community – and not leave them loose to search for leisure activities elsewhere, in the secular space (Interview with youth from Roman Catholic Church, Kabwe, May 6, 2024).

Many participants who shared views similar in context with the above perceived the availing of recreational activities closer to believers at churches as a good move that prevented the youth from looking elsewhere in secular places like bars, which environment would tempt them to engage in sin.

4.3 Sports as a Tool for Evangelism and Fellowship

Participants saw in sports, a strategy that was used to unite believers at church. "People need to associate through sport", said one male aged 51. Other participants submitted that the promotion of sports activities

in the worship space was a fellowship and evangelising strategy’ that contributed to uniting the believers who subscribed to the common belief and doctrine, which also helped in winning new souls to Christ.

These findings are consistent with the report by Tucker and Woodbridge (2012), which reveals that sport in South Africa provided platform for Churches to preach to the people using the strategy of subjecting people to watching the 2010 FIFA World Cup prior to preaching at crusades. This strategy, according to the authors, “provided a unique window of opportunity for the renewed engagement between the church and the world of sport in South Africa” (*Ibid*).

4.4 Sports for Leisure and Socialisation

The findings of the study also revealed the provision of a moment of relaxation to worshippers, as one benefit participants saw in spot at churches. Games and other recreational activities provided the community of believers with light moments for relaxation, after their exhaustive divine services. A sixty-five-year-old female participant said:

People need light moments to interact and relax with fellow church members by participating in various games right at church, away from divine services. People come to know each other through mingling as they participate in various games like soccer and nsolo [traditional chess] (Interview with an SDA woman, Kabwe, May 9, 2024).

The old lady added that if believers simply subjected to the routine of attending divine services sitting without mingling, and returning home thereafter, chances are rare that they would know each other at a personal level. Quoting the adage which says “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop”, the old lady stressed that apart from the mental value of fostering a healthy mindset, Christians also benefitted from a spiritual value derived from the fact that by keeping their minds busy with spot, they also benefitted from the ripple effect of always keeping their mind occupied. She observed that this would ultimately prevent them from the temptation of engaging in sinful activities like drugs, beer drinking and other forms of illicit behaviour, hence enabling them to grow in the fear of God.

The view from the participant above seems to speak to one of the four priority areas identified in the Zambian government’s sports ministry policy, namely “promoting social cohesion through sport” (*SDGs of Sports, Zambia*)

4.5 Sport for Health

The study revealed yet another emerging theme of ‘the need to promote sport as a health strategy’. Responding to a question on the benefits of believers participating in physical exercises, a clergy at one worshipping Centre said:

Worshippers need to keep fit by participating in physical games at churches. This in my view, is a health strategy meant to promote fitness (Interview with a New Apostolic Clergy, Kabwe, May 7, 2024).

For one to have an effective relationship with the creator, the Clergy said, good health was important, adding that Christians were supposed to embrace the culture of participating in sports activities as a normal behaviour in order to keep fit by maintaining their blood circulation.

Another participant submitted that physical exercises were necessary for a Christian because they helped in burning excess fat in the body, which was one of the common health concerns among the current generation.

These findings of the current study show some consistency with the documented results of studies done by other scholars. For instance, Geidne *et al* (2021), Morris *et al*. (1990) and Hambrecht *et al*. (2000) all seem to agree that there is a relationship between physical health and sport and the suggestion about the impacts of physical activity on certain diseases. This is also consistent with the observation by Vogel *et al*., (1997) that the continuation of the current exercise gives a lower risk of heart disease by improving flow-mediated dilation. There may be links here to the fatty protein metabolism because, as observed by scholars, the flow dilation is altered by the presence of much plasma triglycerides, in proportion to concentration (*Ibid*).

Additionally, in the literature of epidemiology, there has been a consistent result in the relationship between the level of physical activity and a reduced chance of the risk of colon cancer (Morris *et al*, 1990). However, it remains uncertain whether the mechanism is systemic (medium promotes low growth) or local (elevated coli frowning). For females who exercise regularly, there are lower chances of having breast cancer, and there is also the chance of better maintenance of good weight (Morris *et al*, 1990).

4.6 Participants' Views on the Relationship between Religion and Sports

The study further sought to get the views of participants, on whether there was a connection between religion and sports, to justify the idea of promoting sport in churches. The findings were that all, except for one participant, said there was a relationship. Reasons to justify the linking of sport to religion by participants were given, which were within the context of the view of a Bishop at one congregation, who narrated thus:

We believe God would love to have people physically fit, as they meet to worship him in spirit. Generally, physical exercises promote fitness and can prevent someone from contracting unnecessary diseases, because they activate the immune system. The community of believers is not an exception in this regard (Interview with a Bishop, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Kabwe, May 9, 2024).

In addition, the Clergy contended that physical exercise enhanced good health; and strengthened the body and the heart which is the temple of God.

Other scholarly work has suggested a link between religion and sport. As already noted in the preamble to this study, Brasch (1972) has suggested a link between religion and sport when he contends that the rainmaking priests of the primitive tribes were the first team of professional players whose sole task was to join in *games of chance* which they believed would force nature to precipitate rain. He observes that the sport was perceived by a primitive man as divine and gift of the gods, where rules in primitive ball games were religiously observed to direct the winds, the bringers of life.

Achebe (1980) is also consistent with Brasch (1972) when he observes that in traditional African society, sport and religion were one functional unit. He makes this observation about the wrestling contests of the Ibo of West Africa which could not take place before the oracles of the hills could be consulted for their consent through the priests of the clan, for the blessings to win the contest.

In the current study, the exceptional participant who held a view contrary to the rest regarded the games and any other physical excesses conducted at worship centres in the name of promoting the sport in churches, as merely secular activities, advancing her view that there was no special religious ritual in them. She likened playing soccer at Church to activities such as laundry, cooking, and so on, in which Christians engaged themselves. This divergent perspective may suggest some consistency with the view of Scholars such as Connor (2003) who posits a contrary view that the collaboration of sport and religious ministry

has become popular in recent days at the expense of faith, causing many to view sport as slowly becoming a religion in and of itself.

4.7 Theory and Findings: The Nexus

The findings of the study are in conformity with the Institutional theory that guided the study, which analyses the organisation forms, explains the reason behind their structures in a corporate arrangement. The theory depicts organisations (in our case, religious and Sports institutions) as subsets of the entire society, with their corporate operational practices mirroring the standard values of a broader society. In revealing the connection between religion and sports, participants in the current study explained the relationship between the two institutions in terms of the view that God intends his people to worship him in spirit, while being physically fit and without unnecessary diseases since the believers' participation in sports activities activated their immune system. Their view, taken from this context, reflected and appealed to the broader standard and values of the entire Kabwe society.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Premised on the Institutional theory, this discourse explored the views of believers from selected church denominations in Kabwe Urban to examine how sports had been incorporated into their worship space. The study further examined the believers' perceptions of the relationship between religion and sport, and how this was related to their lives. Our findings have shown that believers in Kabwe Urban supported the inclusion of sport in the church management, as it united believers in the same church, across churches and denominations. Sport also served as a provision of relaxation to worshippers after exhaustive divine services, preventing believers from being tempted to engage in sinful or illicit behaviour. Additionally, a healthy mind resulting from participation in sports reduces the acquisition of diseases such as cancer, among other benefits. As such, the relationship between sport and religion cannot be undermined as the two have generally continued to exist side by side from time immemorial to current times when sport is globally often accompanied not only by prayer but also different mantras in and out of the field of play. Sports management in the worship space is therefore a necessity in Kabwe Urban, Zambia and beyond.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, researchers recommend that the church should:

- a) Officially integrate sports activities in its strategic plan for all ages and genders. This will help mass participation and inclusivity. It should organise tournament and non-tournament games and provide the correct facilities for effective participation.
- b) Identify youth-specific sporting activities to align with community and school sports whose structures are already established
- c) Have a definite schedule to promote sports Health and Fitness by encouraging appropriate fitness programmes, health workshops and sports events.
- d) Create networks with various government ministries, companies, service providers, financial institutions, individuals and sport-based organisations for sponsorship, funding and knowledge exchange.

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