THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SOCIAL MINISTRY AS A TOOL FOR CHURCH GROWTH: CASE STUDIES OF SOME LOCAL BAPTIST CHURCHES.

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ABSTRACT

This Degree Essay "Social Ministry as a Tool for Church Growth in Local Baptist Churches" examines the effect of social ministries on the numerical growth of some Baptist Churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in Southwestern Nigeria.

The essay comprises of five chapters. Chapter one contains the introduction to the essay including the motivation for the work. This motivation comes from personal observation of the researcher of certain mainline Evangelicals and Pentecostals' involvement in social ministries and the attendant growth, which resulted.

Chapter two focuses on the biblical basis for social ministry. God is seen from the Old Testament as the Initiator of social ministry through the instrumentality of His priests and prophets. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ is seen as the Perfect Example of the One who utilizes social ministry for the propagation of His Gospel. The disciples in the early church sustained his holistic approach to ministry. This leaves a challenge to the contemporary church.

Chapter three deals with the natures of social ministry and Church growth. Social ministries can be as numerous as the given context permits. However the common ones mentioned include adult literacy, establishment of educational institutions, prison ministry and health-care programmes. Church growth must always consider both the numerical and spiritual aspects. Some types of growth include internal, expansion, extension and bridging.

Chapter four presents data analysis and discussion of the questionnaires administered to Baptist churches in three Southwestern states of Lagos, Osun and Oyo.

The last chapter, chapter five gives the summary, recommendations and conclusion for active involvement of the contemporary church especially Baptists in Social Ministry. This is in view of its great potentiality for church growth.

B. Recommendations

Motivation is vital to ministry. Serving Christ and others in love is the basic motive. Most people must be encouraged to keep at their task.[2] The greatest motivation to doing social ministry comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who in His earthly ministry showed the perfect example of ministering to the whole person. He did not only meet the spiritual needs of people but met their physical, emotional, social, economic and other needs. His requirements and demands to doing social ministry borne out of His boundless love for humanity are vividly depicted in Matthew 25:31-46, "The Judgement of the Nations" scene. In the passage, He emphasized that doing deeds of kindness to the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry and destitute were invariably done to Him.

Therefore, some of the suggestions that will be recommended to churches are simply back-ups to the ultimate demands of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are based on the field data and the library research work of this project.

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[2] Pinson Jr. The Local Church in Ministry, 35.

First, Pastors and Ministers of churches should be well informed of latest events in the field of social ministry from relevant sources. The Nigerian Baptist Convention Social Ministry Department organizes seminars, lectures and symposia, in churches, associations and conferences. Information is also disseminated through he Nigerian Baptist Magazine and through literature written by the Department. Some of them are handbooks on Adult Education, Prison Ministry and Social concern. Pastors should take advantage of these various outlets to promote social ministry in their local churches. The place of the Pastor in promoting social ministry in one local congregation cannot be over-emphasized as it obtains in all other areas of the church endeavour. If a pastor is well motivated, he can in turn motivate his church's active involvement in any particular cause.

Second, Pastors should supervise carefully and prayerfully the selection of social ministry committee. This is in order to ensure an effective and well-organized social ministry. Professionals in the congregation can be made heads of the different team – Doctors for Health Programmes, Lawyers for Prison Ministry and Nutritionists for Food and Care related programmes.

Third, Pastors should work co-operatively among each other in their various associations in order to build a formidable front for social ministries. With a united front, they can network and approach governmental institutions for aids.

Fourth, it is recommended that Pastors mobilize their congregations to give generously towards social ministry. They can do

this through Bible studies, seminars and preaching on giving. When the congregation is taught properly on the subject of giving, members will be motivated to give in obedience to the teachings of the Bible. In the same vein of sourcing for funds for social ministries, Pastors can encourage their churches to be engaged in viable business ventures that can bring profit. Business centres which deal in Computer typesetting, electronic mailing, Internet browsing, photocopying and related services can be explored. Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools can be established for the same purpose. Large-scale farming is also another viable option for profit making for the purpose of doing social ministry effectively.

Fifth, each congregation should study their context well enough to determine the kinds of social ministries that will bring about the desired results. People engaged in reaching out in the acts of social ministries must not be individuals of questionable character. They must have good report both within and outside the church. They must also have good compartments.

Sixth, congregations should desire for growth in the entire ramification of the word. Invariably this will certainly cost them time, money and energy. According to Wagner, "Church growth costs money. Yes there are some experimental church growth projects which are more economical than the average, but by and large it will continue to cost money. Obviously this money must ultimately from the church memebrs."[3] It bears repeating that social ministries gulp money.

[3] Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth, 64.

Therefore congregations should be willing to make the necessary sacrifice financially to make it succeed as a tool for church growth.

In a similar vein, congregations should be willing to take risks in making social ministry work as a tool for church growth. Like in every of life's endeavours which strives to succeed, various antagonistic challenges will show up as risks. The risks in social ministries are numerous. Two among them include failure and fraudsters. Again Wagner confirms this with the following statement, "assuming responsibility for growth involves a substantial risk – the risk of failure."[4] It is better to attempt something worth doing and fail than succeed at doing nothing. Success is never ending and failure is never final. Almost all aspects of human endeavours involve risk taking. God's people must not be afraid of taking risks.

Church members must be willing to co-operate with their leadership to make social ministry succeed. Every from of lack of co-operation must be relegated to the background. By and large, congregations should avoid and guard against sectionalism, sentiments and tribalism in carrying out social ministries. Congregations must follow in the steps of the Lord in order to do social ministry that will be pleasing and acceptable to God.

Consequently, social ministries should be done prayerfully under the leadership of the Holy Spirit who is able to guide the Pastors, officers and the entire congregation into all truth and fruitfulness expected from them.

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[4] Wagner, 47.

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, social ministries have been observed from both the biblical and contemporary points of view to aid church growth, which in essence is the focal point of this thesis. Some churches in Southwestern Nigeria have been used as case studies. Further studies can explore the impact of social ministries on churches in Northern or Eastern Nigeria. The results will give insights into the various types of social ministries that can be done and the strategies that can be employed in achieving god success. It should be noted that social ministry does not intend to usurp other church growth strategies or mechanisms but only to reinforce and complement them. God displayed His active involvement in social ministry through the activities of prophets and priests in the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated social ministry during His earthly ministry as recorded in the New Testament excellently. Acts 10:38 puts it succinctly; "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." The Early Church continued with Jesus' holistic tradition, as can be found in the letters of the disciples to believers. The Apostle James gives a great argument for social ministry as followed:

> What good is it, my brothers; if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead.

> But someone will say, "you have faith, I have deeds" Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do.[5]

The contemporary church cannot afford to do less as regard social ministry. All hands must be on deck in forging ahead and sustaining holistic ministry in its entire ramification. The Lord of the church promises to be with us even unto the end of the age as we make disciples of all nations.