

The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary

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**An Evaluation of the Impact of Church Societies on the Life of Nigerian
Baptist Convention Churches**

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ABSTRACT

The spirituality and maturity of a local church or denomination can only be measured by the extent of its conformity to the nature and practices of the church established by Christ to reflect his character, which was described with precision in the Scriptures. However, the church today has opted for deviations in matters of doctrines and practices that have eventually brought very serious spiritual damage to its inner life and growth.

Therefore the life of the church need to be evaluated to the end that it may rediscover its lost identity and thereby take conscious steps towards eradicating the strange practices such as the "church societies" which has plagued churches in the NBC.

This essay, which took a five-chapter structure, has examined the impact of church societies of the NBC churches with the aim of evaluating the way it had actually affected the church life. Chapter One is the introduction to the work, containing the thesis statement, the background to the study, its scope and the research methodology. While the second chapter dealt with the historical backgrounds to the NBC missions and evangelism, and the history of church societies.

In this work the third chapter contained the research methods used with the presentation of data and its analysis. The research methods used include the use of literature, field surveys and the use of questionnaires and interviews. Moreover, chapter four of the essay which evaluated the results of the research done in chapter three revealed that church societies is really an aberration of the true nature of the church (Galatians 3:28). The entire work

was concluded in chapter Five with recommendation and suggestions on the need to work out eradication of the various strange practices existing in the church today especially the Church Societies.

and mission of the Convention. The phrase "cooperating churches with the Convention" ¹⁰⁹ is thus a mere deception because many of the local assemblies have deviated from the forms of the established structure.

Furthermore, the available data reveals that the "adopted" biblical bases for church society were passages such as Acts 4:3-37; Luke 6:12-16, Acts 6:1-7 and Exodus 18:13-27. (The quoted word is writer's impression). This idea of biblical basis could be nothing less than an after thought deliberately designed to earn approval. The emergence of these is a manifestation of zeal without knowledge, which made the Israelites of Paul's day to establish their own righteousness rather than accepting the revealed righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-4). Therefore, in a Bible believing church such as the Baptist, the quality of life which characterized the fellowship of believers in Acts 4, the better designed administrative strategies employed in Exodus 18, and the move focused ministry in evident without compromising with the world (Rom.12: 1-2)

CONCLUSION

This work has evaluated the various impacts of church societies on the life of a goal number of church within the Nigeria Baptist Convention. The conclusion arrived at by the research based on the available data shall be presented/highlighted in the following paragraphs.

The idea of churches is real, especially in most of the churches in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. These comprise of small groups of young adults in the churches with membership based on secular factors such as gender, social, status etc. It can thus be deduced that this is an aberration of

the true nature of the church (Galatians 3:28). Jesus prayed for oneness among Christian (John 17). Paul also decried the problem of schism and sectarianism in the Corinthian Church. Introducing these groups is a manifestation of carnality (I Corinthians 3:1-4). Church societies have been identified as anti-missionary groups in the church, which had negative impacts on the unity, love and other virtues that should characterize a true Christian fellowship. They do not have any justification for existence within the context of an ideal church.

In an attempt to seek justification for the existence of church societies it was claimed by members and a few pastors that there are definite goals with constitutional provisions and guideline for their activities in the Church, an example is the Ebenezer Baptist Church Ogbomoso. Nevertheless the introduction of these groups is neither biblical nor in agreement with the Baptist understanding of the church. The writer has taken this position because more often than not the set goals are nor based on biblical standards and many times out of steps with the goal of the Church. Church Societies in most cases have taken over the loyalty meant for Christ and His church from their members. Their commitment to the Lord and His work is transferred to the groups. This has therefore affected the character of the church negatively. Usually it is difficult for the groups to conform to the Leadership structure approved by the Bible and adopted by the Convention. The believer's commitment to Christ should take a priority. There is a very clear indication that they have not really helped in the improvement of church members' life commitment to Christ and the church.

Also in many churches these societies has technically displaced the age long missionary organizations, a major part of the structure of NBC, through which its missions and evangelism are emphasized. In fact they constituted a threat to the life of these organizations, that is, MMU, WMU, Youths, etc. Most of the churches in the Convention today do no longer conform to the Baptist structure.

The Convention is to be reminded that when “deviations occur within the body from its beliefs and practices, the body may suffer a spiritual damage to its inner life and continuous growth.” ¹¹⁰A house that is divided against itself, Jesus said, shall not stand (mark 3:25). If the NBC is conscious of this, it should ensure adherence to its beliefs and practices by individuals and churches.

Furthermore, a few churches have records of societies that have valuable instruments for mission works, evangelism, and outreaches. These are legitimate roles of the church. The truth of the matter is that there is a need for reawakening the churches to rise up to their responsibilities on missions. This is to say, as a denomination, we need to emphasize that evangelism and missions should be top priority of Christ-focused church organizations in our Local Churches (Matt. 28:19-20).

Many Churches rely solely on Church Societies for financial strength through levying thereby de-emphasizing faithfulness in giving, through scriptural tithing (mal. 3:8-11) and offerings (Corinthians 16:2). This is very dangerous because the Church is being cheated in a way and in another way,

¹¹⁰ Minutes of The Nigerian Baptist Convention 69th Annual Session, (Ibadan :Baptist Press (Nig) Ltd.,1982), 232.

the reward of faithfulness will not be the peoples' portion at the end. Therefore the church needs to be watchful for such groups which do originate in Christ and which is not Christ centered may turn into a rebel. The operation of church societies weakens the effectiveness of the Biblical teachings on giving.

Moreover, church societies had been identified with more evil than good and therefore in many cases they had acted as a log in the wheel of progress and agents of dissensions in churches.

Among the dangerous factors they bring into the church are worldliness, unhealthy politics, rebellion, and unfaithfulness to God, polarization of church members, cultism, immorality and marital unfaithfulness. These groups have brought about untold damage to the internal life of the church. Therefore church societies are more secular than been spiritual. The continued existence of these groups has infected the people's relationship to Christ. And it has also coloured the worldviews of members (Jude 3-4). The denomination needs to "contend for the faith that was once for entrusted to the saints"

Lastly, the conformity of the Nigeria Baptist Convention Churches to the biblical model should take priority. It is time for the Convention authorities to rise up to the challenge of restoring the ideals of a true church of Christ. Church societies are not part of the Baptist structure and this must be emphasized through the denominational workers and Pastors.

