

NBTS
AS 31-c
M. Div.

CLERGY-LAITY PARTICIPATION IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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MATRIC No: 04/0036

“A Thesis in the Department of THEOLOGY
Faculty of Theological Studies”

“Submitted to the Faculty of Theological Studies
Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso
in Affiliation with the University of Jos”

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BAPTIST SEMINARY
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
MASTER OF DIVINITY

UNIVERSITY OF JOS”

JUNE 2007

ABSTRACT

Since the last two decades till now, there has been numerical increase of professing Christians and churches planted. Ironically, there is no commensurate level of societal transformation. This development is seen to be contrary to the experience of the early church.

A thorough investigation into the factors that put the church in this dilemma reveals that the clergy, whose duty is to prepare the laity for a closer walk with God and effective participation in the ministry through their equipping ministry, have not been very effective in discharging this function. This has led to inadequate involvement of the laity in Christian ministry. This essay therefore concerned itself with the restoration of the God ordained duties of the clergy and laity in the Christian ministry.

This research have discovered that the clergy and the Laity have been playing their distinct roles to ensure the effective discharge of the Christian ministry but a better result can be achieved with more commitment by both parties. While some of the pastors have been leading majority of their members to discover and exercise their spiritual gifts for ministry, others have not been very effective in their equipping function. The Laity also have not been fully committed to their ministry functions.

The uniqueness of God's people is that they are called to a mission and every member is included in the practical accomplishment of the task. Therefore pastors must regularly design methods for enlisting the laity into the ministry through effective discovery of their gifts and the exercise of those gifts in ministering both within the church and in the society. The Laity on their part must willingly accept their roles as co-labourers with the pastors in the Christian ministry and be fully committed to the task of the ministry.

5.1 Conclusion

It is true that change is something always difficult to achieve but if all concerned clergy and laity- are willing, it is certainly possible to revert the church back to the New Testament standard of Christian ministry. If every pastor whether in a big or small church accept the fact that every part of the body is necessary and has a role which must be performed for the effective functioning of that body, and are resolved to get every part into action, then it can be done. Once they believe: that all are called to serve; that the ministry should consist of a team rather than an individual or some few individuals; and that the potentials for Christian ministry lies slumbering in the pews waiting to be mobilized for action; then they must act without allowing the weight of tradition or the laws of the church to be a stumbling block in the efforts to re-channel the church back to its God – preordained course.

It is basic that for any church to perform its ministry effectively, it must have the pulpit and the pews working together in a closely knitted way. This is because potentially valuable to the Christian course are at present time, relatively untapped and undeveloped human resources hidden among the laity, which are urgently, needed for the progress of the Christian ministry. The employment of these presently wasted powers will make a great difference between the church of today and the church of tomorrow.

However, for the biblical Christian ministry to be achieved, we need: churches who will be willing to fully practice the equipping ministry, pastors who will see it as

their major task and be committed to accomplishing it and laity who have come to know and appreciate that their function in the Christian ministry is not that of contributing money and attending church programs, but involves identifying their God-given gift and exercising them in ministering to others both within and outside the church. It must be realized that the inability of the laity to live in the world as Christian is because of their shallow knowledge about who they ought to be in the world. Equipping them will not only enhance their ministry in the church but also give them the needed confidence to minister outside.

There is no doubt that it is only with the style of ministry in which we once again see the genius and the planning of our Lord can we ever reach the world, this will be a return to the priesthood of all believers, and in deed a return to the New Testament. It is basic that a professionalized ministry is necessary, but it is not sufficient because the job to be done is too big to be accomplished by the work of a minority, no matter how gifted and trained that minority may be.

One could only but imagine what will become of the Christian ministry and the world we live in if the thousands of men and women who attend our worship service are to attend as participator and not as spectator. We can be assured that the church will recover its true nature and be able to really impact on the society and this generation. Therefore, for the Christian ministry to be effective in our generation, both existing and new members must be equipped not only to share the inestimable blessing which they have received with every one they come across but also to minister daily in accordance to their spiritual gifts. There is thus, the immediate need to erase every difference in kind between the lay and clerical Christians not by the exclusion of professional but by the inclusion of all in the ministry.

In conclusion it will be necessary to say that the involvement of the laity as co-workers with the clergy in the Christian ministry requires the vital spiritual empowering of all people involved. This will necessitate an ongoing pilgrimage for all God's people. The church must therefore intentionally seek to provide many contexts in which sensitive, seeking persons may experience God's presence, gain increased understanding of God's nature and become deeply committed to doing his will

5.2 Recommendation

For the effective achievement of the biblical Christian ministry in our churches today, the following factors must be put in consideration.

1. The clergy should adequately prepare the people for meaningful church membership by ensuring that members (excluding occasional worshipers) of a local church are those who have genuinely given their lives to Christ with a resolve not to willingly indulge in sin henceforth.
2. Every local church must engage the clergy and laity in ministering to one another and to the society by focusing on their mutual spiritual empowerment
3. The church must come around to altering the existing form of worship that is currently locked into a set of pattern and make it conducive for lay participation. If the laity are to be personally engaged in such activities as prophecy, exhortation, and evangelism and to be free to seek God for miracles and healing ... they must be drawn in and turned out!
4. The 'balcony view' concept of the laity as spectators in a performance must be ruled out while they should see themselves and be seen as people who are all actors along side of the clergy with only God constituting the audience.

5. The whole people of God should be allowed to minister within the fellowship of the church because each member of the body has a role to play in the upbuilding, the growth and the maturing of the whole in accordance to Ephesians 4:16.
6. The placement procedure for local church position should be reviewed. Instead of the current situation where programs or organizations and task are determined in advance and persons are nominated to fill the positions, the gifts of persons available should be used to determine the programs and the task to be preformed.
7. The local church must be kept in focus as the primary means by which edification is to take place. Members of a local church must be disciplined, taught and encouraged, and helped to become a dynamic koinonia.
8. The whole people of God should minister in the world for Christ to be tangible and visible in the world at; the workplace, institutions, the homes, market place etc. This involves both the clergy and laity who must be prepared and strengthened for the ministry.
9. There is the necessity of small group structures that will enhance individual ministration and gift discovery. This was greatly utilized by Martin Luther who de-emphasized the sanctuary church in favour of the Spirit-filled fellowship of small groups which he termed "house-churches"
10. The pastoral office in the congregation should be understood and practiced in the light of the ministry of the whole people of God. This will not lead to the lowering of the ministry of the ordained but will rather make sure that the ministry of the whole people, including the pastor, is celebrated, as it ought to be.
11. Ministers who are spiritually liberated in this manner should make the decentralization of ministry within the church part of their initial negotiations with local congregation. Just as the partners in a marriage reach an understanding of their

parity and mutual responsibilities before the marriage agreement is sealed. ministers should raise the consciousness of churches intending to engage their service to an awareness of the structural error in the tradition of clerical domination, and also avoid accepting calls to churches which refuse to see the problem.

12. Believers must be provided with opportunities to develop capacity that go beyond knowledge to include wisdom, enlightenment, appreciation, awareness and sensitivity to the Spirit of God in line with Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1: 16-19; 3: 14-19.

13. The clergy will also have to develop a comprehensive ongoing personal plan for identifying, recruiting, training and supporting the laity into the various ministries of the local church as individual ministry gifts are discovered and developed.

14. Believers must be provided with the total experiences, which will help them to get beyond the knowledge level. This will begin with teaching-learning experience, but must go beyond mere dissemination of scriptural content and the interaction with the content by those who are being taught. It must be in the content of: relational Christianity-involving fellowship with God and with one another; and dynamic Christian witness and outreach.

15. For a congregation to reflect the life of Christ, shared values which are related to the development of the mind of Christ among the individuals must exist within the church. The emphasis here is on unity and like-mindedness, which promotes the clear sense of direction necessary for effective ministry. This will, however, put a heavy task on the clergy to not only ensure that each member have both a minimal knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a Christian but more importantly what it means to be a confessing member of that congregation.