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125 Years of Serving in Mission (SIM) in Nigeria: A Missiological-theological Appraisal of Missionary Work

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Abstract

This article is a missiological-theological appraisal of the missionary work of Serving in Mission (SIM) in Nigeria, founded during the later 1890s. A historical study was undertaken to track the 125 years' work of Serving in Mission with the aim to appraise key aspects of the work. This study establishes the significance of the mission work in Africa and the historical activities of Serving in Mission, with a broad discussion on how the mission work resulted in the birth of an indigenous church that continues to build on the legacies of the founders of Serving in Mission. These legacies, strongly driven by a theological and holistic view of mission practice, were appraised. Furthermore, some issues left unaddressed through the work of Serving in Mission were identified and suggestions made.

1. Introduction

Missionary work in Africa has contributed greatly to the development of the continent in diverse ways. It has contributed in driving many developments in the area of education, health care, general wellbeing and many more inexhaustible areas. The work of Serving in Mission (SIM) in the last 125 years has experienced tremendous growth, which has also resulted in the birth of an indigenous church that continues to build on the different legacies, especially in the areas of expanding the

frontiers of missions to other parts of Africa, educational advancement, improving health care services and many more. These legacies were strongly driven by a firm theological and holistic view of mission practice, which has remained critical to the history of evangelical missions in Africa. However, despite the rich historical heritage of Christianity before and after SIM, and the laudable legacies they have left, some key theological issues remain unaddressed. Nigeria, and indeed Africa, seem to be bankrupt of the gospel again and again.

Thus, what is the state of the church after 125 years of SIM in Nigeria? What were the theological undertones that informed the work of SIM and how effective were they in engaging the deep-rooted cultural issues that seem to be challenging Christianity in Nigeria today? How should the Evangelical Church Winning All, an indigenous church that was birthed out of the work of SIM, reposition herself to engage the unaddressed challenges and continue to build on the enduring legacies of the founding fathers of SIM? This paper undertakes a historical study in order to track the 125 years' work of Serving in Mission with the aim to appraise the key aspects of the work of SIM using a missiological-theologically approach. This will no doubt provide a useful pathway for the church in Nigeria to adequately engage the unaddressed challenges that have continued to threaten the Nigerian church today; especially those deeply entrenched in history.

2. Background to Serving in Mission

The work of Serving in Mission (SIM) is one example of the many contributions of Western missionaries in Africa. This is generally true because "[t]he majority of Nigerian Christian churches came into being through the work of Western missionaries" (Dadang 2017:15), although, Bauer (2009:16) alludes to the fact that Christianity in Africa is not a recent happening. Its roots go back to the very time of the Apostles. Africa has played an important role in God's unfolding plan of salvation and redemption from the time of Abraham to the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus (Baba 2009:11, 12, 13). This rich historical role was lost along the line, which rendered Africa bankrupt of the

gospel. Thus, the burden and vision of the early missionaries to take the Gospel back to Africa, to the millions without Christ is commendable (Turaki 1999:130).

The first attempt to sow the seed of the Gospel in West Africa, especially in Nigeria, was presented by the Portuguese traders and Catholic missionaries who came to Benin and Warri around the end of the fifteenth century (Baba 2009:18). Their efforts did not bring any lasting results, and historians gave several reasons for this, for example, tribal wars and diseases (particularly malaria made it difficult for Europeans), traditional religion and culture dominance in the lives of the people (Baba 2009:18). Additionally, the few priests did not make much of an effort to train local catechists who would have provided continuity in the work. The lifestyle and commercial interests of the clergy often included the slave trade, which also contradicts the teachings of Christianity (Baba 2009:18). Isichei (1993:61, 62) also gave other reasons such as often political instability. He adds the fact that local rulers were concerned with expanding and protecting their territories and thus, they only supported mission work if it could advance their interests in which case, they may have welcomed the presence of priests. But, for the most part, these early missionary efforts did not see Christianity take root (Isichei 1993:63).

"By the middle of the nineteenth century, the modern missionary era in Nigeria was under way" (Sanneh 1983:120–122). This century experienced remarkable landmarks in missionary work in Nigeria. By 1842 many former slaves had returned to their people in the Lagos, Badagry and Abeokuta areas. It is notable that freed slaves, who had become Christians while in different countries, played a significant role in taking the gospel back to the various parts of West Africa (Sanneh 1983:122). Thomas Birch Freeman, a Methodist born in England, the son of an English mother and an African father spent many years as a missionary in the Asante Kingdom, the area now called Ghana (Sanneh 1983:122). During this time, he also travelled to Dahomey (Benin) and Yoruba land in Nigeria to try to establish churches in those lands

(Sanneh 1983:122). Samuel Ajayi Crowther of the Church Missionary Society established a station at Abeokuta (Isichei 1993:171). Isichei has argued that "by far, the most successful missionaries in nineteenth and twentieth-century West Africa were Africans" (Isichei 1993:156).

3. History of Serving in Mission in Nigeria

Fraud (2001:147) documents that the "Sudan Interior Mission was founded during the later 1890s by a British-born Canadian evangelical, Rowland Victor Bingham." He affirms that "It was in this context that missionaries of the Sudan Interior Mission contributed to planting the Christian church in Nigeria" (Fraud 2001:160). The Sudan area in West Africa consisted of a large number of black people who practiced African traditional religion, but it was evident that Islam was rapidly ravaging the Sudan, which aroused the interest to do mission (Turaki 1999:167). This and many other factors instigated the work of SIM in Nigeria.

Fraud (2001:160) narrates that in Toronto in June 1893, Rowland Bingham met with Mrs. Margaret Gowans, a staunch Christian woman who had keen missionary instincts for the spiritual needs of the Sudan which encouraged his missionary vision for the Sudan and propelled him to take steps to journey to the Sudan. Turaki (1999:176) elaborates that the first decade of 1893–1900, marking the beginning of SIM, was the formative period of the mission. In this era several unsuccessful attempts to gain a foothold in the Sudan were made. "SIM's first missionaries had the burden to reach the interior of Africa into the geographical area known as the central Sudan, Nigeria in the year 1893." (Baba 2009:11–12). Turaki further reveals that in "1893, the first attempt by the SIM's three pioneers, namely; Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham to gain a foothold on African soil ended in dismal failure" (1999:176). The attempt claimed the lives of Thomas Kent (in Bida) and Walter Gowans (in Girku) and forced Bingham to make a disappointing and humiliating return to Canada (Turaki 1999:176). But this frustration seemed to have been revisited in the light of business and Mission.

3.1 Bingham's idea of business and mission

Turaki reports on Bingham's idea on business and mission for the second attempt around 1899–1900. So, Bingham and his backers adopted the name African Industrial Mission, believing that developing businesses would help to finance the mission as well as open the doors for evangelism. Between February and March of 1899, the mission had sent out two missionaries, first to British East Africa, and then to Tripoli, North Africa and finally to the Sudan (Turaki 1999:112).

Bingham's ideas of the African Industrial Mission were captured in his missionary bulletin, *Faithful Witness*, which expressed his plea for self-supporting and self-propagating industrial mission in Africa. In this bulletin, Bingham argued for a biblical and historical continuity of economics and Christianity, showing that from its inception, the early church refused to divorce the spiritual from the secular as he argued for "the use of industries as an auxiliary to the preaching of the gospel" (Bingham 1898). Bingham believed that "industrial missions historically date their existence to the period of apostolic labors" (Bingham 1898). Bingham's plan for industrial mission called for the purchasing of 1000 acres in Northern Nigeria and the planting of coffee. The hope was that the mission station could achieve self-sufficiency in three years (Bingham 1898). Porter (1977:40) alleges that "it was within this missionary milieu that SIM was founded. Rowland V. Bingham was a premillennialist, which helped to explain his zeal for missionary work."

As brilliant as Bingham's idea was it eventually did not work. Turaki (1999:112) states that this too failed with Bingham being repatriated home and his colleagues following shortly afterwards. For the third attempt, they returned to the original name of Sudan Interior Mission and sent out a party of four, namely Alex W. Banfield, E. Anthony, Albert Taylor and Charles Robinson. Pategi in Nupe land was opened in March 1902 as their first missionary station (Turaki 1999:117).

Low is of opinion that "later the emergence of a commitment to evangelism unsullied by commercial associations would confirm commerce and Christianity's disestablishment" (1973:68). Stanley

(1983:72) states that the "espoused ideal of economy and Christianity was of a fundamentally evangelical variety", however, he thought that the market orientation of "free trade in religion" made clear and irrevocable by the English constitutional revolution, which had the effect of reducing the Church of England to naturally extend to the mission field where most evangelicals thought in times of investment and return in both souls and commodities (Stanley 1983: 76). Other missionaries, for example Roman Catholics, did not relate the two. They were forbidden to engage in trade by canon law, and the High Anglicans of the Universities Christian Mission who were primarily concerned with establishing an episcopal system in Sub-Saharan Africa (Stanley 1983:76).

Baeta (1968:102) has asserted that the evangelical Protestants though characterized with the Calvinist work ethic and inspired by Livingstone's injunction that they ought to encourage the Africans to cultivate markets as the most effectual means next to the Gospel for their elevation. Porter submits that "the relationship was between commerce, and Christianity was never complete" (1985:616). Porter reiterates that its completeness was never assured, because mammon was never at all times or in all places thought by evangelicals to be their ineluctable partner in missionary endeavour (1985:616). Robinson and Gallagher argue that "public interest in the continent in the late nineteenth century was low and sporadic consisting only of vague benevolence" (1981:24). Porter (1985:616) faults that such "interpretation led them to conclude on the need for preaching the Gospel of Christ in the Dark Continent if few regarded it as the duty of the state". He further notes that by the 1990s, mission and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa was no longer cantered on "Commerce and Christianity" (1985:616).

Fraud (2001:160) emphasizes that the missionary zeal that has been rekindled at Cambridge had waned, and the amalgamation between economy and Christianity, although not dead, had ceased to be the guiding philosophy upon which the extension of the evangelical faith

was based. Hastings (1976:3) points that most evangelical missionaries during this period believed in the superiority of their own civilization, which tends to despise both "African culture and African capacity". According to Hastings, they largely ceased to espouse the Old saw of "commerce and Christianity" (1976:3). Fraud continues, "the Lancashire cotton depression of the 1860s contributed decisively to this change" (2001:160). Porter notes that in West Africa where SIM would soon make inroads, "many of evangelical persuasion felt that the Bible should no longer be yoked to the plough" (1977:25, 26). There was a deliberateness to divorce economy and Christianity, and Davis and Huttenback add that "they had no time for its perverted cousin, capitalism" (1986:100). Thus, Porter brings the discussion on commerce and Christianity to a close, stating that "in addition to these reasons for the shift away from commerce and Christianity on the mission field, the advent of premillennialism (1977:40) was another contributing factor."

3.2 Premillennial views and mission

Porter (1977:40) explains that this belief; the expectation of Christ's return before the thousand years of peace on earth, gained prominence among many evangelicals and fundamentalists in the 1870s. Porter alleges that this phenomenon spread rapidly, and in missionary circles it had the effect of stimulating a drive towards evangelization as opposed to conversion (1977:40). According to Porter, if human history was going to end due to an act of ultra-supernaturalism, as the aggressive premillennialists impressed upon their often-reticent colleagues and superiors in its West African work where missionaries' unrelenting haste in evangelizing as many Africans as possible was powered by this premillennialism (1977:40). Palmer affirms that this early missionary theology tended to be individualistic and other-worldly. He also adds that, "salvation for these early missionaries was then the salvation of the soul, and not of the body. Salvation for them is the forgiveness of sins" (2015:87).

Palmer, however, admits that this individual dimension of salvation has some basis in Scripture. The Messiah is called Jesus because he will save

his people from sins and Jesus brought salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Salvation in this context is therefore equivalent to justification. Those who believe in Jesus are justified and saved; those who do not believe are not saved (Palmer 2015:87, 88).

Kunhiyop offers a theological balance on premillennialism. He opines that "those who hold to a premillennial position expect that Christ will return to earth, bodily, and personally to establish his kingdom" (Kunhiyop 2012:238). According to him, premillennialism is a characteristic of a dispensationalist approach which sees a basic distinction between the church and Israel in the present age and right up to the end times (2012:237). Kunhiyop also argues that Premillennialism tends to exaggerate distinction in order to fit everything into its scheme of things and he admits that premillennialists have been accused of being pessimistic about the future which can lead to a lack of concern about addressing present problems (2012:238). However, against the backdrop of the theological debate for and against the premillennial view, Serving in Mission's missionary efforts also faced severe restriction.

3.3. Restriction of Serving in Mission missionaries in Northern Nigeria

The work of SIM did not go unhindered. Barnes (1995: 412) argues that up until the late 1920s, colonial officials opposed most missionaries. Crampton alleges that they lacked social graces, common sense and self-discipline, leading to conflicts between missionaries and the British government (2004:59,60). Walls (2002:151) documents that Miller, one of the most eloquent missionary figures associated with Northern Nigeria "complained not that the British government practiced neutrality in religion, but it did not". Walls further explained that if the government was truly neutral, Islam would not have been making the progress it had in Nigeria, such that the Plateau people had a long experience of harsh treatment from Muslims. But while Muslim missionaries were allowed to go anywhere under British administration, Christian missionaries were restricted (Walls 2002:151).

Ubah refers to a 1951 plea by the Emir of Gwandu not to proselytize school children in leprosaria, that such a plea was made more than ten years after the matter was first raised suggests that the freedom of missionaries had not been effectively circumscribed (2007:13). Ubah further notes that "because of the restrictions and discrimination against the missionaries, there was fear that with independence, the situation would worsen in the early 1950s" (2007:13). However, in the midst of the stringent restrictions which Serving in Mission missionaries faced in Northern Nigeria, Tucker affirms that "Serving in Mission eventually became the largest Protestant interdenominational mission in Africa" (Tucker 1983:295, 299)

Gailyn notes that "years after Serving in Mission Missionaries, succeeding generations of missions' scholars began to seek to overcome paternalism" (1996:191). According to Gailyn "paternalism occurs when missionaries and their sending churches exert control over local Christians and their leaders" (1996:191). Gailyn alleges that "this control is almost always exerted through financial arrangements and the implicit authority of money" (1996:191). According to Gailyn, "it was out of this idea developed that the indigenous philosophy stream of thought on handling money and missions was developed" (1996:191). Gailyn says that contrary to this theory, "young churches should be self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing from their inception" (1996:195).

Serving in Mission later adapted the *three-Self* formula by saying that missions' churches should be self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting, while reflecting God's will in appropriate ways (1953:7). Hodges defines an indigenous church as a native church which shares the life of the country in which it is planted and finds itself ready to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself. Serving in Mission finally gave birth to an indigenous church denomination called Evangelical Churches in West Africa. Musa (2007:1) establishes the fact that Serving in Mission created Evangelical Church of West Africa in 1954 out of various Churches she planted already existing. It was

registered officially with the Federal Government of Nigeria. However, a common English saying "like father, like son" happened to become true of the newly registered Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA).

4. Like Father like Son

As Serving in Mission Missionaries were restricted in spreading the gospel in Northern Nigeria, the newly organized church, ECWA, was also restricted. Olatayo notes that "the absence of religious freedom continued even after ECWA was formed in 1954" (1993:1, 2). According to Olatayo, the aim had been to allow the church to inherit the property of the founding missionaries and continue the work in case the mission was expelled from Nigeria after independence in 1960 (1993:21). Olatayo (1993:39,40,41) also argues that the absence of religious freedom concerned delegates attending the 1956 ECWA General Assembly. They felt that the inclusion of a human rights clause in the Federal Constitution would provide legal safeguards. Sir Ahmadu Bello, the premier of Northern Nigeria, was invited to address a joint ECWA/SIM meeting in Jos where he assured them there would be no interference in mission work although Muslims would not be encouraged to convert to Christianity.

Bagudu alleges that churches were still concerned about the religious freedom of their new converts in Northern Nigeria. The situation compelled evangelical denominations to produce a joint statement to the Willinks Commission hearing in Zaria calling for guarantees of fair representation, equality under the law, religious liberty, and equal rights to education, employment and promotion (2003:220–223). He affirms that these church denominations did not make any representation regarding state creation; instead, they sought constitutional guarantees (Bagudu 2003:298). These requests were granted in 1959 when a Human Rights Declaration for the Northern Region was promulgated (Olatayo 1993:42, 43).

However, the rights and freedom of worship for Christians were still not guaranteed. Even when Nigeria got her independence on October 1, 1960, some mission organizations in Northern Nigeria were apprehensive. They feared persecution and the continuous absence of religious liberty for the churches they planted. The Lutheran missionaries provide a case-study, as Kastfelt notes that Danish Lutherans and their converts in Numan and Yola observed that the mood of missionaries was very uncertain. Various questions were raised. What would happen with their schools and mission stations? How would it face the challenges of nationalism and Islam? (1994:36, 37, 38). Kastfelt narrates how that, to meet these challenges, the Danish Lutheran missionaries redoubled their evangelism and developed their leadership training both for church purposes, and to provide the secular leaders that the country would need (1994:38).

The newly founded Evangelical Churches of West Africa was not exempted as Olatayo (1993:33, 34) asserts that "there continued to be outstanding cases of violence against Christians and denial of human rights". According to him, (1993:53, 55) "individuals and corporate churches were denied rights to purchase parcels of land to build churches, own property and freedom of proclamation faith". The 1966 Evangelical Churches of West Africa General Church Council heard reports of threats to burn a church in a particular village if it held services while Sir Ahmadu Bello campaigned there. Sir Ahmadu Bello could not get to the village, as God intervened by sending out fire from his presence, the fire burnt up his car on the way to the village (Olatayo 1993:33–34, 53, 55).

In fact, the growing missionary work through ECWA faced a lot of opposition during those early years. Fuller observes that, "History and culture were against her. One of those opponents was Islam, and its discrimination against Christians and traditionalists" (1980:199). However, like its founder, Evangelical Churches of West Africa has grown beyond Africa.

4.1. Church growth and leadership

ECWA experienced an exponential growth in membership, scope and leadership. Musa notes that ECWA currently estimates her membership to be over six million in Nigeria (Musa 2007:1). As a result of its numerical growth, the name was changed to Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA 2010:1, 2). The Evangelical Church Winning All's constitution was revised and approved in April 2019 to reflect global practices (Baba 2019:16).

Baba (2019:16) further affirms that "the missionary journey which started like a lifeless project had metamorphosed into a historical breakthrough that had over 10 million members in Nigeria alone and some 10,000 pastors of local gathering of believers associated with the Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria". He further asserts that apart from membership growth, Serving in Mission missionaries are no longer the dominant figure in the life of the African church; however, the enduring legacy SIM missionaries left has been its partnership relationship with the national church (Baba 2019:16).

5. Appraisal: The legacy of Serving in Mission

Today, the success story of Serving in Mission portrays "years of God's faithfulness in its missionary activities in Nigeria." (Gyang 2019:16) SIM's missionaries' success story left for ECWA legacies in the areas of medicine, education, theological trainings, Church growth and leadership and partnership.

5.1 Medical work

The medical work of SIM missionaries played a significant role in propagation of the Gospel of Christ in Northern Nigeria. Turaki (1999:167) mentions that missionaries viewed medical work as the most effective means of approaching Muslims with the Gospel. He reiterates that "SIM was the largest contributor in Northern Nigeria towards leprosy work and fighting eye diseases and blindness" (Turaki 1999:312). Butler adds that in the early days of the work, before there was even a nucleus of believers, the preaching of the Gospel-

accompanied generally by such medical help was available and was the main task of the missionary pioneers (1967:48).

5.2 Educational work

Another legacy of the pioneering missionaries is the use of education as tool for expanding the missionary work. Tushima (2018:4) notes that the pioneering missionaries regarded education as a tool and means of evangelism and church planting. Educational programmes and activities were used as a means of communication and spreading the Gospel of Christ. The type of education was mainly literacy with the goal of converts being able to read and teach the Word of God.

The place of educating those coming to faith was therefore a priority, particularly before being baptized. Butler (1967:48) emphasizes that an illiterate church can never be an effective Church; nor indeed, can it remain a live church in the context of this modern age. According to Butler, it was thus generally a prior requirement that those desirous of being baptized should not only give evidence of genuine repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, should also have made at least a serious attempt to learn to read (1967:48).

Tushima stresses that those early missionaries' educational goals of proclamation of the gospel of Christ, raising local evangelists and teachers of the gospel of Christ, and the strengthening and sustenance of Christianity in Africa guided the development of the philosophy, policy, activities and programs of education (2018:4)

5.3 Theological training schools

The missionaries employed the use of formal theological training. Tushima emphasizes that one cardinal objective in the missionaries' application of education "was the transformation and acquisition of socially desirable values, attitudes and skills" (2018:5). According to him, since students acquired their core values more from its environment than home, "education becomes the fulcrum for their character formation and spiritual formation" (2018:5). From Tushima's explanation it shows that early SIM missionaries were careful not to

build a one-sided education but one that was holistic. Butler shades light on the fact that the mere amassing of knowledge can never bring new life to the soul. Yet the very Gospel we preach, cleansing the heart and setting free the soul, at the same time renews the mind, creating within it new desires, releasing new potentialities, and redeeming the whole of life from the destructive effects of sin (1967:48).

As a result, SIM missionaries started Bible training schools to train lay evangelists and leaders. The earliest were Bible College Kagoro, and Bible College Billiri, then later Aba Bible College. All these have become theological seminaries. Kafang (2009:32) affirms that schools are not located anyhow and anywhere. They are located deliberately looking at the size of the estimated population of the area the school will serve, the distances, and what will be achieved by citing it there. Kafang (2009:32) also points out that "that was the case with the early theological institutions when the missionaries started them". Another legacy SIM Missionaries left was partnership with its national church.

5.4 Partnership

SIM did not break ties with the national church she founded. Chiang notes that "partnership began to develop in the late twentieth century, as the world became increasingly interconnected" (1992:284,). According to Chiang "this interconnectedness led to heightened cooperation among international businesses and governments" (1992:285). Chiang believes that by this time the Christian movement in the Southern Hemisphere had surpassed that of the Northern Hemisphere in both number of Christians and missionaries (1992:286, 287–289). From the ideas of Bush and Lutz "partnership must not be naively constructed but governed by fundamental Christian principles of mutuality (Bush and Lutz 1990:46).

Unfortunately, Lederleitner laments that "many churches and mission agencies misunderstand the purpose of partnership" (2010:132). To Lederleitner (2010:132) "it is not just giving money or cutting a check". He is rather of the view that there is need to go beyond that to the place where we help partners develop infrastructure and capacity, so they are

sustainable over the long haul. Bush and Lutz's understanding of Partnership shows that it is an association of two or more Christian autonomous bodies who form a trusting relationship and fulfil agreed-upon expectations by sharing contemporary strengths and resources to reach their mutual goals (1990:46).

This understanding of partnership is what ECWA/SIM has operated over the years through a yearly memorandum of understanding. An example of a yearly memorandum of understanding between ECWA/SIM reads:

> That in consideration of the historic linkage, common bond, common purpose and evangelical beliefs, both the Church and the Mission do prayerfully commit themselves to a loving, friendly, trusting, co-operative, inter-dependent working relationship and mutual understanding (ECWA/SIM2008:2).

The memorandum of understanding allows ECWA to govern itself in accordance with its Constitution and through its General Church Council. SIM governs itself with SIM's Manual and its Board of Governors and matters relating to the working relationship and or mutual understanding between the national Church and the Mission are governed by this agreement (ECWA and SIM 2010:3). This memorandum of understanding shall normally be jointly reviewed by both parties every five years (ECWA and SIM 2010:6).

Smalley expresses that, "It seems to have become axiomatic in much missionary thinking that a church which is self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, is by definition an indigenous church" (1999:474–479). However, Smalley adds that the criteria of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation are not necessarily diagnostic of an indigenous movement. They are essentially independent variables, because it may be very easy to have a self-governing church that is not indigenous (1997:231–237).

Certainly, the partnership relationship between ECWA/SIM has been good all through the years. However, one would have offered a godly

advice to SIM that with the COVID-19 pandemic, Serving in Mission needs to revisit and restore her spirit of raising funds from overseas partners to support the ECWA Theological Seminary Jos and others. This is in the light of the fact that the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic might weaken theological institutions and churches in Africa economically.

Indeed, the Evangelical Church Winning All has experienced tremendous numerical growth. However, the founding fathers, SIM left some issues unaddressed. For the purpose of this article a few of them are mentioned. Laubach observes that the "church is characterized by *Illiteracy* because majority of the church's rural membership cannot read and write" (1967:58). Another unaddressed matter is *tribalism and ethnicity*. This a more sinister factor which seems increasingly to have raised its ugly head in ECWA leadership at all levels. Turaki (1997:146) offered words of hope that "the challenge of addressing the issues of ethnicity, racism and tribalism lies in the hands of the church". He advocates further that "the church has the spiritual and moral resources required to tackle these issues effectively" (Turaki 1997:146).

A further unaddressed matter is issue of discipleship. Because the early converts were not discipled, the indigenous church is characterized by nominalism. Turaki (2000:281) explains that "nominalism is neither a foreign term to us nor is it distant from us". He further notes that "Nominalism is both a western and a non-western problem. Nominalism among second generation Christians is on the increase in Africa". Hendricks (1991:8) laments that the "nominal way of many church members has made them have divided loyalty in their Christian faith". Hendricks (1991:9) goes on to describe this category of Christians as people who "are under the Word of God, but not in it for themselves". These are people who believe in Christ and come to church, but who during the week turn to diviners, astrologers, witch doctors and spiritual houses for healing and help.

Additionally, the effect of dualism that seems to be sown many years ago is widening and ravaging the church today. Cope called this phenomenon, "A spilt mindset." Cope (31–32) asserts that

> Over the past two centuries Christians, especially evangelicals, have developed a split view of the world that dominates much of church today. This dualistic thinking developed as one part of the church took the stand that God was responsible for salvation and that it was the church's responsibility to look after people's basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, health, and education. Another part of the church responded to this stance with a resounding "No!" This group believed that only people's souls were of value and that the church was to focus on evangelism. This latter group, identified as evangelicals, was concerned with "spiritual" or "sacred" matters, while the former group, identified as liberals, was concerned with "material" or "secular" matters. This split sacred-secular view of the world was exaggerated by an increasing emphasis among some evangelicals on the immediate return of Christ and the belief that the material world would be destroyed.

The question then is 'would the Evangelical Church Winning All reposition herself to engage these unaddressed challenges and continue to build on the enduring legacies of her founding fathers?'

6. The challenge

In the quest for ECWA to break new opportunities for mission practices amidst the changing national and global contexts, ECWA's leadership must appraise the position of ECWA today after many years of being self-governing. Firstly, ECWA's assessment must not be on the basis of prestige, power, buildings, money or large congregations, rather, as part of mission practice, its leadership levels need to assess the potential context within which ECWA operates and does mission work appropriately. Secondly, ECWA needs to identify the major driving forces that transform people and cultural norms within the African context with a view of reaching them with Christ. Cope (2011:39)

reports that in addition to our awareness of the population and geographic challenges of the task of reaching the world, "we can compare the job of reaching every creature today with the job of the first-generation church" (Cope 2011:39). Cope adds that we know today that some eleven thousand languages in the world still have no witness of Jesus. However, so much has changed in the context. For instance, we know which of these groups have already been targeted by translation ministries and how long it will take them to be reached. We have also experience advancement in computers, language, and mapping programs that have made giving meaningful tools to workers in the field. "All of this helps us to evaluate the job the church needs to accomplish and the strategies needed to do it." (Cope 2011:39)

The gap seen in the area of training leaders through the theological institutions is another area that must be appraised. The reality is that most of the grassroots pastors or mission workers are educationally deprived even though they are undeniably committed Christians. They need training, but much of it must be orally transmitted through non-formal learning methods. Chrispal (2019) notes that:

> The materials from traditional theological education place a heavy emphasis on reading and writing, which is quite difficult for oral-based learners. They also carry different worldview presuppositions. Therefore, we need adaptable materials with a solid biblical base which are easily transferable according to the needs of people.

There is an urgent need for theological training in ECWA institutions to be redesigned to address the emerging needs of our time, particularly that of raising leaders for the church. Chrispal (2019) alludes to the divide between the church and theological education which is said to have widened. He notes that within the last 30 years in India, there has been an explosion of church growth, much of it, especially in North India, through Christian workers who have no connection with the traditional denominations and seminaries (2019), and this is also true in Nigeria. As a result of the divide between the church and theological education, the leaders of many churches are not being equipped by the

seminaries, nor are the leaders of the seminaries well acquainted with the needs and challenges of the emerging churches. This is affecting the thoroughness of ministry at the grassroots. The existing gap between theological institutions and churches must therefore be bridged, and emphasis placed on Spiritual and character formation for mission and ministry.

The power of the church to accomplish and sustain her missional work is deeply imbedded in the Bible, upon which the values of the denomination, ECWA are said to be based. Wright rightly posits that, "there would be no good news if God's blueprint is ignored; there would be no knowledge of that good news if the story of God's love and its redemptive achievement were not recorded for us in the Scriptures (Parker, 2009:5), thus biblical theology must remain the basis for all missional practices in ECWA, and ECWA must continue to uphold the comprehensive richness of what the Bible teaches. This can only be possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, because when the gospel is carried in the power of the Spirit, the evidence from the life of the early church suggests that there is first 'transformation' and then 'influence' (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009: 33). The long-awaited transformation becomes evident as lives are turned around

The inseparable relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is thus the power of the gospel. Asamoah-Gyadu (2009:32) rightly asserts that the work of the Holy Spirit is to take what is of God, animate it with his Presence and through that, restore life to human brokenness. Thus, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, ECWA can address the issues calling for attention today and chart a course for the expansion of the Gospel in this dispensation.

Lastly, the need for discipleship is increasingly widening as Africa is become more youthful and the future of church depends on it. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (2007:242) assert that:

> Since the church is the body of Christ on earth today, then thirty years from now it still will need to be doing what Jesus did while here in his physical body two thousand years ago. While the

> church's methods must constantly change in a changing world, the church's mandate will never change: we are called to know and love God (worship), love each other (fellowship), grow in Christlikeness (discipleship), serve God by serving others (ministry), and share good news (evangelism).

The ministry of church has to be holistic like never before. In fulfilling the mandate of the church, we must recognize the fast-changing context, with a majority of the church population becoming youthful. Hence, the ministry of the church must be investing in equipping her teeming youth towards enabling them to fulfil the mandate. The teeming youthful population of Africa are in need of Jesus Christ and only discipleship can accomplish that. Landa Cope (163) posits that "if believers are to regain the influence God designed for us in every arena of life, we are going to need a greater revelation of Christ." In a time where there are many conflicting narratives fighting for the attention of the youths, the Evangelical Church Winning All must be willing to invest in making Jesus known to them. Cope (2011:163) adds,

> One of the important questions in the New Testament, one Jesus was continually leading people to ask, is, "who is Jesus?" The great transforming truths of the gospel are all contained in the answer to that one question. Who is Jesus Christ?

Only the holistic knowledge of Jesus can transform the mind of the youths and equip them for the fast-changing context. The founding missionaries were young people, unfortunately, many youths seem unequipped for our increasing secularized society, but the knowledge of Jesus through discipleship will prepare them for the secularised world. Youth people in the church cannot continue to be clueless on how to engage their world. It is the responsibility of the church to prepare them. Cope (2011:169) notes,

> Today, we talk a great deal about secularization in societies – Christmas, Easter, Sundays, and so on. And it is true that much of culture, even religious culture, has been turned into a business venture void of additional meaning. Who is responsible for that

secularization process? Many believers think nonbelievers are to blame. But that cannot be true. Such people don't know God and don't have the understanding to change culture. They do live in a secular world, because their world does not include the living God. Believers, on the other hand, have a choice!

Now is the time for this to be the priority of church; the empowering of the youthful population through discipleship to be the salt and light of the different sector of the society.

7. Conclusion

The place of the Bible in shaping the mission work of the church and sustaining the long-lasting legacies of missionary organisations like Serving in Mission in Nigeria and around the world is imperative and cannot be over emphasized. God has continued to sustain his mission throughout history even amidst several challenges. This is no doubt an existential proof of God's work seen in God's loving self-revelation intended for our redemption. Thus, as creation groans and awaits its redemption, (Romans 8:19–24), in a violent and turbulent changing mission context, ECWA congregations can take advantage of the innovative holistic mission practice as a strategy to advance the Church's mission methodology of reconciliation, healing and witnessing to the broken-hearted.

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