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MISSION AND THE REALITY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS:
THE CASE OF BATONU HOME MISSION FIELD.

An Essay Presented
to the Faculty of the
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by
Joseph Ayanlola
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A. CONCLUSION

Our discussion thus far point to the fact that though the HFMB has declared the Batonu Mission Field as self-supporting, the Mission Field in terms of existing realities is far from being autonomous. A situation whereby only one or two churches, in a mission field of over 25 churches, are able to maintain their pastors cannot be said to be autonomous. The churches are small in size whereas the possibility of expansion appears restricted. There is a large, strong and perhaps intimidating muslim presence. One wonders why the over 60 years of Baptist witness has not succeeded in reaching a larger percentage of the population. The answer is found in the words of David Barrett:

One reason is that voicing pious hopes has been allowed to substitute for determined organisational and logistical investigation and action on the part of the Home and Foreign Mission Board.¹

The people are so much preoccupied with ekeing out a living and the rather damning and oppressive economic conditions today aggravate the problem. The harsh realities of life make it difficult for them to accept that which is not tied to here and now political and economic decisions. Among a people already steeped in tradition and

¹David Barrett, World Class Cities and World Evangelization (Birmingham AL: New Hope, 1986), p.35.

Islam, conversion to the christian faith on a large and appreciable scale must be highly responsive to the socio-economic realities in terms of providing better alternatives.

Again, there seemed ~~never~~ to have been a carefully defined goals and objectives for the mission enterprise. The mission efforts thus far have been more emotional response to felt needs, and the need to spread the message without adequate understanding of the peculiarities of the field as well as closely articulated strategy for attaining the set goals.

The mission-field is equally faced with some problems that require urgent attention. These are:

1. Inadequate personnel working in the mission field.
2. Lack of funds to support the existing pastors.
3. Urgent need for Batonu Indigenes to be trained in theological institutions.

From all indications, the Batonu Mission Field cannot be said to be self-sustaining yet. We think that at least a period of not less than five years could be declared as years of consolidation. During the period, conscious and deliberate efforts should be made to ensure that whatever gains might have been made before are put on sound and solid footing.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are therefore proposed to facilitate the consolation of gains at Batonu. Some of these may be of short-term benefit whereas others may have long-term effect not only for Batonu but for other mission efforts elsewhere.

(a) SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) The HFMB should solicit for the help of organisations like Women's Missionary Union (WMU), Men's Missionary Union (MMU),

Youths, as well as churches, associations and conferences to provide financial support for the pastors currently working in the mission field.

- (ii) More pastors should be recruited to take up the leadership of the churches that do not have pastors. The pastors will be expected to have the responsibility of bringing up the churches within the stipulated period of five years to sustain themselves financially and otherwise.
- (iii) There is an urgent need for the training of Batonu indigenes in NBC theological institutions so that they could return to provide leadership for the churches in the area.
- (iv) Support for voluntary mission workers especially during the Long-Vacation period.

(b) LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) Two tools effectively used as means of reaching out to the people of Batonu had been provision of schools and health services. Presently, government has taken over the operation of public schools. Also, given the existence of primary schools in virtually all villages today, there seems to be no need to deplete energy on such.

The same cannot be said however of health facilities. Throughout Batonuland today, there are only two health facilities- The Government Health Centre at Okuta and a private clinic. The nearest hospital is Baptist Hospital, Shaki.² It is suggested that the hospital establish an arm (an annexe) of the hospital at Boriya; as it presently does with a town like Ilero. Alternatively, it could operate a mobile clinic, visiting the centre at least once or twice a week. It will be a great help to nursing mothers, pregnant women and children. The clinic could provide at least primary health care services.

²Interview with Pastor Paul Bio, Kenu Baptist Church, July 4, 1996.

- (ii) Furthermore, the HFMB in co-operation with other Convention mission-oriented bodies can provide some agricultural support services like tractor-hiring, provision of improved seedlings, insecticides and expert advice. This kind of support service has two advantages: it provides opportunity for witnessing and it has the potential for helping farmers improve on their mode of farming.
- (iii) Etim Udoh laments the ignorance³ of many members of the Convention family about mission matters. Without any iota of doubt, there is the need to be more specific as to exactly what we mean by 'mission'. In most of the Convention Churches today, many people interpret whatever is done in the name of christianity as mission or evangelism. Thus if people for instance, attend an associational meeting or visit the sick at the hospital, they want to call these evangelism/mission. It is important therefore that members be made conversant with the biblical conception of mission.

Leslie Newbigin for instance, gives a concise meaning of missions as "the concern that in the places where there are no christians, there should be christians".⁴

Glasser and McGavran define it as:

carrying the gospel across cultural boundaries to those who owe no allegiance to Jesus Christ and encouraging them to accept Him as Lord and Saviour and to become responsible members of His church, working as the Holy Spirit leads at both evangelism and justice, at making God's will done on earth as it is in heaven.⁵

³Udoh, Missions Handbook. p. 7.

⁴Leslie Newbigin, "Mission and Missions", Christianity Today. August 1, 1960. p. 23.

⁵Glasser and McGavran, Contemporary Theologies, p.26.

It implies all activities - education, agriculture, medicine, social action, proclamation, etc. whose purpose is to witness to Christ with the view that He would be accepted as Lord and Saviour.

- iv) The NBC mission efforts thus far have been based on opinion arising from limited personal experience and partial knowledge of the population and their response to the gospel. But the fact is that it is important to identify where the needs are most urgent and where the rather limited resources could be utilized to the maximum. It is imperative therefore that the Convention commission studies with a view to identifying successes and failures in mission efforts, as well as providing rationale for either success or failure.
- v) Finance and personnel are limited. It is therefore important to prioritise needs. This obviously calls for systematic planning; and it is in consonance with what Paul calls a proper and orderly way⁶ to discern God's will and to provide ways to accomplish our spiritual purpose.
- vi) Mission projects should be regularly evaluated. It should not be intended as a judgement but rather to make possible necessary corrections and adjustments.
- vii) Individual churches should take a more active and direct role in mission efforts; but this should not be at the expense of the co-operative programme of the Convention.

⁶I Corinthians 14:40.