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THE HOLY SPIRIT
AND THE GROWTH OF THE EARLY CHURCH:
IMPLICATIONS FOR OGBOMOSO BAPTIST CONFERENCE CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

However the 21st century Church is observed to be moving at a very slow pace. This may be partly because of the assertion in certain quarters that the era of the Holy Spirit is not with us. It is therefore in this regard that this research was intended. Its main focus is to research into the activity of the Holy Spirit with emphasis on His role in church growth. The study adopted both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary sources included participants' observation by the researcher and oral interview of church members and clergies. The secondary sources include library research, vis-à-vis reading theological journals, periodicals, books, commentaries, dictionary and internet. Certain churches within Ogbomoso Baptist Conference were selected as the population of study. The study reveals that the Holy Spirit has prominent roles to play in the growth of the church. He is the principal factor or the prime mover of the noble assignment and is relevant to this work in various dimensions. As the source of spiritual power, he gives strength to the believer for evangelism, grants power for preaching, supply the needed grace to withstand persecution, enable the transformation of the believers through all the dimension of salvation, and endows the believer with charismatic gifts, which leads to the healthy growth of the church. The same Holy Spirit unifies the church in meaningful fellowship and is the source of spiritual revival and refreshing. It is the light of the aforementioned realities, the study states categorically to the fact that, the era of the Holy Spirit is still very much with us. It is, therefore, mandatory on every believer and every minister of the gospel to depend fully on Him, so as to witness tremendous and the expansion of the church. Church leaders should ensure that they operate under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Church growth is paramount in the mind of God, so the church in obeying the risen Lord must grow in accordance with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). This as explicitly explained by this paper cannot take place by human smartness but by the power of the Holy Spirit active and alive in the life of the church leaders, church planters and the church members at large.

The research in the library and interviews has revealed that church growth is not the work of an individual or individuals alone but individual(s) working in line with full leadership and control of the Holy Spirit.

We must acknowledge and appreciate the fact that when we talk of church growth, it involves majorly qualitative and quantitative growth. Qualitative growth deals with the spiritual development of the believer and the church in general while quantitative growth deals majorly the numerical increase of the church. From the sample study of some of the churches in the Ogbomoso Baptist Conference, the

churches seem to pay more attention on the quantitative growth to the detriment of the quantitative growth. A church must first grow spiritually before it can grow in number not vice versa. Most of the churches in this Conference seem not to have been totally recovered from the effect of tradition which allows the church to do church work by human standards (traditions), to the detriment of the role of the Holy Spirit. The effect of culture also has and is still playing serious role in the growth of the churches in this Conference. The culture is given an upper lift to that of the Holy Spirit. These traditional and cultural limitations have been a great hindrance to the growth of the churches in this conference as the role of the Holy Spirit is not completely allowed.

Finally, a church that is not growing is in the categories of “plateau” “decline” or “dead”. To escape this great virus which works against church growth in this conference, the churches here therefore must arise and catch up with the leading of the Holy Spirit who is the source and the power behind church growth.

RECOMMENDATION

In the light of the above discussion concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the growth of the early church and its implication to the Ogbomosho Baptist conference, the following recommendations will be very necessary or go a long way to improve upon the state of the church. There are as follows:

1. Church growth leaders and church planters should realize that the growth of a local and the universal church is not the effort or the of men but first and foremost the role and the responsibility of the Holy Spirit.
2. Church growth leaders should therefore fully and totally depend on the Holy Spirit for both the spiritual (qualitative) and the numerical (quantitative) growth of the church.

3. Church growth leaders must consciously study, practice and then teach the word of God. By so doing this the Holy Spirit will not be hindered to flow from the church leaders to the laity as they all do the work of ministry.
4. They should also live a practical and focused prayer life as they do it and allow the church to do it at individual and cooperate levels. This is because god is pleased when we spent time in prayer so that He can act to the benefits of the church. Jesus said “My house (church) shall be a house of prayer to all the nations” (Mark 11:17 RSV).
5. The church growth leaders must ensure that the unity of the church is paramount to the life of the church, for this will permit the flow of the Holy Spirit among the people of God for effective and fruitful living.
6. The leadership of the church must not allow culture to inform Biblical standards but allow the Holy Spirit to help them transform the culture as the use Biblical standards in the Yoruba context.
7. It is the paramount responsibility of the church growth leasers to educate their member’s appropriately the Person, the Works, and the Importance of the Holy Spirit in their lives, in the church, and His purpose in the world at large.