

NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION'S PRACTICE OF ORDINATION
IN THE LIGHT OF THE SCRIPTURES

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ABSTRACT

Christians, from the beginning, have set apart ministers through prayer and the laying on of hands. The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) is no exception to this practice since her humble beginning.

The concern of this essay is to find out whether this setting-apart formula generally known as ordination as practised by the NBC is in line with scriptures. This the essay hopes would warrant its being continued or discontinued.

In this essay, chapter one is about the introduction, motivation for the work, scope and methodology. Chapter two contains the historical and biblical bases for ordination.

Chapter three is a foray into the ordination of women thereby establishing the NBC's stand on it.

Chapter four examines the practice of Ordination in the NBC and compares it with the biblical provisions while chapter five contains the conclusions and recommendations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Baptist Convention churches as well as their leadership as "people of the Book", should accept the reality that the origin of ordination is not clear in Scriptures. As believers of God through Christ Jesus, who hold the Bible supreme in decision-making on all matters, holding tenaciously to a practice that has no strong fundamental Scriptural foundation may amount to making a mockery of our claim.

Looking at Scriptures, there is no one mention of the word "ordain" except the King James translation which used the word instead of the word "appoint" which is "kathistemi" in Greek.

The word "ordain" and its other derivatives have a sense that is more than what is done in the ceremony called ordination. For every kind of appointment that was made in Scriptures, it was always God who led whosoever would choose to choose. By this, this writer believes that only God through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit empowered those who were led to choose. What this writer understands by this is that God Himself had invested in the one He wanted to choose and only led His

¹W. E. Vine, Vine's Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, (Old Tappan: Fleming's H. Revell Company, 1981), p. 67.

church to identify this new servant so that His choice would be made known to God's people.

In essence, if the NBC would continue to ordain her ministers alone, it should just be for recognizing and appreciating the gift of God on the ministers' life. It should be a forum to further encourage the ministers to continue to serve the Lord better. The rights reserved exclusively for reverends now should be extended to every trained minister of the gospel and allowed to perform what is now referred to as "the full gospel ministry".

There is the need to know that the Bible is complete and it is this complete Bible that is the word of God and this is what the baptist minister of God has been called and trained to preach. To talk of "ordination into the full gospel ministry" is out of place and confusing when the called and trained pastor has the whole of the Bible given to him. There has never been anytime that the NBC instructed the so-called unordained pastors not to preach or teach his or her congregation a particular aspect of the Bible. If unordained pastors then can preach and teach on baptism, Lord's Supper and Christian marriage, then there should be a no-holds-barred ministry for every minister.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus Christ gave the great commission to everyone without strings attached. In Acts of the Apostles, 1:8, Jesus again spelled out the enduement

and who the giver of the enduement is. He also reiterated the assignment given and even how it should be done. By virtue of the NBC practice of ordination, NBC has allowed human agendum to prevail over divine agendum. If one is therefore convinced that he or she has been called and has been trained, only unbiblical traits within and without his or her life should render his or her ministry partial.

The NBC ordination places the ordained minister in an order. It is true that NBC always denies this fact but by the definition of the word "order" it is any of the several grades of the Christian ministry, it can also refer to the "Office of a person in the Christian ministry" such as a rank, class or special group in a community or society. The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary refers to it as "things grouped according to quality, value, or natural characteristics."³ NBC ordination confers on the ordinand the legal right to join couples, to baptize and to conduct the Lord's Supper. This "accreditation to perform all functions"⁴ is only granted by ordination.

Ordination in the NBC seems to be a denial of service and duty. Whereas Jesus Christ assigned and commissioned each believer to perform a full task, all that ordination

²"order," Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, p. 634.

³"Order," Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary.

⁴James Ademola Shoremi, Interview, Yaba, Lagos: Akoka Baptist Church, 6 January 2001.

as practised in the NBC has done is to withdraw such duties from the trained minister not to talk of the ordinary believer who also ministers in a way.

Ordination, according to a Baptist theory in Walton's The Gathered Community, "is not essentially necessary to the work of the ministry. The essence of a minister lies in the consent of three wills. The will of God, the will of the people, and the will of the minister"⁵. In other words, the ordination of the minister expresses a double aspect of the minister's calling. It also expresses the intimate relationship between himself and the congregation.

Just as the origin of ordination cannot be clearly pinpointed in the Bible so also is the title that ordained ministers take for themselves has no biblical basis. The only place where the word "Reverend" is found in Psalm 111:9. It says that "He provided redemption for His people; he ordained his covenant forever - holy and awesome is his name." NIV. The KJV renders the word "awesome" as "reverend". What is clear from this passage is that the One whose name is holy and reverend is God Himself. This position, status and name should therefore not be misunderstood for man's.

The Christian faith has two aspects of its content namely the accidentals and the substantials. That Christ

⁵R. O. Walton, ed., The Gathered Community, (London: Carey Press, 1943), p. 156.

