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THE ROLE OF NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY MISSIONS

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ABSTRACT

"The role of NBC women in contemporary missions" is an attempt to stimulate missionary consciousness of men and women of this generation by highlighting the organisation, missionary strategy and contributions of women of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

The first chapter contains introductory materials such as motivating factor, purpose and significance of the work. Areas of possible misconceptions are cleared while research methodology as well as definitions of some key terms which recur in the essay are provided.

A review of the role of women in missions from biblical times through contemporary periods provides the basis as well as the context for NBC women participation in missions. This is done in chapter two.

Chapter three opens by placing NBC women in context of mission strategy of Nigerian Baptist Convention. Finding them relevant and strategic within the Convention, their varied missionary roles are thus examined and highlighted.

In chapter four, the implications of women involvement are examined. Drawing from their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, fresh challenges are given, not only to women but also to all who are called into the Kingdom task of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The concluding chapter, chapter five, attempts a summary of the essay. From the advantageous point of view of research carried out, recommendations are made and options offered to the various agencies through which NBC carries out her missionary objectives.

B RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of carrying out research work for this paper, a number of concerns came up which could provide new insights or improved missionary organisations and outreaches for our great Convention. Since the goal is to involve all in this all important assignment of mission, recommendations will be made directly to the Convention or her departments with the mind of better strategising for missions. Recommendations will also be made to other organisations or identifiable groups within the Convention who are directly or remotely connected with missions.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS TO NBC

¹"Woman's work for Women," The Encyclopedia of Mission 1904 ed., p.791.

² Paul O. Ebhomielen, Forty Years of NBC Missions (Benin- City: Christian Network Organisation, 1993), p.31.

a. Autonomous Status for Missions Department.

In the course of gathering materials for this essay, the writer's close interaction with the missions department affords her the opportunity of an objective assessment of some aspects of the work in the department. There is need for restructuring of the department to make room for better coordination of the missionary organs of the convention. The department should initiate and stimulate missionary consciousness from local church levels, through associational, conference to convention levels. Regular visits must be paid to mission fields by the functionaries of the department to possess up-to-date information about their goals, aspirations and problems.

To this extent the present office is grossly understaffed and inadequate to carry out the volume of work expected of a missions department of the dream of NBC. The writer therefore advocates for an autonomous status for the missions department of NBC for a more effective missionary outreach.

b. Auxiliary Status For MMU

The NBC is highly commended for her magnanimity in granting an auxiliary status to WMU in 1925. The contributions of WMU to Missions which have been highlighted is enough proof of what the Convention stands to gain by extending same privilege to the menfolk. It is about time that Boys and Men's work were given a boost. It is strongly believed that when MMU is given an auxiliary status, the missionary concerns of the NBC will be carried to greater heights.

c. Orientation for Female Missionaries.

It is acknowledged that the WMU is doing a great work in training Pastors wives serving as missionaries in Home and Foreign Mission fields. Beyond WMU work, this paper recommends a more comprehensive orientation for Pastors' wives

serving as female missionaries. This is in the areas of ministry related courses such as preaching, counselling and praying, among others. Ministry on the mission fields often times demands spontaneity and dynamism both for the Pastor and his wife. Circumstances dictate that the Pastor's wife begin to function in certain roles which are not perceivable from the view point of the streamlined and well organised local churches in urban centres. The experience of the Udoms in Akwa Ibom mission field is a good case in point where Mrs Udom inevitably finds herself standing in for her husband to carry out certain roles in some churches within the mission field.

It is therefore recommended that female Pastors with a strong bias for missions should be utilized in giving ministry orientation to female missionaries by the missions department of the NBC.

d. Educational Institutions

The NBC is called upon to establish a separate school of missions for the exclusive training of male and female missionaries. The success story of missionary agencies in Nigeria such as CAPRO faith ministries, who have a separate school of missions, is hinged on the specialized training given to missionaries. Lois Fuller underscores the benefits of an indigenous mission school, stating that his training in capro school of missions afforded him the opportunity "to see missions from the Nigerian point of view."³ Where this is unattainable at the moment, a separate department of missions should be created in our seminaries and Bible schools. A semester work, currently offered in many NBC seminaries on missions may not equip the missionary adequately with the right tools needed to handle the intricacies and complexities of the mission field.

³Lois Fuller, "The Delicate Balance," OCCUPY, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1994, p.5.

- e. Provide Vocational and Recreation Training centres for Mission Fields.

The value of vocational and recreational centres as a missionary strategy cannot be over emphasized. Such centres could provide training opportunities in the areas of typing, fashion designing, Batik, cane or basket weaving, cooking and baking, and other such skills as will enhance the economic strength of the people. Such opportunity predisposes them positively to the gospels of Jesus Christ.

Edith Vaughan, Baptist missionary in Brazil observes "we make it a point that every one who comes into one of our centres hear about Jesus".⁴ Needs vary from one mission field to the other (as was highlighted earlier in the essay) hence the peculiar needs of a given place must be carefully considered in determining what is more appropriate for each locality.

- f. Church societies should have missionary biases

It is an established fact that other groupings exist within the context of the local churches representing one interest or the other. Local churches with the NBC should be encouraged to utilize these groupings for the purposes of furthering missionary interests of the church. Due to the strong commitment members usually have for these groups borne out of a strong bond of common interest, where this is geared towards the direction of missions via the leadership, large measure of success will be achieved. Such groups who excel in missionary activities could be given recognition at the Convention-in-session.

⁴Webb Leland, How in this World (Nashville: Convention Press, 1974), p.97.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS TO WMU

a. Strengthen Missionary base of local church

The WMU has done creditably well in practical missionary endeavours on home and mission fields. However, findings reveal that this is not reflected in the mission action awareness of the average WMS member of the local Church. From a total of 105 respondents covering 10 Churches in Ogbomoso and Ibadan, just about 12 women know what mission action is all about while only about 5 claim to have participated in one, in the past.

It is therefore recommended that WMS in local Churches be encouraged and led to do mission action in Home and Foreign Mission field.

b. Utilize female Pastors and itinerant evangelists

Trained female Pastors and evangelists are helpful in WMU's outreach in home and foreign mission fields. It is noteworthy that in 1989 WMU employed "a lady field worker for 3 associations in Idoma area."⁵ More of them should be employed. These are particularly helpful when they are located through the local WMS who know those with God-given gifts. Such field workers will be particularly useful in Home mission fields in the Northern part of Nigeria where they can function as itinerant evangelist, reminiscent of Adeyoyin Adebisi.⁶ Their work may be intensified in the villages where they may likely face less confrontation.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS TO FEMALE PASTORS

a. Need for a common front.

The ordination of women places greater responsibility on

⁵Aduke Akinola, "Labourers Together" WMU and NBC (Ibadan: Abimbola Commercial Printers, 1996), p.11.

⁶Aduke Akinola, "Their Legacy: WMU of Nigeria" (Ibadan: J. O. Oloola Printers & Co., 1992), p.27.

the female called servant of God. This has the implication of the need for a more focussed ministry within the NBC. An association of female ministers is highly desirable such that matters of common interests could be addressed. With a common front for called women of God, varying gifts and ministries will be identified and channelled into relevant areas such as preaching, teaching, counselling, mission and evangelism and other related areas of the ministry.

b. Need for a more dynamic ministry

In light of the above, women should not be restricted to courses in Religious Education department only, for fear of not receiving calls as Pastors after graduation. Opportunities for Pastoral ministries of women are widening hence women who possess God-given gifts and have a definite sense of call should use such "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph.4:12).

c. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Baptist Convention is one of the foremost Christian denominations in Nigeria. She commands great respect and enjoys the privilege of having the first degree awarding theological institution in Nigeria. It is a great paradox that the level of awareness in missionary concerns is acutely low. Etim A. Udoh, the director of Mission for the Convention, lends weight to this statement as he affirms "the pathetic story is the ignorance displayed by many about mission matters of the Convention - Home and abroad."⁶

This work has attempted to contribute, in a modest way, to enlightening us about the contributions of women to missions. It has shed some light on the great potentialities

⁶Etim A. Udoh, Missions Handbook, Home and Foreign Mission Board, Nigerian Baptist Convention (n.p., n.d.), p.7.

the NBC has in her womenfolk. They are an asset of inestimable value in the hands of the NBC which can be utilized even more effectively and dynamically. They have given a challenge and encouragement to all who take the missionary mandate of God in Christ Jesus, seriously. The womenfold have demonstrated that mission is a task that must be done.

Greater potentialities are latent in the men and women of the Convention which are yet unexplored. When all these are harnessed and put into good use, the sky shall not even be a limit for the Convention. The word of God, which is the Christian mandate has been given to us "For lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).