A Biblical Examination of the 'Great Commission' and Church Planting in Nigeria

Abstract

This paper made a biblical Examination of the 'Great Commission' and Church Planting, with a particular focus on the amazing relevance of Church Planting to the 'Great Commission'. Earlier scholars had examined the 'Commission' from ethical or sociological perspectives but this paper examined same subject from a biblical perspective. This study is library based although oral interview with prominent religious leaders and Church planters in Nigeria were conducted. Findings were made and recommendations were based on discoveries before concluding remarks were documented. Finally, this paper challenged contemporary 21st Century Church to active response towards effective 'Evangelism and Soul Winning' via Church Planting on virgin territories in cities and villages because the Church that does not save the lost is lost itself.

Keywords: The Great Commission, Church, Church Planting, Evangelism,

Introduction

Evangelism is a direct consequence of obedience to the great commission; this had been a principal preoccupation of the Church since its inception. It was commanded as an abiding obligation of the Church till the end of the age and successive generations of the Church have taken this mandate seriously over the centuries. The Acts of the Apostles reveals the zeal of the Apostles in this direction and the early Church is also not left out in the venture as the gospel experienced a tremendous dispersal, particularly in the Roman Empire, through the planting of multiple churches.[1] In the same vein, the 19th and 20th century Church emulated earlier evangelistic passion and adventures of the Apostles via the formation of several independent missionary bodies at that point in time. Creditably, some of these missionary groups brought the gospel to Africa. The 21st century also witnessed unrelenting efforts in the pursuit of global evangelism as catalogues of conferences and mission minded seminars have been held, there and then, declarations made were backed with concrete actions which have seen the gospel message promoted and taken to several countries of the world. Many Church organizations have developed their own Mission Boards and Evangelistic groups which have performed creditably well; however, ''the harvest is plenty…..''

No doubt, the 21st century presents great and formidable challenges to the Christian Church: political, social, demographic, economic, philosophical and religious problems of all kinds. World population is on the increase and novel communities emerge each day. The

[1] Aubrey Malphurs, 1998. *Planting Growing Churches: for the 21st Century* Michigan, Grand Rapids, 52.

world has become increasingly integrated and each passing day we become aware of strange illnesses, injustices, crimes against humanity, terrorism, suffering and poverty around the world. The rampage of secular humanist, the relentless and violent march of other religions, especially Islam, and the holocaust of the HIV/AIDS; the nuclear threats in the Middle and Far East, the growth of urbanization, the escalation of crimes such as sexual assault, moral decay in public life have all placed new demands on today's Church. The place of morality in great commission has been identified by Ajayi when he submits that ethical inclination will go long way to enhance effectiveness in evangelism. This paper identifies diverse challenges but maintains however that the way forward for today's Church, in spite of contemporary rage and challenges, lies in massive corporate obedience to the great commission through planting of mission minded and high impact Churches.

Meaning of Evangelism

There are various definitions of evangelism. It is from Greek concept 'evangelismos' meaning ''preaching or a zealous effort to spread the gospel,[2]'' Evangelism may also be defined as the process of explaining the gospel to the sinner and inviting him to meet Christ. The task of evangelism is an instructional process which focused mainly on the intellect rather than any other form of psychological pressure. In other words, it involves the clear explanation of the gospel message.[3] It is the practice of giving information about a particular doctrine or set of beliefs to others with the intension of converting others to the Christian faith. It is an act of preaching the gospel. Evangelism is communicating the good news of Jesus Christ and inviting response. Evangelism requires verbal communication of the good news, a call on people to trust Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, become Christ followers, be filled with the Holy Spirit and join God's community and mission in the world. Wagner opines that:

> Nine words are used in the New Testament to describe the evangelism that took place in the early Church: (1)*Matureo*- sharing your experience with others, (2)*Laleo*-talking to others, (3*)Euangelizo*-telling others about Jesus Christ, (4)Disdasko-teaching others the gospel systematically, (5)*Dialegomai*- Answering reasonable objections, (6)*Katangello*- driving home the gospel, (7)*Kerusso*-announcing the gospel to people who can respond, (8)*Mathateuo*-convincing others to follow Jesus, (9)*Peitho*-Persuading those who are hesitant.[4]

[2] D.J Kennedy(1992).*Evangelism Explosion,* Wheaton: Tyndale Publishers. 22

[3] F.E. Enegho and C. Enisefah, *The Christian Evangelism and Its Implication on Church Growth: An Evaluation,* A paper presented at the XIth Quadrennial International Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies in Part Dickson, Malaysia,july 31-August7,2004.

[4] P. wagner, 1995.*Breaking Strongholds in your City, Califonia, Regal Books,43*

The Great Commission and Church Planting

The great commission is found in Mathew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47, and Acts 1:8. A careful analysis of these passages reveals three components that make up the commission. *The first component consists of the intentional pursuit of people*. This is reflected in the word "go", as it is recorded in both Mathew 28:19 and Mark 16:15. Jesus clarifies what He meant by this word in such passages as Luke 5:27-32, 15:1-10 and 19:1-10, where He developed the concept of seeking lost people such as Levi the tax collector, his friends, sinners in general and Zacheaus . Several churches in the 21st century still wait in expectation for lost souls to come to them. This tactics may have worked years ago when adherents of other religions were timid, tolerant and less violent. This method does not work today that other religions vigorously compete, and sometimes, violently contend with Christianity. Besides, such expectation does not work in a culture that is significantly or predominantly not delighted in church going. The twenty-first century church needs to take initiatives and bold-steps to pursue or seek after lost souls.

The second component of the great commission is evangelism, In Mark 16:15, Christ says, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." In Mathew* 28:19-20, *He says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy-Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*". To this end, the great commission church is the one that places a high priority on evangelism. A situation where the church in general and the people in particular are not simply talking about evangelism but are actively seeking and reaching out to lost Souls. A church that is not seeking or reaching out to lost people has lost its purpose.[5]

The third component of the great commission is edification. Once the church seeks out the lost people, it does not drop them but precedes to disciple them. This is the process of edification, which involves bringing new believers to Christ-likeness (Eph.4:11-16). This involves a personal commitment to Bible study (which transforms their world view), fellowship, communion and prayer (Acts 2:42). Consequently, the local church provides a place where a new believer becomes a disciple and mobilized for service; this creates a great link between 'The Great Commission' and 'Church Planting.

It is relevant however to ask, how can the great commission be effectively implemented? The answer lies in the examination of how the early church implemented the commission. Further explanation is found in the book of Acts where the early church sought to put into practice the 'commission command' of Jesus. The attempt of the early church to practice the commission command of Jesus is one of the major thematic concerns of the book. A careful study of the book of 'Acts of the Apostles' reveals that the early church implemented the great commission mandate primarily by effective church planting, that is, by planting daughter churches, even in private apartments.

[5] Aubrey Malphurs, 1998. *Planting Growing Churches,* Michigan :Grand Rapids, 42

A study of the missionary journeys in Acts of Apostle is an attestation to the fact that the journeys were Paul's foray into the world of Church planting across pagan territories and cultures. As a result of the said trips, Paul and others successfully planted high impact churches in major cities such as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth and Ephesus.

If churches must reach out to significant cities of the world, it is beyond individual effort. Churches must corporately multiply themselves by starting a network of significant, biblically based churches in target areas. Unfortunately, not very many churches caught this kind of vision. It would be magnificently exciting and rewarding if churches could catch the vision now, particularly in the 21st century. Ade-Adeleke J, while citing Billy Sunday, defines Soul winning 'as a definite effort to lead a definite person to accept a definite Savior at a definite time'. He opines further that:

> Soul winning is the conscious, persuasive and persevering efforts made by a Christian to lead a sinner (unbeliever) to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, thereby saving him from the jaws of death and eternal hell through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.[6]

Going by Billy Sunday's argument, it is crystal clear that contemporary urban churches and cathedras had wrongly conceived the great commission mandate as being optional, thus considering it as the duty of gifted soul winners and burden-bearers. It is imperative for the church and her leaders to embark on corporate obedience to the great commission mandate. It is not optional but mandatory. It is not a question of being gifted but a question of readiness and willingness to obey. In fact, Church Growth analyst, Lyle Schaller, sees church planting as "the Key to reaching the next generation". While speaking at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist New York Fellowship in Atlanta, Schaller argued, "If you are interested in reaching new people, by far, the most effective way to do this is through church planting".[7] Another church growth expert, Peter Wagner, once submitted that the single and most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches".[8]

Studies have revealed that a large number of churches are declining and many are dying. In the Pastor's Manual for Effective Ministry, Win Arn writes, "In the years following World War II, thousands of new churches were established. Today, out of the approximately 350,000 churches in America, four out of the five are either leveled out or are declining". He notes further, "In the normal life –cycle of churches, there is birth, and in time, death. Many churches begin a slow decline around their 15th to18th year" [9] Not only is the American Church, for example, declining but there is a significant reduction in church attendance. Sadly enough, various cults and non evangelical religions are filling the vacuum. It must be

[6] J.Ade-Adeleke,2011.*Effective Biblical Evangelism* ,Ibadan, Gideon Global Press ,11
[7] L. Schaller, 1991. *44 Questions for Church Planters*, Nashville, Abingdon, 20.
[8] P. wagner, 1990. *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, 16
[9] W. Arn, 1988. *The Pastor's Manual for Effective Ministry*, Monrovia: Church Growth Publications, 41.

noted that this is not peculiar to America alone. Worthy of note is the Islamic fire that is ravaging African nations, particularly, Nigeria. The formidable anti-gospel agenda by the *Boko-Haram* group to recapture Nigeria and frustrate evangelism is a force to contend with. The Church must wake up from deep slumber and embark on purposeful soul winning and evangelism by planting mission minded churches.

Aubrey once argued that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the 'Mormon church', is one of the world's richest and fastest-growing religious movements or groups. Since World War II, its ranks have quadrupled to more than 8.3 million members worldwide. With more than 4.5 million U.S members, Mormonism already outnumbers Presbyterians and Episcopalians combined. He is of the opinion that if current trends hold, by some estimates, they will number 250 million worldwide by 2080 and surpass all but the Roman Catholic Church among Christian bodies. It is both significant and alarming that several major cults have doubled their sizes within recent years and those new religions are prospering. Apart from the Mormon Church is Jehovah's Witnesses which had grown rapidly. On the other hand, Eastern faiths, especially, Buddhism and Islam are spreading like bushfire.[10]

The Church and Her Purpose

The Christian Church is a New Testament institution beginning from Pentecost and ending probably with the rapture, that is, the second coming of Christ. Dag Heyward sees the Church as ''a regular gathering of Christians for the purpose of teaching'', to him, this is called a church.[11] He argues further that the Lord commanded us to go into the world and gather people together regularly in order to teach them the word. God is in the business of creating gatherings of teachable people. God by His Spirit is raising men who will go into all parts of the world to gather people regularly to teach them His word. (Matt. 28:18-20)

The more gatherings and groups there are, the more the "Great commission" is being fulfilled. The more gatherings and groups we teach, the more we obey the great commission command. These groups are the churches that are being planted by obedient servants of God. There is the need to start many gathering of people in every possible location so as to fulfill the great commission. The vastness of the world and the distribution of people demand that pastors and people move away from the one congregation church to multiple gatherings in different locations. Prophet Olowere, the founder of several assemblies of Christ Apostolic Church, "*Oke-Agbara*", in Nigeria, corroborated this opinion in an interview conducted with him when he opined 'that Church Planting is a direct obedience to the great commission command and there is the need to gather people at different locations for teaching'.[12] Importantly, the "superstar" mentality of the church must be allowed to die, not only in Africa but in the whole wide world. The superstar mentality wants us to have one great pastor

[10] Aubrey Malphurs, 1998. *Planting Growing Churches*
[11] D. Heyward, 2014.*Church Planting*, Benin City: Hosanna Publishing House,3
[12] Prophet Olowere, *Interview Respondent*, 7/10/2017

whom everybody acknowledges and praises. We are often deceived into thinking that the pastor with the largest congregation is the most successful. Pastor Aremu, the minister in charge of 'Redemption Centre', Ibadan, Nigeria, in an interview conducted with him, He supported the view that the so-called 'superstar mentality' is anti- gospel.[13] The 21st century church needs to be productive. She must reproduce herself.

More importantly however, churches must be planted according to where God directs. Divine direction is not negotiable. Churches must be planted in cities and villages. There is the need to plant churches in virgin territories. It is pathetic that several 'church planters' in the 21st century concentrate only on areas where things are already happening, whereas, several untouched and virgin areas exist, and such areas are populated with the oppressed, the afflicted and the idolaters, particularly, in Africa[14]. The 21st century church needs to re-ignite the fire, the passion, the commitment to soul winning and church planting, the church must encourage her youths towards this direction. The church must introduce her young men to this glorious task. Today's church leaders must be concerned that Islam is taking over large sections of Africa and the world, yet, the church looks unruffled. Moslems are sacrificial and do not mind going to the furthermost towns and villages of several nations. Sadly enough, Christians who are commanded to go to the uttermost parts of the earth are sitting in the nearest and most convenient cities of the world! The Bible never said, "ye shall be my witness in the *nearest, most convenient and prosperous cities of the world***".**

The Relevance of Teaching and Preaching to the Commission Command

Observably, the Gospel of Mathew is essentially a missionary text because of Mathew missionary vision. He focused more on providing the newly founded community of believers with the understanding of the purpose of its calling and mission.[15] Young argued that the reference to the mandate given the Church to evangelize the world is known as the ''great commission.'' These words are seen as the greatest and most important command that Jesus gave the Church.[16] The command appears five times in the four gospels and Acts.

The exegesis of the great commission as presented by Mathew 28:18-20 is hereby presented. Mathew's account of the commission command includes the nations ''Pantata ethne''. He does not give the Jews special privileges; rather, he treats them as part of all nations to be discipled. The risen Christ sent His followers into the entire world to disciple ''all nations.''[17]The theme of discipleship is central to Mathew's gospel and to his understanding of the Church and her mission. The word ''disciple'' is mostly used by Mathew. He used it seventy-three times in his gospel, Mark forty-six times while Luke used same word thirty-seven times.[18] The imperative of the great commission, ''*teaching them to*

[13] Pastor Aremu, *Interview Respondent*,12/10/2017
[14] D. Heyward, 2014,.*Church Planting*,*4*,*5*,*6.*
[15] DJ Bosch, 1991,Transforming Mission, New York, Orbits Books,57.
[16] GD Young,1984, Bible Dictionary, USA, Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 66.
[17] GD Young,1984, Bible Dictionary,66
[18] GD Young,1984, Bible Dictionary,73

observe all that I have commanded you'' and ''*baptizing them*'' appear to be the real content of disciple making process.

Mathew remarkably distinguished between *teaching and preaching* (proclaiming) whereas Mark used the two terms as synonyms. According to Mathew, Jesus never preached to His disciples, He *taught them* but preached to the masses and unbelievers.[19] Therefore, the content of discipleship should be: to teach people. The promise ''I will be with you,'' refers to the baptism in the Holy Spirit that is to come at Pentecost. The inference could be drawn therefore that Jesus demanded that people are gathered together regularly in order to be taught. Evangelism and crusades are good, as they are the starting point of teaching. Evangelist must go forth, but are they really fulfilling the great commission? Yes and No! Yes, because they have started the process, and No, because without teaching, which comes by establishing churches, the great commission will not be truly fulfilled. Simply put, the great commission is evangelism which is followed by planting of churches. The churches are gatherings and these gatherings are to be taught the word.

Preaching is relevant to 'the commission' because it is the act of proclaiming the gospel, the proclamation of God's saving work. The Old Testament mentions several prominent preachers: Noah, who warned of the impending flood and proclaimed God's ark of safety, was called a 'preacher of righteousness' (II Pet.2:5). Solomon described himself as a preacher who taught 'words of truth' (Eccl. 1:2; 12:9-10). At God's direction, Jonah made a preaching mission to Nineveh, declaring God's judgment and mercy. (Jon.3:2) Like Jonah, all the prophets of the Old Testament were regarded as preachers.

John the Baptist called for repentance in preparation for the Messiah's appearance. (Matt. 3:11-12) Jesus was under a divine order to spread the gospel by means of preaching. (Lk.4:43-44) With a sense of martial urgency, Jesus and the Apostles preached in homes, by the seaside, in the temple, and in synagogues. In sending out the twelve disciples, Jesus commanded them. "As you go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7)

In the New Testament, The gospel advanced on the wings of preaching. The zeal generated by Pentecost, coupled with growing persecution of the young church, led the disciples to preach everywhere in the known world. (Mark 16:20). Phillip, the preaching deacon, 'preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). Paul the Apostle interestingly declared his credentials as one whom God "appointed a preacher and an apostle" (I Tim. 2:7). Virtually all New Testament preaching carries an evangelistic thrust. Paul declares, 'It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe'. (I Cor. 1:21) The redemptive mission of Christ is a fulfillment of prophecy, particularly, His death and resurrection was the main theme of apostolic preaching. (I Cor. 1:2-3; 15:14) The preacher's personal testimony to Christ's power in his own life was also a feature in several preaching (Acts 4:20). Consequent upon

[19] GD Young,1984, Bible Dictionary,66

such evangelistic passion, thousands were saved when Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:41)

Today, distinction is made between *Preaching* and *Teaching*; such distinction is relevant and it is evident in the New Testament. How? Both Jesus and Paul regarded themselves as both *preachers* and *teachers*, and were so regarded by others. Luke reports that Jesus "taught the people and preached the gospel" (Luke 20:1). Paul testifies that he was appointed "a preacher, an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles" (II Tim. 1:11). These titles suggest a difference between preaching and teaching. The best New Testament Preaching, while aimed at motivating sinners to receive Christ, had a strong element of teaching. Paul charged young Timothy to convince, rebuke and exhort through the preaching of the word and with all longsuffering (2 Tim. 4:2).

Teaching

The word ''teach'' comes from an Anglo-Saxon word, *teacean*, which means, to show how to do. According to Athearn, to teach is to help to learn. Therefore, He sees teaching as an act of ''helping others to learn''[20]. Betts also argues that 'teaching requires us to reveal our reasons to the student, and by so doing, submit the reasons to his evaluation and criticism'. It involves a number of activities on the part of the teacher such as questioning, explaining, demonstrating, motivating, listening, making judgments, evaluating etc.'[21] Ilori however submits that teaching is the introduction of control into the experience of a person, arguing that any child will grow and develop whether he or she is taught or not but such growth and development will be without definite goals, direction or purpose.[22] The New Testament used this concept to indicate instruction in the faith. Thus, teaching is to be distinguished from preaching or the proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian world".

Teaching in the Christian faith was validated by Jesus who was called *Rabbi* (teacher) more than anything else. Since sound instruction in the faith is essential to the spiritual growth of Christians and to the development of the Church, the Bible presents numerous passages that deal with teaching (Matt. 4:23, Luke. 4:14, Acts 13:1-8, Rom. 12:6-8, Gal. 6:6). Nevertheless, special attention is directed to the danger of false teachings and false teachers. Christians are warned to test those who pervert the true gospel (2 Tim. 3:1-7, 1 Peter 2:1-3). Sound teaching was, no doubt, a concept deeply engraved in the Jewish mind since Old Testament times. Moses and Aaron were considered teachers of God's commandments. (Exod. 18:20) Parents were also directed to teach their children about God and His statutes (Deut. 4:9-10). At this juncture, we can argue that the Jews are sufficiently familiar with the dichotomy between preaching and teaching. Summarily therefore:

i. When the word is preached, our souls are ministered to.
ii. When the word comes by teaching, our minds are involved in receiving
iii. Teaching has a more lasting effect than preaching does.

[20] W. Athearn, 1932. *The Minister and the Teacher*, New York: The Century Co., 5
[21] W. Betts. 1966. *The Nature and Direction of Learning*. New York: Appleton Co., 397
[22] J. Ilori,2005.*Principles and Methods of Teaching Christian Religious Education*, Bukuru: ACTS, 57

iv. Teaching is sometimes more difficult to prepare or assimilate whereas Preaching enters quickly but fades or evaporates quickly.
V. Preaching is moving and stirring (touches emotion quickly)
Vi. Preaching is more outwardly impressionistic compared to teaching.

Heyward once declared:

> If I were to put a preacher on the left and a teacher on the right, most people would prefer the preacher; therefore, teaching is not as popular as preaching. Most people would think that a preacher is a more powerful man of God compared to the teacher. If the masses were asked to vote; he would be more impressive. [23]

However, Teachers usually have churches that grow steadily. This is because the truth is taught line upon line, and precept upon precept. When building a house, the blocks are laid systematically until you get an orderly and lasting structure. Succinctly put therefore, preaching is the God-given ability to communicate God's word with *clarity* and *power* in a culturally relevant way so that it applies to the specific situation of the hearers. (I Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11) The gift of teaching is the ability to understand and communicate the scriptures *clearly* and with *spiritual insight*. Those with these gifts spend much time studying their Bibles and delight in helping people to better understands the scriptures.

The Need to Plant New Churches

If Jesus commanded that we teach people, there's no better way to teach unless you gather people together. The benefit of new gatherings include :

- *New churches evangelize better than 'Old' or 'Established' Churches*.

New churches are better in evangelism than established churches. Malphurs, quoting Bruce McNicol writes: "among evangelical churches, those under three years old will win ten people to Christ per year by every one hundred members. Those churches from three to fifteen years old will win five people per year by every one hundred church members. Finally, after a church reaches the age of fifteen, the figure drops to three people per year by every one hundred members."

- *New Churches Grow Faster than Established churches…*

The second advantage is the fact that new churches grow faster than older ones or established churches. Win Arn citing a study by the Southern Baptist Convention submitted thus: "churches started between 1972 and 1981 were compared to those prior to 1971. These churches were examined according to their membership sizes which include the categories of 1 to 50, 51to100, 101-200, 201-400, 401-600, 601-1000, and 1000 plus. The growth span on which the study was based was the percentage of growth of all these churches from 1981 to 1986. The result was that churches of all sizes that were started between 1972 and 1981 grew at a rate of 60 percent to 80 percent. Those started prior to 1971 grew at a rate of 20 percent

[23] D.Heyward,2014.*Church Planting*, 65

to 60 percent, with the older and larger churches coming closer to the 20 percent figure."[24] Certainly older churches shouldn't be overly discouraged by these figures. Instead, they should find in them a challenge to renew their evangelistic passion and plant daughter churches.

Lyle Schaler once submiitted, "it is a mistake to attempt to revitalize existing congregations at the expense of church planting. The reason is that nobody knows how to do it, and it takes too much time". Schaler further opined that new churches grow faster than long-established parishes. The reason is contained in his further argument: "Perhaps the simplest explanation of this pattern is that new congregations are organized around evangelism and reaching people who are not actively involved in any worshipping activity, whereas, powerful internal institutional pressures tend to encourage long –established churches to allocate most of their resources to the care of members"[25]

New Churches do experience the ''New Wineskin" solution.

Further advantage of planting new churches is noticeable in the fact that people who are attracted would, expectedly, come into a new situation in which they are open to jettisoning much of their old 'baggage'. No one is attempting to sew a new patch onto an old wineskin; rather, new wine is being poured into new skins. The result is that not only are those involved extremely excited about the new church, other people are equally attracted and become much open to change; such are ready to try new and innovative ideas. Above all, people involved in church planting are much more open to change than those in old churches**.**

Thessalonians Church as a Model for New Churches

A look at the Thessalonians church is imperative. In the words of MacArthur, "All the basic ingredients that Jesus wants in a church were found in the Thessalonian congregation. The Epistle that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians lays out for us the pattern of the church that Christ builds. It contains no reference to the number of members. It tells nothing about their goals and objectives, their programming, the kind of sermons that were preached or the music they sang. It does not tell us about their Sunday school, their worship services, or their high school camps. However, it does tell us about their several spiritual elements: a saved Church with evidence of personally knowing the Lord Jesus."[26]

The Thessalonian church had a marvelous two fold testimony. First, the manner with which they spread the gospel was by living exemplary lives. Apostle Paul said to them, "Ye were an example to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (I Thess.1:7). Other people could look at the Thessalonians church and conclude: "That is the way we ought to be living".

[24] A. Malphurs,1998.*Planting and Growing Churches*, 43
[25] L Schaller, 1991. *44 Questions for Church Planters*, 45
[26] J. MacArthur,1991.*The Master's plan for the Church*, Chicago: Moody Publishers.95

Amazingly, it took the Thessalonians only a couple of Sabbaths to establish a lifestyle that was surrendered to Christ. It is not programmers or creativity that gives a church testimony. It is each member's Christ -likeness. The Thessalonians were like Jesus Christ. They set a pattern for everyone else, including believers. Chapter one of I Thessalonians shows how the believers in Macedonia and Achaia responded to the Thessalonians' testimony:

They themselves show of us what manner of entering

in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from

idols to serve the living and true God.''(I Thess. 1:9)

The Thessalonians authenticated their genuine conversion with their lives. The latest news there and then was, "Have you heard what happened at Thessalonica? Many people turned to God from Idols. One incredible thing was that Thessalonica was only fifty miles from Mount Olympus – the supposed residence of the Greek gods. Although they had been raised from their earliest years to believe in a plurality of gods but within three successive Sabbaths, an entire community of people dropped their idolatrous system to serve the living God. This unique turn-around makes news.

The second way by which the Thessalonians spread the gospel was through verbal witness of the word. "From you sounded out the word of the Lord in every place" (I Thess. 1:8) The Greek word for sounded out is *exechita*i, from which we get the English word echo. Hence, a Christian's testimony should never be independent of God's word. It should be an echo of God's word only. An echo repeats what is originally spoken. God demands that today's church should echo His truth. The 'Great Commission' therefore is a supreme task to be echoed and accomplished through Church planting.

Recommendations

Obviously, the 21st century church is timid, seems contented with arithmetical growth and incredible population upsurge on one spot rather than planting churches on virgin lands, it is high time the Church gave up this idea; there is the need to go after one lost soul without losing the saved ninety-nine.

Besides, Churches must be planted according to where God directs us, in villages and towns. Also, the superstar mentality of the Church must die, the mentality of one great pastor with the largest congregation, whom everybody acknowledges and praises. The 21st century church must produce itself. There is the need for multiple congregations.

Today's Church and her leaders must be bothered that other religions are taking over large territories, large sections of Africa and the world. To this end, the Church all over the world must rise up to face the challenges of the great commission through effective church planting. The under listed observations call for sober reflection on the part of the Church also:

If Jesus had preached the same message that certain preachers preach today, that is, prosperity without holiness, Jesus, would probably, not have been crucified, and His mission would, probably, have been crushed.

Today's Church must note that a holy and obedient life has a voice. It speaks when the tongue is silent. No believer would have the mind of Christ except he that makes it his business to obey God. Today's Church must train members, not only to relate profitably and personally with the unconverted, but equally endure to win such people to Christ. No one must excuse oneself but commit oneself to the irksome task until it becomes easy. Jesus never gave a command which cannot be accomplished

Conclusion

The Great Commission Church or individual is the one that places a high priority on evangelism and soul-winning; "go and make disciple of all nations" (matt 28:19). However, it must not be dubiously exploited by erring ministers as a means of escape from discipline, particularly in Africa.

It should be noted that discipline in the Church helps to prevent continuity in sin; it sustains the integrity of the Church, protects the effectiveness of the witness of the Church (to unbelievers), rehabilitates the guilty and protects the reputation and resources of the Church. To this end, individuals or ministers involved in Church planting must not see t as an escape route from Church discipline. Discipline should be rightly seen as the awakening of self-critical reflection and the re-shapening of behavior towards greater personal, social and spiritual happiness.

Importantly therefore, the great commission had a broad application that calls all believers to participate in preaching the gospel (Mark 16:15). We need to note the piercing question: "How shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). This challenges all Christians to share with others the Good News of Jesus. This is best done by planting churches on every fertile soil. Laymen must be released to partake in the work of the gospel. A well-mobilized lay army will do exploit for Jesus.