
**MISSIOLOGICAL APPROCHES TO ECONOMIC
RECESSION IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF
SELECTED BAPTIST CHURCHES IN OGBOMOSO**

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Abstract

In the context of the contemporary reality of economic recession in Nigeria, the study investigated Missiological Approaches by the church to economic recession. The research was with the view of identifying specific cost-effective means by which the church in Nigeria can continue to fulfil its divine purpose of making Christ known to the whole world. The existing truth is that many churches have abandoned or suspended missionary activities due to economic challenges. This writer argues that this should not be the case. In attaining the goal of this study, the writer applied the qualitative research method- involving participant observations of the mission activities of five selected churches in Ogbomoso, interviews with some of the leaders and members and a study of the mission policies and practices of these churches and interactions with academic writings. The findings from the field on effective approaches to the mission of the church in economic difficulty are- lifestyle evangelism, building the body of Christ through discipleship, the preaching of Spirit filled life-transforming sermons, encouraging volunteerism and sharing, and socio-economic empowerment of members.

speaking about the spread of the Christian faith particularly by missionaries or persons sent by the church. This normally included the crossing of geographical or cultural barriers. However, since the 1960s, the terms have assumed independent meanings.¹

The term Mission (singular) is used broadly to describe all of God's sending activity. This activity of God is referred to in Latin as *Missio Dei* (the mission of God). This is to say that mission is rooted in divine initiative and character.² It is God's self-revelation as the one who loves the world. It is the activity of God in seeking humanity for redemption through his only Son, Jesus Christ. The mission of God pronounces the good news that God is a God for all people. The mission of God has the intent of reconciling to himself and bringing into his kingdom men and women from every nation of the world.³

On the other hand, Missions (plural) refers to the missionary endeavors or activities of the church in seeking lost souls for Christ. It refers to the undertakings that the church is involved in as she proclaims salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.⁴ In other words, missions is the term that describes the sending mandate of the church. Donald McGavran, the doyen of mission/church growth studies nicely articulates the meaning of the term missions as he notes that it is "carrying the gospel across cultural boundaries to those who owe no allegiance to Jesus Christ and encouraging them to accept him as Lord and Savior and to become responsible members of His church, working as the Holy Spirit leads..."⁵ It is important to add that the idea of carrying the gospel across cultural boundaries may or may not necessitate travelling to meet other people groups. In the context of migration and globalization, diverse people keep moving across societies, states and nations hence encounters across cultural

boundaries have become a common experience. Within the context of such meetings, the gospel can be shared with non-Christians. In a nutshell, through missions, the church participates in *Missio Dei*, the mission of God.

Related to the terms Mission and Missions is the comprehensive term, Missiology. It is the discipline that deals with the academic study of missions. It studies critically the missionary dimensions of the Christian faith, the Great Commission of the church. As a theological discipline, it engages in a systematic and scientific study of the fact that the church is missionary by nature. It critically examines the activities through which the church does her missions.⁶ Thus, while mission is the redemptive activity of God for all of humanity, missions is the participation of the church in that mission of God through her soul winning activities, and missiology is the systematic study of missions. In this study therefore, we have used the terms missions and missiological (a derivative from missiology) to simply mean approaches pertaining to missions. In other words, the study focuses on or examines the cost-effective activities of the church in soul winning (missions) as she participates in the mission of God in a time of recession.

The Missionary Mandate and Nature of the Church

The Bible presents the church as essentially missionary by nature. In Mt.28:18-20; the church is sent "to go and make disciples of all nations." Here it is clear that the risen Lord exclusively tasked the church to make disciples through teaching them to obey Christ's words and incorporating them into the body of Christ through baptism. In his enunciation of this passage, John Stott notes that this Great Commission of the church to preach Christ also entails social responsibility. He argues that "evangelism and compassionate service belong

together in the mission of God."⁷ One of the major implications of Stott's argument is that, in participating in the mission of God, the church in her missions ought to perform social actions.⁸ This is perhaps not out of place because there are several dimensions to the activities that the church can perform in doing missions.

One of the prominent nomenclatures in Acts of Apostles by which the church was described is the term 'witnesses.' A witness bears testimony about another person. The disciples have the task of testifying about Jesus Christ. In Acts 1:8, the disciples were commissioned to be witnesses of Christ from their immediate constituency to the ends of the earth. In both Mt.28:18-20 and Acts1:8, the instruction to make Christ known to the world was given by Christ the head of the church Himself. We may say that this all-important task or commission given to the church is seen as an obligation that must be carried out.

One of the important dimensions of ecclesiology is the idea of the church as essentially missionary in nature. In I Pet.2:9, the church is not the sender, but the one sent by God. The mission of the church as the 'sent one' is its primary nature. One way David Bosch clearly puts it is that, "missionary activity is not so much the work of church but simply the church at work."⁹

In his description of the church as missionary by nature, Bosch's argument stems from the fact that, because God is a missionary God (*Missio Dei*), God's people, the church are a missionary people.¹⁰ By implication, the nature of the church befits that we cannot speak about missions without speaking about the church and vice-versa.

Economic Recession in Nigeria

While it is true that Nigeria as a nation is very rich in oil, yet, the level of poverty is very high. The recession that struck the country has lasted so long. As at 2014, Nigeria became Africa's largest economy, surpassing South Africa in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), nonetheless, the country is in economic downturn. A number of factors contributed to the economic recession currently experienced in Nigeria. First, for many years, Nigeria suffered from political instability, corruption and poor economic management. Second, for long, the country depended solely on oil without diversifying the economy. Oil provided 95% of foreign exchange and 80% of the revenues of the state budget.¹¹ While it is true that some efforts are being made by the incumbent administration to diversify Nigeria's economy, yet, not much has changed in the economic situation due to the depth of the recession and other attendant factors.

In the first quarter of 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics informed that the country's economy shrank by 0.36% to hit its lowest level in 29 years. Such an experience occurred last during the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. The economy in that period declined 0.51% and 0.82% in the first and second quarters of 1987. By the end of 2016, Nigeria's economy had declined by 1.5%.¹² The fall in oil prices and insurgents' attacks on oil infrastructures among other things, were said to have contributed to the decline in economy. Soon, exchange rates climaxed at record height. In addition, the five months' delay in approving the spending plans for 2016 also affected Nigeria's economy.¹³

On September 5, 2017, Nigerians woke to hear the news from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) that the country had exited its worst economic recession in more than two decades. According to the NBS, Nigeria's economy has notched up with a growth of 0.55% in the second quarter of 2017. The bureau's

report indicated that the economic recovery was propelled by improved performance in oil production and sales, agriculture, manufacturing and trade sectors of the economy. Expounding further on the "end of recession", the bureau informed that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 0.55% in the second quarter of 2017. As at 2016, Nigeria's oil production was 1.3million barrels per day, however, by the second quarter of 2017, the production was said to have risen to an average of two million barrels per day.¹⁴ All of these factors according to the bureau made Nigeria exit economic recession.

As we shall note further in the next section, the day to day reality and experiences of many Nigerians at present (third quarter of 2017) is different from the report of the NBS. For instance, foreign exchange is not stable, prices of commodities that have gone up have not reduced. For the average Nigerian, the declaration of the end of recession is a mere media propaganda. Such a pronouncement has not translated into economic ease in the lives of many Nigerians. Both money and goods are scarce. While it is true that the Central Bank hinted that more foreign exchange had been supplied for Nigerians, yet, it is a common knowledge that in many official quarters where it ought to be available, foreign exchange is not obtainable. Nigerians go through "hell" to get foreign currencies at official rates.

Tuition fees in both private and public institutions of learning continue to be hiked indiscriminately, yet workers' salaries are not increased. Inflation rate of commodities has continued unabated. Price stability of goods has become rapidly alien to Nigerians. In other words, prices of goods change on somewhat daily basis. These price hikes appear not to be checked by any government agency. The impression this gives

to many Nigerians is that there are no regulatory agencies overseeing the prices of goods in Nigeria. And if there are, their effects are not felt in the country. Many Nigerians continue to live under the burden of economic recession despite the declaration of end of recession. In the next section we shall discuss the effects of economic recession or its challenges on churches in Nigeria.

Some Effects of Economic Recession on the Church and its Mission in Nigeria

The economic recession enumerated above has had its toll on the church in Nigeria. Many will agree that the effects and challenges of the recession are still very much present with the church. In an interview with Olumide Okeyode, the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported that the cleric who as at the time of the interview served as Pastor of Unity Baptist Church in Ilorin, Kwara State, noted that the recession has impacted the attendance and offerings of the church. In his words, "the economic downturn had also affected the Church in terms of attendance and offerings."¹⁵ In the same vein, Bishop Juan Zuhumbe, the Anglican Bishop of Bukuru in Plateau State, as at 2017, hinted that the present economic situation in Nigeria is a test of faith for believers in the country. Zuhumbe sees these hard times as God's tool for strengthening the believers.¹⁶

According to *Today's Challenge Magazine (TCM)*, the weak in faith in church today are not happy because they have little or no food to put on the table for the children at home. In many churches, tithes, offerings and attendance have dropped. Many complain that they have no money for transportation to church. *TCM* also hinted that in some churches, families no longer bring their children to church, while others now rotate church attendance.¹⁷ One other way the recession has affected the church as *TCM* noted is that many church members are no longer religious. It was noted that some members are now

busy looking for what to eat and how to train their children. In some churches, mid-week services and bible studies are no longer attended as before. The quest today among many in the church is not for revival but for survival. Thus "to say the recession has affected the church is stating the obvious."¹⁸

Furthermore, the magazine noted that in some churches, the focus on missions has been affected. Many who were ardent in missions' activities have become weary due to the economic crunch. Funds previously spent on missions are now diverted to other areas considered more pressing. In many segments of the church, there have been cuts in the cost of running the church. This is because some members have reduced their financial commitments to the church. The Pastors' families in many churches are also said to have been affected by the crunch. Some pastors now request for more support towards the upkeep of their children and their tuition because many no longer earn regular salaries. Despite this development, some members also continue to knock on the doors of pastors for assistance.¹⁹

Furthermore, *Today's Challenge Magazine*, interviewed a sizeable number of Pastors in Plateau State. The pastors covered diverse denominations- Evangelical Church Winning All, Pentecostals, Anglicans, and many more. Eight major ways were identified as the major challenges the recession continues to poise to the church.²⁰ These are:

1. Drop in church attendance
2. Inability to pay pastor and other church staff salary
3. Lack of funds for projects
4. Little of no participation in mission activities
5. Low sales in church's business ventures
6. More indigent members in the church

7. Not meeting up with the budget of the church
8. Religious and spiritual apathy

Cost Effective Mission Approaches

This part of the work relies on the field work conducted between March and June 2017. Earlier in the paper, we noted that the church is missionary by its nature. We hinted that for the church to cease to do missions, is for the church to cease to exist. The very core and essence of the church is the doing of missions. The purpose of the church as God's redeemed people is to make known God's redemptive works for humanity.²¹ A major implication of this purpose is that the church wherever found and in whatever economic difficulty, must continue to identify cost effective means of undertaking missions.

In the light of this reality, the writer interacted with the leaders of five randomly selected Baptist churches in Ogbomoso that have been known to participate in one form of missions' activities or the other. These churches are New Era Baptist Church, Grace Baptist Church, Sabo Baptist Church, Victory Baptist Church and Odo-Oru Baptist church. All of these churches have been established for at least twenty-five years. In the writer's interactions and observations of these churches, one important issue was investigated; the cost-effective missions involvements of the churches within the last three years (2015-2017).

Resulting from the interactions with the pastors, eight important cost-effective ways of involving in missions were identified. The writer arrived at this list based on the frequency in which the items were mentioned by the respondents. These include: life-style evangelism, life transforming sermons from the pulpit, local mission mobilization, praying for missions, target group evangelism within the society, missionary

support, partnership in missions, and volunteerism/self-sponsorship.

Life-Style Evangelism

Four out of the five pastors that the writer interacted with independently noted that one major way they have encouraged their members to participate in missions in a time like this, is the proclamation of Christ to all and sundry through life-style evangelism. Oguntayo Adeyanju sees life-style evangelism as the preaching of Christ through living a Christ-like life daily in the presence of the people.²² This according to John Adetutu calls for a life of integrity that exemplifies Christ.²³ While explaining further, Segun Makinde hinted that many in the society are tired of people preaching to them without truly living like believers. They are rather interested in seeing people who will truly live the life of Christ. Hence, through life-style evangelism; the demonstration of godly living by members, lives can be won to Christ.²⁴ He narrated the incident of a member's neighbor who joined the church sometimes ago due to the godly character observed in the member of the church. One important dimension that Gabriel Awolola added to the issue of lifestyle evangelism is that "it costs no money to exemplify the godly characters of honesty, integrity and truthfulness."²⁵

Life transforming sermons from the pulpit

All of the respondents were unanimous on the matter of maintaining a pulpit through which life-transforming sermons would be preached in moments like these. When asked the reason for such an insistence, Awolola hinted that not everyone who comes to the church is a Christian or someone who has given his or her life to Christ. Hence, for him, he sees every service in church as addressing a 'mission field' where both Christians and non-Christians are gathered to hear the word. He noted further that through the church's ministry of preaching, he has seen many souls coming to the Lord.²⁶

While noting the importance of the Word of God in conversion process, Makinde remarked that he saw each sermon he had to preach as an opportunity to win souls and bring people to Christ.²⁷ When asked the major benefit of life-transforming messages from the pulpit, Abraham Okunade did not mince words in highlighting that the goal of Christian preaching ought to be life-transformation. He added that the goal of missions is also life-transformation hence, through nicely prepared and godly inspired sermons of the pastor; lives can be transformed through the pulpit of the local church at no extra cost to the church.²⁸

Mission Mobilization

Mission mobilization according to Adeyanju is the creation of awareness about missions among the church members.²⁹ Such awareness possesses the capacity to facilitate diverse actions that would enhance mission work. For example, Awolola informed that one of the mission mobilizations he did in the church has given birth to the opportunity for a ministry with Okada³⁰ riders in Ogbomoso.³¹ Today, Awolola has a vibrant ministry among the Okada riders in Ogbomoso where he reaches out to an average of two-hundred and fifty such persons every month. Formerly, he goes to each of their stations to preach to them, however, beginning in September of 2017, he now brings them together in his church for diverse ministrations ranging from spiritual to socio-economic empowerment.

Praying for missions

All the pastors of the selected churches hinted that prayers are offered for missions, mission fields and missionaries in almost every Sunday service. They all informed that in keeping with the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) annual observance of mission week of prayers; they observe this annually in addition to the weekly prayers offered for missions. The mission week prayer emphasis program of the NBC usually

takes place in November of each year. It is a week that is dedicated to supporting home and foreign missions and missionaries through prayers and financial collections. Each mission field and missionaries are prayed for. We would agree with Makinde in his description of the cost-effective nature of prayer as he notes that "when we pray with our mouths to God for missions, it costs us no money, rather the results are great."³²

Target group evangelism within the society

One important way that the Sabo Baptist Church (SBC) under Adeyanju has continued to involve in missions in Ogbomoso is by opening the doors of its facilities to minority ethnic groups in Ogbomoso. For instance, at present, the church allows a Hausa speaking church group to meet in its premises in one of the classrooms every Sunday for worship. This church is comprised of migrant farmers from Northern Nigeria and the middle belt who migrated to Ogbomoso for farming as occupation to make ends meet. Through this avenue, they get to worship together in Hausa language and enjoy the fellowship of one another in Christ. In a related sense, Sabo Baptist church has also organized a similar worship opportunity for a Ghanaian church that meets for worship.³³ Apart from the provision of places of worship for these groups, SBC does not cater for the daily or weekly running of the church; this is done by the respective ethnic churches. In the words of Adeyanju, "all of these ethnic missions' activities have not been a burden to the church."³⁴

Missionary Support

Since 2015, Okunade has led Victory Baptist Church to be providing meager support for the Nigerian Baptist missionary located in Benin Republic. This is in addition to providing medical support for him here in Nigeria at moments of health challenges and needs. According to Okunade, this action has been more cost-effective than going with a team to that area for

missions. He hinted that it was the insufficiency of funds that led the church to adopt this strategy of catering for the welfare of the missionary in that land.³⁵ In a similar vein, Awolola noted that his church has mission stations in remote villages in Ogbomoso area. For each of these villages, his New Era Baptist church pays the monthly stipends of the pastors, while the money collected in such stations are kept by the respective churches for self-growth. This development as he noted has not been a financial burden to the church in anyway.³⁶

Partnership in Missions

The time we are in Nigeria, as Makinde noted, is a time when churches must collaborate to do missions.³⁷ Partnership carries the idea of a joint effort to execute a venture. Partnership in missions is the realization of the enormity of the task of missions; hence the need for working together to achieve significant results.³⁸ In Odo-Oru Baptist church, the various missionary organizations comprising men and women join hands together to make financial and material contributions for the task of missions. Periodically, the missionary organizations of the church pay visits to orphanages, hospitals and prison yards to evangelize the people. At such places, they share the gospel with the inmates and also minister to their physical needs through social missions.³⁹ Through this means, the donations for the outreach come from the members of the church and this eases the burden on the joint purse of Odo-oru Baptist church.

Volunteerism/Self-sponsorship.

All the pastors interviewed mentioned that volunteerism has been a key way by which the churches have continued to do missions. Makinde was exact in noting that with the current reality of Nigeria's economy, the use of volunteers has been very cost effective. He adds that such persons who volunteer to participate in missions in the church also sponsor themselves to such mission programs.⁴⁰ Between 2015 and

date, Adeyanju has led his church members on mission trips to Benin Republic and Togo. He noted that for both trips the "missionaries" or persons who went on the mission trips were volunteers from the church. While the church made available the vehicle that conveyed the group, it was the volunteers that sponsored themselves for the trip.⁴¹ According to Adetutu, without volunteers, mission work and indeed the entire ministries of the church cannot be effectively functional. He adds that no individual church has the finances to hire enough staff for all of its activities, particularly missions.⁴²

Reflections: Economic Recession, the Church & Missions

Economic recession in Nigeria is a reminder that no human system is permanent or perfect. All human systems are prone to failure. Local and global economic recession is a wake-up call to the church everywhere to have a rethink on its primary purpose of existence which is missions, and how to ensure it is done. Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible suggest to us that the Triune God is a missionary God. If this is the case, God's people the church must also be a missionary people doing the works of God. Through missions, the church fulfils the mandate for its existence.

Looking through the eight cost-effective activities enumerated above- life-style evangelism, life transforming sermons from the pulpit, local mission mobilization, praying for missions, target group evangelism within the society, missionary support, partnership in missions, and volunteerism/self-sponsorship; we could say that these churches have made good efforts in doing cost-effective missions despite the recession.

If the reality of recession is here with us, then the church needs to think and perhaps innovate more cost-effective ways of doing missions. However, in developing such ways, it is

imperative to keep in mind two important issues. First, the cost-effective methods must not contradict scriptures, and second, the mission approaches should be relevant to the context in which it is applied. For instance even in Nigeria, a mission approach that would be cost-effective in Ogbomoso, may not be cost-effective in Warri. The point is that efforts must be made in each context to find the best ways of minimizing cost in doing missions, particularly in the context of economic recession or depleting resources. Looking through the findings from the field, four among the eight appear to be applicable in almost any context. These include lifestyle evangelism, praying for missions, preaching by the local church pastor, and volunteerism.

In her participation in missions, there are at least four important dimensions that each local church or any group of Christians ought to give attention. First is preaching, declaration of the gospel or Good News of salvation in the power of the Spirit. Second is church planting; the establishment of the body of believers for fellowship. Third is discipleship which is the spiritual development of the believers to grow unto maturity in Christ. In addition is social empowerment which relates to putting to practice the love of Christ by caring for people through empowering them to be self-subsistence depending on the capabilities of each church. Despite economic recession, churches should give attention to some or all the dimensions of doing missions.

Conclusion

This paper focused on approaches to doing missions in a time of economic recession. Based on a field work among five randomly selected Baptist churches in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, eight cost-effective missions approaches were identified. These are life-style evangelism, life transforming sermons

from the pulpit, local mission mobilization, praying for missions, target group evangelism within the society, missionary support, partnership in missions, and volunteerism/self-sponsorship. We noted that due to the challenges of recession, many churches have abandoned the task of missions. This study has argued that this development should not be the case because, the church is missionary by nature. To desist from missions is to cease to exist as a church. The church in keeping with its divine purpose must continue to seek for cost-effective ways to doing missions. However, such approaches should not antagonize the Bible and must be socio-culturally applicable to the context of the people.

Endnotes

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 30. Okada is the local name given to motorcycles used for commercial purposes. It is actually a word native to Edo people of Edo State, Nigeria.
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