

Church Global Responsibility in Social Mission: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The Great commission is not only to preach the gospel for the regeneration of the world. It is also concerned affecting totality of human life. This paper is concerned about investigating the responsibility of the church in social mission. This will make the research to answer the questions what is the Church? What is the Social mission? And what the church can do to be involved in social mission alongside the sharing the word of God? The method that the study uses is literature review method. That is the literatures serve as sources of the information for the paper. The findings from the study are, the social mission is a responsibility of the Church, the social mission's areas are disasters, poverty, medical challenges, lack of food, lack of drinking water, housing problem, violence and so on, and the social mission strategies are educational, industrial, agricultural, medical and different enterprises. The study concludes that the Church must get involved in meeting the needs of the people in the world, the church must use the revealed approaches in the study and the church must prioritise the physical and spiritual needs of the people in the world.

Keywords: Church Responsibility, Church, Social mission, Universal Church, Local Church.

1.0 Introduction

The Great commission is not only to preach the gospel for the regeneration of the world. It is also concerned affecting totality of human life. It is a holistic assignment for the church in the world. Jesus expects his church to imitate his ministry ways in the world. The Lord Jesus ministers the gospel with social provision for the wellbeing of the humanity. He healed the sick.¹ He fed the hungry ones.² He did a lot of miraculous things to make sure that people of his days were both spiritually and socially catered for.³ This responsibility is left for the church to keep doing in the world until Jesus' second return. The pathetic side of it is that today the church is gradually moving away from this responsibility in the global world and most African context. Only few are paying attention to this important aspect of mission, known as social mission.

This paper is concerned about investigating the responsibility of the church in social mission. This will make the research to answer the questions what is the Church? What is the Social mission? And what the church can do to be involved in social mission alongside the sharing the word of God? The method that the study uses is literature review method. That is the literatures serve as sources of the information for the paper. The findings of the study from the literatures are presented and after the conclusion and recommendations are discussed.

2.0 Concept of the Church

Cheesman declares that "The church is both the agent and the goal of mission"⁴. Of course, church is the agent and the goal of

¹ Jan-Olav, Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes. Jesus as healer: a gospel for the body. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016.

² Ken Williams. The Miracles of Jesus. WestBow Press, 2024.

³ Andries Van Aarde. "UNDERSTANDING JESUS' HEALINGS'." *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 74 (2000): 223-236.

⁴ Graham Chessman. Mission Today. An introduction to Mission Studies. (Bukuru: ACTS, 1989) 132

mission. Through church God is doing missions in the world. Without church there could not be missions. Likewise, without missions there could not be church. Missions gave birth to church for the church to take missions to the world. It implies that God has mission to restore the whole world to him, and he sent Jesus to the world on mission for the world to be saved⁵. Jesus mission in earth led to the founding of the first church that includes apostles and other disciples of Jesus⁶. In short, church is one of the instruments that God depends upon to reach the world. Therefore, the need to discuss the concept of the church in this research is imperative. There shall be a brief discussion on church, in which its definition will be considered, and its types will be examined.

2.1 Definition of Church

According to Janvier, church has different meaning to different people. Some called it a building, or a denomination, while some called it worldwide church or the invisible church. But others referred to it as the people of God, or the body of Christ⁷. Hornby refers to church as “a particular group of Christian: a denomination: the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church”⁸. The word “Church” is from Greek Word “Ekklecsia” meaning the called-out ones⁹. This meaning is more appropriate for the Church in its Biblical meaning. The called-out ones from darkness to the light of the gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ. Its Greek word “Ekklecsia” appears about 114 times time and used in 109 times to mean community of God’s people in the New Testament¹⁰. So, Church is “The whole members of true

⁵ Fuller, 14.

⁶ Ibid, 14-23

⁷ Jenvier, 3

⁸ A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advance Learning’s Dictionary of Current English*, (New York: oxford University Press, 1995), 197.

⁹ Jim Murphy and Carolyn Murphy, *An International Ministers Manual*, (Blue Jay: Hundredfold Press, 2000), 202.

¹⁰ Ibid.

believers and only the true believers throughout the world”¹¹. Therefore, Church is not just anything as Janvier early represented the opinions or views of people about Church. It is not a building as in Church auditorium where the church meets. It is a denomination that forms from caring together of different local Churches of the same beliefs and tradition. But in a biblical meaning, it is world Church or invisible Church of true believers. It means the people of God or the body of Christ¹². All its members are in Christ and are knitted together by a supernatural Kinship. All their gifts and activities continue the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, originate from Christ, and are coordinated by him to the final goal”¹³.

2.2 Forms of the Church

There are two forms of the Church namely: Universal Church and local Church. Through these forms of the *Church God's desires to glorify* himself in mission on earth. God has chosen the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring glory to himself and restore the whole world to his kingdom through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

2.2.1 Universal Church

“The Universal Church consists of every believer in Jesus Christ all over the world”¹⁴. It is “all of those people who profess to be Christians”¹⁵. That is, it is “the total number of true believers and only the true believers throughout the world”¹⁶. This includes all born again people of all Christian churches or

¹¹ Complete Christian *Dictionary for Home and School*, (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1992), p. 104.

¹² Janvier, 3.

¹³ R. G. Clous, “Church,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2nded (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984), p. 246

¹⁴ Jim Murphy and Carolyn Murphy, *An International Ministers Manual*, (Blue Jay: Hundredfold Press, 2000), 203.

¹⁵ Complete Christian *Dictionary for Home and School*, (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1992), 104.

¹⁶ Ibid.

denominations¹⁷. Non-Christian cults like Mormons and Jehovah Witness and non-Christian religions such as Muslims, Hindus and so on, are not included¹⁸. “The universal Church also includes those who have gone on to be with the Lord in heaven”¹⁹. This is a church of believers in Christ who are no more living on earth here, the present believers in Christ and these ones who the Lord will save before his return to the world.

2.2.2 Local Church

“The local church is simply a group of believers who gather together to celebrate the goodness of the gospel. It is a true community of believers committed to Christ and to each other”²⁰. It is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to his teachings exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by his word and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth”²¹. As Universal Church is Biblical in meaning, so does the local church. Every Christian is expected to have his/her membership in a local Church²². A local Church may not necessarily have a personal building where they meet, and it may have. A local church is not only churches that have already built auditorium. Even some churches that meet from house to house or any other convenient place like Christian in the early stage of the Church are also local churches²³.

This type of Church can be seen in a rented apartment (like shop, hall, a member’s sitting room) or under tree shade, canopy or possess their own building in their own landed

¹⁷ Murphy and Murphy, 203.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Harsch H. Hobas, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), p. 74.

²² Murphy and Murphy, 203.

²³ Ibid.

properties and so on. These churches are gathering together for the purpose of mission; to praise and worship God; to express Jesus to the World; and to minister to themselves. These churches are the ones associating themselves together as denominational churches like Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterians, Anglican, Methodist, and Pentecostal and so on²⁴. All these churches or denominations are in the world doing missions for the Lord.

3.0 Social Ministry in Missions

Social ministry is a vital aspect of mission. It is a gate way for mission to gain entrance to every community of human society. Many challenges are there in society that may hinder mission work if they are left unattended to. Providing solutions to those challenges is the most concern of Christian missions today. True blood discloses that “most missions now seek to penetrate the total life of a community, not merely in what has been known historically as evangelism, but also by means of a great variety of approaches to human needs”²⁵. Based on the above scholar’s view, the only true way to penetrate the total life of any community is to meet its need. If its need is met, there will be an open door to the life of the community’s members. The approaches to meet the need are also the area of concern in missions. “The most evidence of these approaches are educational, industrial, agricultural, and medical, but there are now many supportive enterprises as well”²⁶.

Some of the areas of challenges in the world today are disasters, poverty, medical challenges, lack of food, lack of drinking water, housing problem, violence etc. All these social challenges can be met by the Church through her mission efforts to her community or beyond. Odesola identifies how these could be solved by the Church. He also offers through social ministry.

²⁴ Ibid, 203-219.

²⁵ Etton Trueblood, *The Validity of the Christian Mission* First Edition. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 11,12

²⁶ Ibid.

He noted that the time of disasters could serve as opportunity for missions among the victims²⁷. He suggests that church could provide food for widows, orphans, and other less-privileged people in her community or beyond²⁸. He adds that a church could also “organize seminars to training the unemployed youths and render assistance to provide soft loan to empower the participants to become self-employed”²⁹. He adds that church could provide free medical facilities and establish temporary schools for the people in the refugee camps and displaced families”³⁰. Church could also make provision for good drinking water for the community by digging well or sinking borehole and good housing for those who lack one. Doing such social ministry gives the church the opportunity to minister gospel to her environment and beyond. Clinard says “Genuinely evangelistic churches generally are those which are actively engaged in some forms of social ministry”³¹. By implication, any church which fails to involve in social ministry is not a genuine evangelistic church. In other words, the Church is not a Mission minded church, if she fails to involve in social ministry in the world. She is not a genuine evangelistic church when the social ministry is neglected. Social ministry seeks to transform a whole society both physically and spiritually. Jesus ministry on earth does not exclude social ministry. This is also reflected in the ministry of the apostles. Social ministry has been part of church’s ministry to the world right from the early stage of missions till this day³². So, social

²⁷ Adedayo Oladele Odesola, “” Strategies for Advancing the Frontiers of Missions and, Evangelism of the Local Church.” *Going and making Disciples of All Nations*. The Missionary Evangelist and Nurturing Task of the Church. Ministry Enrichment series. Vol. 3. Emiola Nihinola (Ed.). (Ogbomosho: The publishing unit NBTS, 2016), 80.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gordon Clinard *Evangelism: The cutting Edge* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist convention, 1973), P. 35.

³² Samuel Escobar, *A Time for Mission. The Challenge for Global Christianity*. David smith and John Stott (Ed.), (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 142-149.

ministry is highly relevant in missions if the great commission will be achieved for the Lord. It opens door for ministry quickly among people that the church or ministry is trying to reach for Christ.

4. Findings on the Areas of Church responsibility in Social Mission

There are three important areas that this research study has revealed as far as the social mission efforts of the church is concerned in the world.

4.1 The social mission is a church responsibility

This study has indicated that social ministry is one of the most important areas of missions that church is expected to do in the world. Making the disciples of all nations is not only based on preaching the gospel to sinners and the sinners will become the disciples. The church responsibility in the world goes beyond spiritual life of the people. Jesus in the scripture has fed thousands of people that he ministered the gospel to and also healed so many people. The same responsibility has been placed on the early church to pass on to the other generations of the church to the present-day churches. Historically, social mission has been the responsibility of churches in different generations. Specifically, modern day missionaries churches got involved in social mission and passed on the baton to the present-day Christian churches. This heritage must be continued until Christ come. So, the Church need to mobilise for social mission among the church members.

4.2 The social mission has relevance in the world today

The study depicts that the present time is a more needed time for the church to get involved in social mission in the world. There are areas where the social mission seriously is needed. These areas are the global challenges today. The areas are disasters, poverty, medical challenges, lack of food, lack of drinking water, housing problem, violence and so on. The

church should attend to these social problems that are challenging the world today alongside giving the gospel to the world. Both the spirituality and social life of the people are expected the church to meet today.

4.3 The social mission needs approaches to be employed

The study depicts the workable and strategic approaches that can be employed to conduct social mission in the global world which can help the church to be actively involved in fulfilling the great commission. By these approaches that have been for long times the church will be able to meet the needs of the people in the world through the social mission. They are identified as educational, agricultural, medical, industrial and entrepreneurial approaches. Through the establishment of educational centres people can be educated to liberate them from their poverty, lack of information on certain areas of their lives and equipping them for employability. They can equally be employed to train and teach others. Establishing the agricultural farms can also give the people the opportunity to learn techniques of farming to produce their own food and be empowered for self-employment. Medical approach can attend to the medical problems of the people by providing free medical care and establishing of medical centres where none is available or too expensive one does exist to make medical care accessible to the people of less privilege. Through establishment of an industry people in the areas where unemployment is the need can have access to employment for their survival. Introducing entrepreneurial programmes that will empower people with skills that will enable them to be self-employed and reliant is a key to deliver people from poverty that are globally common today. Lastly, the relief programme approach is a good approach that can easily attend to the need of good drinking water, relief from both natural and artificial (war) disasters that are rampaging the entire world today.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has examined the church responsibility in social mission. The study employs the literature review as a method by reviewing the literatures on church and social mission. The study presents the concept of the church by examining the meaning of the church and its forms. Two different forms of the church are presented which are universal church and local church. The universal church is a church of all Christian believers of the world which includes all Christian denominations while the local church is an assembly of the believers who are denominationally organised in one community to celebrate the goodness of God. The social mission is a social ministry of the church in the world to meet the needs of the people of the world. The study unveils three important findings. The study establishes that social mission is a responsibility of the church. It also reveals its areas that church needs to get involved in the global world. It finally reveals the ways that it can be done by the church. In view of these research findings, these recommendations are made for the Christian churches all over the world, especially in the developing nations to engage in social mission among the people. One, Church should not fold its hands in this contemporary time to be involved in social mission by meeting the needs of the people of the world alongside the sharing of the Christian faith with the people. Two, the church should employ the approaches that the study revealed such as educational, agricultural, entrepreneurial, industrial and relief programme approaches for its dimensional social mission in the world. Lastly, the Church should prioritise the holistic transformation of the people in its mission in the world by attending to both physical and spiritual needs of the people.

For further study, this study can be replicated in any social context by employing empirical method to conduct a similar research. The area like educational approach, agricultural, medical, entrepreneurial, relief programme or industrial

approach in social mission of the church can also be conducted as a research in any social context.

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