

NATION BUILDING THROUGH MISSION WORK: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES JOS

by

Emmanuel O. Egyegini¹, Solomon I. Aguh¹ and Peter S. Egre²

¹ School of Biblical Studies, Jos (An Affiliate of the University of Jos, Jos)

² Church of Christ Kado, Abuja

Corresponding authors email: emmanuelegyegini2@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Theological institutions are primarily established to train Church workers such as evangelist and elders (pastors). In some cases, school teachers are also trained in theological institutions to teach religious education in Church or secular formal schools. The role of theological institutions in nation building is often overlooked. Using the School of Biblical Studies Jos as a case study, this paper examines the roles that theological institutions play in nation building. The researcher used the qualitative method of research for this study. Primary and secondary sources were used to get the formation necessary for the study. The study found out that the work of the Lord in Nigeria and beyond has received a great boost through the instrumentality of Christian institutions, particularly the School of Biblical Studies Jos (an affiliate of the University of Jos, Jos). The study recommends that since Christian institutions have greater role of providing sound Christian education to people who will serve the nation in various capacities, effort should be intensified to ensure the desired quality of education is achieved. Christian institutions ought to be more actively involved in mission work as they train people who will in turn teach others the gospel, the key to productive living.

Keywords: Mission work, nation building, School of Biblical studies

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the work of the Lord in Africa has received a great boost, particularly in Nigeria, since the coming of Christianity into African soil through the significant role of Christian institutions (particularly those within the brotherhood [i.e. Church of Christ] in Nigeria) like the Nigerian Christian Bible College (NCBC) Ukpom, School of Biblical Studies Jos, West Nigerian Christian College Abeokuta, and a few others. African soil is a fertile ground for the gospel. Africans, by nature are religiously inclined, having their own traditional religion passed unto them from their ancestors long before the coming of

the true religion of the only one true God known as Christianity. Talking about the religiosity of African people, John S. Mbiti spoke of African people as being religious in the sense that they walk religiously, eat religiously and dress religiously; and their religion affects every aspect of their lives (quoted in Ikenga-Metuch 1). This is just to buttress the fact that Africans are receptive to the true gospel and the work of the Lord is growing in different parts of Africa as a continent through the instrumentality of Christian institutions.

In Jos, Nigeria, the School of Biblical Studies has been playing significant role in the

training of preachers and teachers for the propagation of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the dying souls. Her graduates are actively involved in the spread of the gospel even after their graduation from the School as they work with the local Churches of the Lord and teach in either secular and or Church's schools. Therefore, this paper examined the role of Christian institutions, particularly the School of Biblical Studies in Mission work or the propagation of the true gospel in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

THE SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES AND THE GROWTH OF THE GOSPEL IN NIGERIA AND BEYOND

The school of Biblical Studies is located in Jos, the Capital of Plateau State, Nigeria. The School started in August 1989 with Dr. Solomon I. Aguh as its president, and he is still effectively running the School even at this time of writing. The School's Moto is,

“TRAINING TO SERVE.” Since its inception, the School has been keeping to that mission of training those who will in turn teach and preach the gospel to others. This is to help people to be responsible and effective leaders/preachers in the local Churches, in order to aid the spread of the gospel even to the entire world. To achieve that, the School of Biblical Studies has both academic and evangelism programmes that are aimed at the growth of the gospel and the Kingdom of Christ here on earth. There are four academic programs which include: B.A Ministry, B.A Christian Religious Studies (Affiliated to the University of Jos, Jos), Diploma in Ministry and Certificate in Ministry. The evangelism program, which is compulsory for all students, includes: Weekly weekend practical Evangelism training, Annual Campaign for Christ evangelism, Annual Leaders'/Preachers' workshop and Extension Training Program (which comes up twice in a year in different study centers in Nigeria).



Figure 1: SBS Students and Staff Ready for Evangelism (Campaign for Christ) with the school's Bus

On the growth of the gospel (mission) in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular, the School of Biblical Studies, Jos, is significantly playing a great role on this aspect. Through the School's evangelism, many souls got

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converted and many congregations established, particularly in many major cities in Northern Nigeria such as: Makurdi (Benue State), Jos (Plateau State), Kaduna (Kaduna State), Sokoto (Sokoto State), Maiduguri

(Borno State), and Yola (Adamawa State); and as well as a few other congregations in other parts of Nigeria. In fact, with the effort of the School's evangelism, today, there is the Lord's Church in all the 19 states of Northern Nigeria with her graduates serving in all of these states and beyond. Therefore, it can be confidently said that SBS Jos is a key God-given tool for mission work in Africa.

The involvement of the students and staff of the School in evangelism has contributed

immensely to the growth of the gospel in that many souls obeyed the gospel as they were baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. So far, from the inception of the School to date, based on the School's records, over Thirty-five Thousand (**35, 0000**) souls have been baptized into Christ in obedience to the gospel through the School's evangelism program carried out by students (SBS Jos 25th Anniversary and Graduation Ceremony Manual, 18).



Figure 2: Tom Ekpot (Staff) Baptizing Some People During Evangelism at Foron, Jos.



Figure 3: SBS Students Baptizing People in Du, Jos South LGA, Plateau State

Apart from the evangelism conducted by students while in school, the graduates continue actively in the work of God in the field. Within Nigeria, some of her graduates

who work with local churches have equally recorded great number of baptisms. Take for example, two out of her first graduates in 1991 have recorded **1,030 baptisms** (i.e. Brothers

Douglas A. Anongo 310 baptisms and Obadiah Doka 793 baptisms) from 1991 to 2015; and they equally established congregations in different places. Likewise, Brother John Alapa, a graduate of 1992 (the second set) has recorded 146 baptisms from 1992 to 2015 and established 5 congregations in different places where he worked in Nigeria. He has preached in Atlo (Benue state), Uffa-Igarra (Edo State), and Otukpo (Benue state) (School of Biblical Studies Jos Newsletter 1-2).

However, the growth of the gospel through the instrumentality of the School of Biblical Studies, Jos, is not limited to Nigeria only but other parts of Africa in general. The School so far, had impacted on the growth of the gospel in the following countries through her international graduates and missionaries:

1. Liberia

The School of Biblical Studies Jos had impacted positively on the growth of the work of God in Liberia through her graduates. So far nine Liberian have graduated from the School of Biblical Studies Jos. These graduates have been doing great exploits in the growth of the Church in Liberia through evangelism; especially through their evangelism team known as “**Liberia Evangelism Team (LET)**,” formed by the recent graduates from SBS Jos. Through the Liberia Evangelism Team (LET), a congregation known as Barclay’s Farm was established, specifically on 6th December, 2015. The team (LET) preached the gospel and 5 souls at the first time got baptized into Christ, and subsequently more people continued to obey the gospel as they were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins; raising the membership of the Barclay’s Farm Church of Christ up to 120. The picture of the congregation is shown below:



Figure 4: Church of Christ, Barclay's Farm, Liberia

In the words of the LET members on how the congregation started, they said, “We started this congregation with 5 membership, and by the grace of God, we have had several baptisms that increased our membership to 120.” (LET Newsletter, Dec. 2016).

Some of the pictures of SBS graduates from Liberia baptizing souls into Christ in their country are seen below:



Figure 5: Lenin Cooper baptizing some souls



Figure 6: Kelvin Johnson baptizing a soul

2. Chad Republic

There is also a great improvement in the work of the Lord in Chad through the School of Biblical Studies, Jos, Nigeria. In 1992, Brother John David Nassa (a Chadian) graduated from SBS Jos and returned to N'Djamena in Chad and worked tirelessly and planted 2 congregations of the Lord in the capital. Through him, four other persons from Chad also came and were trained in SBS Jos and returned back home working in the Southern part of Chad. They are Pierre Rimorbe Ngardjiba, Pascal Ngearndu Yoguernan, Sabastien Dji and Lazare Benjim. They are all serving the Lord in the propagation of the gospel in their country.

Through the efforts of Brothers Peirre Rimorbe, Sabastien and Lazarus, over **35 congregations** have been established in Chad plus a registered government primary school with over 700 students. These brethren started the school in which the Bible and English were added to the normal curriculum. The reason for the inclusion of English in the



Figure 7: Jonathan Cooper Sihr baptizing a soul

curriculum is because the official language in Chad is French. Peirre wrote in his 2016 report of the work of the Lord and the number of converts saying:

Brethren, I would like to share with you the result of the evangelism programs organized by the members of the churches of Christ in Dono-Manga distric, Southern Chad Republic. The end of this year of 2016 seemed to be a fantastic harvest of souls for Christ. After conducting three outreaches, God has made a tremendous open-door opportunity in three districts. From September to December, we had **34 baptisms**: 11 in Kasseraye village, 15 in Kimre, and 8 in Mbaya Koutou. ... (quoted in the Jos Journal, January 2017).

3. Niger Republic

In 2002, two of the graduates of the School of Biblical Studies Jos in the persons of Brothers Anji Tigga and Guda Mishi with their families who were Nigerians citizens left for mission work in Niger republic. They worked and

started two congregations of the Lord at Niamey and Terra and also started a primary school in Terra. Through their effort, six (6) Nigeriens have been trained as preachers of the gospel, and they are preaching in their own country. The last one who graduated from SBS Jos last year (May 2016) is Aliou Souley. In fact, when his mother (a Muslim) came to witness his graduation from SBS Jos, she heard the gospel and got baptized into Christ; after which she and her son returned to Niger Republic as children of God.

Souley is presently working at Terra. His mother remained faithful to Christ and His Church. Souley's father commented at the wife's conversion to Christianity, "Of all our children, you decided to follow the bad one." Souley's mother laughed and replied back, "The love shown among the brethren when I visited my son at SBS Jos showed that this is the Truth." Below is their picture.



Figure 8: Aliou Souley and his mother, Maimouna

From Souley's graduation to date (May 2016 to date), he has so far recorded 7 baptisms in Tera, Niger Republic through daily evangelism from door to door.

4. Cameroon

The work of the Lord in Cameroon also witnessed significant growth through the School's graduates. SBS Jos, so far has graduated 6 persons from Cameroon and they are preaching the gospel and teaching Bible in schools. The graduates from Cameroon so far are: Ji Mathias Ofon, Pierre Biyaga (Deceased), Otia David, Rene Ewuhayime, Evodia Ayime, and Brice Arnaud Ndesian (presently teaching in a secondary school in Nigeria). Through the effort of Ji Mathias Ofon, Otia David, and Rene Ewuhayime, **Cameroon Institute of Biblical Studies,**

Bamenda was established to train local preachers to take care of English speaking areas of Cameroon.

Additionally, one of the School's graduates from Nigeria has been serving as a missionary in Cameroon. He is in the person of Bro. John Abasiama Archibong. Through him, as an instrument, Mile 1 Church of Christ Limbe, South-east Cameroon where he has been serving is strengthened and many souls are won for Christ. He started a radio programme through which the gospel is preached. In fact, a director of the same radio programme who

heard the gospel preached obeyed as he was baptized into Christ.

5. Uganda (East Africa)

Just like other African countries, the School of Biblical Studies Jos has equally impacted positively on the growth of the gospel in Uganda. So far, 7 Ugandans (John Brown Okwil, Luke Apamaku, Joyce Apamaku, Rhone Anguaza, Raimond Limbya Muhyana, Simon Odongo, and Samson Bisathu) have been trained while 2 others (Avur Brian Opio and Apuuni Godfrey) are currently undergoing training at SBS Jos. Opio will be graduating in May, 2017 by His grace; and would soon join others in the field to propagate the gospel of Christ in Uganda. These graduates continued

to work for the Lord and many souls are won into the Kingdom of God.

Through these graduates, a Bible School known as “**Uganda Christian Bible College-Kigumba.**” is established in Uganda. Brother Luke Apamaku and others who graduated from SBS Jos lecture in this Bible School, making great impact. For example, from the graduation of Bro. Luke Apamaku from SBS Jos in 1996 to date, has recorded 36 baptisms and established five (5) congregations (including those he supervises in the College programme). He has equally conducted about fifteen evangelism campaigns with the help of the college where he works. He has preached in 5 congregations (Kampala, Entebbe, Bweyale, Lira, Kigumba, among others)



Figure 9: Luke Apamaku baptizing a convert



Figure 10: Luke Apamaku with some of SBS graduates in Uganda at the back row (from the left: Raymond L. Muhyana, Samson Bisathu and Simon Odongo)

Apart from the graduates from Uganda, there is another graduate of SBS Jos, from Nigeria

whom after graduation in 2000, left for mission in Uganda. He is brother Nkem Chris

I. Okpe. He and his wife (Sister Kelechi Ngozi Okpe) and their 4 children have been in Uganda as missionaries of the Church of Christ from Nigeria since 3rd June 2003. He

has been very instrumental in the growth of the Church in Uganda. Below is Brother Nkem's picture.

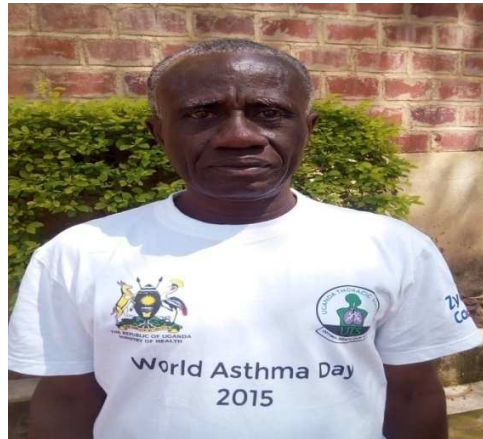


Figure 11: Nkem Chris Okpe.

6. South Sudan

South Sudan also witnessed growth in the gospel of Christ Jesus through the impact of the School of Biblical Studies Jos in training men and women who will in turn pass the same message unto others. From South Sudan, Bro. Elias Odongpiny was trained from SBS Jos and is preaching and teaching God's word in South Sudan. He is presently teaching in a Bible school as well as helping the Church in South Sudan.

7. Zimbabwe

The work of the Lord in Zimbabwe also received a great boost through the graduates of the School of Biblical Studies Jos who came from Zimbabwe and were trained. So far, 4 Zimbabweans (Matthew Muchingami, Hope Tawanda Karikoga, Isaiah Suwari and Evans Nyamadzawo) have been trained and they are working with the local churches and teaching in the new Bible school in Zimbabwe. Sadly, we lost Isaiah Suwari about two years ago in a

car accident in Zimbabwe. However, the work of the Lord still goes on to His glory. Currently another brother in the person of Gerald Dzuwanani is undergoing training at SBS Jos which after graduation will join his colleagues in Zimbabwe for the growth of the Church.

8. Bangladesh (Asia)

The School of Biblical Studies Jos had also impacted positively on the growth of the work of the Lord not only within Africa but even beyond. Two persons from Bangladesh in Asia (Bassak Pabitra and Arthur Shal) graduated from SBS Jos in 2006 and are now teaching God's word in a Bible school in Bangladesh where they are preaching and influencing young people as role models in the Church. God is using them as instruments in the growth of the true gospel in Bangladesh for His glory.

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS IN THE BUILDING OF A NATION

Having specifically considered the great impact of the School of Biblical Studies, Jos, as a Christian training institution in the spread of the gospel in Nigeria and Africa at large; this section generally deals with the role of Christian institutions in the building of any nation in the world.

The notion of nation building presupposes that the nation itself is in need of building or rebuilding to become a better place for living. This is possible through holistic Christian principles being taught in theological institutions. Nation building ought to be based on concrete Christian values such as justice, peace, sacrificial love, compassion and goodness. Hence theological institutions do contribute immensely to human development and nation building through sound moral teachings that help in the fight against corruption, injustice, and other social vices impeding the smooth growth of human society.

In building a nation, education (specifically Christian education) is very essential. It is an integral part of nation building especially when values such as justice, sacrificial love, mercy, peace, and goodness are adhered to. Talking about facts of nation building, Ibrahim Gambari explains two aspects of nation building. First, he says it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship (http://mafng.org/anniversary/challenges_nation_building_nig.htm).

Second, Gambari explains that it is also about building institutions which symbolizes the political entity- institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all, nation building is about a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared identity, a collective imagination of belonging (http://mafng.org/anniversary/challenges_nation_building_nig.htm).

However, the underline fact of nation building as captured in this work is through sound Christian values as taught in theological institutions. Christian institution has the primary responsibility of providing sound Christian education that will help in building a nation. It is in light of this that Ezekiel Ajani mentioned four important contributions of Christian education to nation building to include, “The provision of a basis for Christian stewardship; the provision for the basis for Christian leadership; the provision of a basis for Christ-like advocacy for equality and fairness in the rule of law, and the provision of an adequate Christian response to the menace of corruption in Nigeria [or any other part of the world]” (211-221).

Within the brotherhood, there are trained brethren who have impacted positively on the growth of the society. For example, in the Nigerian society, we have people like Prof. Moses Akpanudo, the proprietor of Nigerian Christian University, Akwa Ibom state. As a leader, he has contributed meaningfully to the building of the Nigerian nation through stewardship and leadership of the University where Nigerian citizens are trained to

responsible and effective in all spheres or sectors of the society.

Likewise, there are others like Brother Okon Mkpog (OON) who used his both his biblical and secular knowledge and contributed meaningfully to the Nigerian nation and was officially awarded a National Honour of *The Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON)*. As a leader and head of the institution known as Nigerian Institute, Uyo, Akwa Ibom state, he influences young ones positively as a role model. He is equally a traditional chief of his community where he leads the people. Additionally, there is another Brother in the person of Steven Okoronkwu who owns a secondary school in Aba, Abia state where foundational training is given to young people.

Similarly, Brother Jacob Achinefu, the administrator of Bible Institute known as Nigerian Institute of Administration and Technology (NIAT) in Onitsha-Ngwa, Abia state. He is also contributing positively towards the growth of the nation through sound education. Another Brother who also used his Bible knowledge or education and impacted meaningfully in the growth of the gospel and Nigerian society is Brother Etim Abidiak. He worked in the North-East of Nigeria as an evangelist before relocating to Akwa Ibom state. He has mentored several young people and sent many to SBS Jos where they obtained sound Bible training. Those trained are now preaching the gospel in different places within the country. Presently in Akwa Ibom state, Brother Etim Abidiak operates leadership Bible Institute in Oron, Akwa Ibom where he helps in training preachers in that area for local congregations.

Furthermore, in reference to the growth of Christianity generally in Nigeria, Bulus Y. Galadima and Yusuf Turaki state, “Christianity is making remarkable strides, not only in numerical growth but deepening theological maturity of many outstanding leaders” (85). Therefore, Christian institutions have greater role to play in building of a nation; and this is only achievable when the gospel of truth is preached and its message internalized and lived by citizenry of that nation. For in the gospel, there is a changing power –i.e. the power to change the individuals from whatever bad habits or characters to become responsible to the society in which they live. When the individuals living in a given society are morally changed for good, they will positively contribute their quarters for the growth of that society. In fact, Christian education, in conjunction with home and the Church, will provide quality education for the whole members of a society or nation spiritually, academically, socially and physically; and will produce adjusted, morally sound individuals equipped to transform the society (2 Chron. 17.7-8; 2 Tim. 2.15; 3.16-17).

Additionally, Don Espina writes on, “Christian Schooling and Nation Building” stating thus: “Christian schools provide real-life modeling of what godly men and women look like, act like, and are like.” (<https://www.acsi.org/resources/cse/cse-magazine/Christian-schooling-and-nation-building-83>).

This emphasizes the end result of sound Christian education given to the people living in a society. Christian schools equally function as world-class training grounds and

launching pads for a global ministry. Christian schools that own this vision of being world-class training grounds that produce world-class leaders contribute significantly to the Great Commission (Matt.28.19-20).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the ongoing discussion, it is clear that Africa as a continent has received the gospel of Christ Jesus and the work of God is growing well, especially through the instrumentality of the School of Biblical Studies, Jos. However, there is still need for encouragement morally, physically and materially. In fact, with the evil winds of

change in the Christendom today, there is need for Christians all over the world to know the basic doctrines of salvation, teach them and pass same to the next generation. Bible school or education is key in teaching and spreading the undiluted doctrines of salvation. The study recommends that since Christian institutions have greater role of providing sound Christian education to people who will serve the nation in various capacities, effort should be intensified to ensure the desired quality of education is achieved. Christian institutions ought to be more actively involved in mission work as they train people who will in turn teach others the gospel.

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