

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXODUS OF YOUTH FROM THE FIRST
GENERATION BAPTIST CHURCHES: A CASE STUDY OF OGO-OLUWA
BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

A Degree Essay in the Department of Theology, Faculty of Theological Studies

Submitted to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Master of Divinity in Theology

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12/0159

JUNE, 2015

ABSTRACT

The researcher has conducted an investigation into the exodus of youth from the first generation Baptist churches; using Ogo-Oluwa Baptist association as a case study. The research was conducted with the intention of coming out with useful recommendations for the stake holders in the church; with a view to foster proper understanding of the purpose of the church ministry. Besides, it was also intended to further provide better understanding of the inter dependency of both the youth and the elders in church ministry. Baptist is a denomination with unique biblical heritage and faith. However, in the contemporary church, distractions, conflicts, tensions, and even crises exist. All these need to be promptly and adequately taken care of. Dichotomy, strife, rivalry, complacency, and divisions, among others, are rearing their heads among the various strata of the church, even to the convention level. The youth who should be the future of the church on many occasions, quit the scenes of action due to disagreement on doctrinal, tradition, leadership, worldview or social factors. Proliferation of churches with expedient theology seems to provide soft ground for the bundles of youth who have left their local churches in their large numbers. This study has investigated into the remote and near causes of such degeneration effect of youth exodus from the first generation Baptist churches in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Empirical method was employed for this work, which involved administration of questionnaire in seven selected Baptist churches in Ogo-Oluwa Baptist association of Kwara Baptist Conference. The findings revealed issues ranging from lack of discipleship, mentoring, poor inter-relationship, parental failure, attitudinal factors on both the youth and the elders, church doctrines and practices, Pentecostalism, modernism, and even satanic influence, among others are noted as responsible for youth exodus from the first generation Baptist churches. It was also revealed that there are attendant effects of youth exodus; which includes lack of human resources, low financial supporters and even active worshipers in those churches that have witnessed the outflow. In the overall view, neither the youth nor the elders could be exonerated from this drift. All have their roles to play in maintaining and ensuring continuity of the church ministry, knowing fully well that no party is perfect. The researcher therefore recommends that the interpersonal relationship between the youth and the elders be improved upon, church leaders should be creative in their programmes, intensive discipleship and equipping ministries of the churches be strengthened, and the experience of the elders should be appreciated and improved upon, by the youth, where necessary.

5.2 Conclusion

The church is the body of Christ which He redeemed by His atoning blood. Baptist as a denomination is very unique in its beliefs, practices and doctrines. The doctrine of the Priesthoods of all Believers perhaps puts every baptized member on the same pedestal; which probably makes way for frequent agitation for improvement, restructuring, and amendments by the members. As a matter of fact, agitations will continue in the Baptist denomination as long as people discover new things in their theological reflections. This is why the Baptists are referred to as “the people of the Book”- the Holy Bible.

However, it is necessary for everyone to put the Scripture and the will of God first in his practice of faith. This should be well above sentiment of any kind. Every agitation must be scriptural based, God centred and Holy Spirit driven. No individual or group interest can ever measure up to the cost of the sacrificial death of Christ for the Church. Satanic and external influences should be given prompt attentions and dealt with by the right instrumentality of God's sovereignty.

It is also important to know that schism will do no one any good when it has to do with the church of God. It is worth to remember the old saying that the tradition that is practiced only by the elders without the participation of the young ones will soon disappear from among the community. The Church; beginning from every individual, homes and the local assembly should be seen as a unified structure with every member as responsible and accountable part of the whole unit whose head is Christ the Lord. Everyone should be well informed that there could not be any justifiable reason for disunity or even breakdown of the body of Christ by any means.

Because man is a social being, he has the instinct to relate with his environment. There is every tendency for friction to set in in the cause of interaction in the community, church especially. This is why toleration and acceptance are expedient in and outside of the church community for peaceful coexistence. As a matter of fact, the pastor of the local church should see the parishioners as his children in the Lord which he cannot but love, keep and sustain.

The elders as well should see the youth as their biological and spiritual children that will succeed them tomorrow. In like manner, the youth and Elders should see the pastor as their spiritual father. With these understandings by all, none of the investigated opinions will be strong enough to cause degeneration, crises or

even departure of the youth. The church should follow the example of the development crisis in the early church between apostles Paul and Peter as regarding issues in church practices and how they were able to resolve what could have scattered the church.

5.3 Recommendations

In view of the results of this research work, the following are recommendations for all that are involved in church and youth ministry:

1. Elders and youth should see their relationship first from the perspective of parents-children relationship; hence, there should be spirit of toleration, love and acceptance among all.
2. Baptist faith, practices and doctrines should be given special attention in the discipleship training course of every local church and should form part of the Christian education program of the convention.
3. The church leaders should be creative and in the program and activities of the local church in such a way that the needs of the contemporary youth are met in their local Baptist churches, without necessarily going to pentecostal churches.
4. The church should give more to creative discipleship, enlistment and equipping of the youth to enhance progressive successions.
5. The youth should understand and appreciate the labours, experiences and contributions of the elderly that have brought the Gospel and church to this level. Besides, they can constructively improve on them where necessary.