

**TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF MEN'S MISSIONARY UNION OF
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION, 1977-2002**

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ABSTRACT

There was an effort at mobilizing men for evangelism when Men's League was inaugurated in Lagos in 1916 but it was short lived. Incidentally Women's League which was inaugurated the same year for a similar purpose later merged with Women's Missionary Union and has continued till date. In 1977 Baptist men were organized when the Nigerian Baptist Convention formally organized the department of Men, Youth and Boys' Work which later became the Men's Missionary Union (MMU). Why did the Men's League die a natural death? What difference has the Men's Missionary Union made in the mission enterprise of the Nigerian Baptist Convention since 1977? These questions constitute the problem of the research.

In finding answers to the statement of problem, the researcher made effort to find out existing works which relate to the Men's Missionary Union of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The researcher engaged selected individuals in structured interview, and administered questionnaires to categories of Baptist local churches.

The twenty-five years of existence have not been without significant landmark. The MMU has affected the mission enterprise of the Nigerian Baptist Convention positively. It has also initiated programmes that have been of tremendous blessing to the Convention.

If men had enjoyed the type of influence the Women's League enjoyed through the Women's Missionary Union perhaps the Men's League would not have died a natural death. Male missionaries did not show much interest in

the men and boys work the way the female missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention through the Women's Missionary Union showed in women and girls work.

The research revealed that men failed to organize into a nation-wide body for the purpose of mission not because they could not but because for a long time they held on to erroneous ideas. In the face of compelling reasons and at the fullness of time men were organized and mobilized for missions and have since remained active.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the MMU has come a long way in mobilizing men and boys for mission. The work has been firmly established in the southern part of the Convention, but it is not so strong in the North except for a few urban areas where the influence of indigenes from the South is strong.² It is commendable that MMU aligned with the Global Mission Board in pursuing Operation Reach All programme.³ This is evident in one of the resolutions passed at the 13th Annual Congress of the MMU at Ifako, Agege, Lagos to the effect that "the entire MMU hierarchy of the Nigerian Baptist Convention should equip itself spiritually and financially to actively lead,

¹*Bold New Laity* (Memphis: Brotherhood Commission, n.d.), 5.

²Rev. J. O. Owolabi, MMU Chairman of United Baptist Conference raised the issue of non-existence of MMU chapter in many local churches of the Conference at the 23rd Annual MMU Congress which took place in Port-Harcourt in 2002. *24th Annual Congress of the Baptist Men's Missionary Union*, 68. Similar report was given by Dn. Gambo Mamuda, MMU Chairman for Sabon Rai at the 23rd Annual Congress which took place in Osogbo, Osun State. *23rd Annual Congress Programme*, 41.

³*The Nigerian Baptist* (October 1991). 20.

support and participate in the Operation Reach All (ORA) as embraced by the Nigerian Baptist Convention and that the ORA Coordinating Committee of the MMU led by S. B. Oyelade should as a matter of urgency bring out something positive that would create a great impact of the MMU involvement in the ORA exercise.⁴

It is also remarkable that the MMU has rolled out literature to educate, inform and guide men and boys in realizing the objectives of the MMU.⁵ Apart from the pioneer Secretary who later became the Director, others who succeeded him have built on the foundation that was laid, adding their own blocks which have increased the size and beauty of the edifice. Between 1977 and 2002 the following have served as Chairmen/Presidents – H. D. Wicks (1977-1980); J. O. Onotota (1981-1990); Ayo Ojebode (1991-1994); N. B. Oyalade (1995-2000); Dn. J. A. Akala (20010date). The following have served as Secretary/Director – S. Ola. Olaniyan (1978-1979); H. D. Wicks (Acting, 1980); U. K. Madugu (Acting, 1981-1982); S. Ola. Olaniyan (1984-1998); T. A. Akande (1999); F. T. Lateju (2000-2003).⁶

The MMU made an effort at compiling a history of Baptist churches of the Convention. A decision to this effort was arrived at during the MMU

⁴Ibid.

⁵*Missions, Mission Focus and Christ's Ambassadors* are annually for the use of men, young men and boys respectively for their monthly meeting. Other publications in circulation to promote men and boys work in Nigeria and Africa include *Manual for Intermediate and Senior Royal Ambassadors* prepared by Harold D. Wicks; *Baptist Men's Fellowship Meeting, Men's Missionary Union of the Nigerian Baptist Convention; All Africa Baptist Fellowship Baptist Men's Handbook*, vol. 1; *Baptist Men's Work in Africa* all compiled by S. Ola. Olaniyan, "Emphasis on Baptist Young Men," by F. T. Lateju.

⁶Olaniyan, *On Course for Missions*, 56. Olaniyan's record indicates that H. D. Wicks acted as Secretary/Director in 1980, but another record shows that Revd. E. A. Adelaiye became Acting Secretary when Olaniyan left for the United States on September 1, 1979. See *The Nigerian Baptist* (September 1979): 19. The regular column, "Men, Youth and Boys" was virtually on leave for almost one year after Olaniyan's departure to U.S.A.

Congress which took place in Kano in 1994.⁷ Though the plan did not materialize, the efforts are commendable. It is a project which deserves the support of the Convention.

The Royal Ambassadors were guided in formulating "National Uniform Pull-Out"⁸ – a service parallel to the Bible Presentation of the Lydia Circle.⁹ This is different from the Royal Wedding programme such as were conducted for deserving Royal Ambassadors, National Uniform Pull-Out takes place before the wedding day. Being an eye-witness, this researcher can affirm that the programme, apart from being very inspiring, is capable of promoting chastity and moral uprightness among boys and young men. The programme as approved is supplied as Appendix VII.¹⁰

Recommendations

1. Strengthening the MMU in the North

Conscious effort is required to step up the work of MMU in the North. Reports from MMU Conference Chairman at the annual congress give credence to this observation. The enlightenment and promotion work in this regard must begin with the local church MMU. Given all the necessary support, mobilization and motivations, MMU work should experience significant growth in the North.

⁷Olaniyan, "Men's Missionary Union," *The Nigerian Baptist* (October 1994): 15.

⁸The National Uniform Pull-Out Programme draft was approved on October 19, 2001 at Ede. It is observed for Royal Ambassadors who exemplify the ideals of the R.A. as expressed in the R. A. pledge.

⁹Bible Presentation is programme of the WMU organized for ladies who preserve themselves from sexual impurity. The service usually holds a week before the wedding day.

¹⁰The maiden edition of National Uniform Pull-Out was observed at Sabo Baptist Church, Ogbomoso in November 18, 2001. See *The Nigerian Baptist* (August 2001): 26.

