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ANTIOCH CHURCH LEADERSHIP (ACTS 13:1 – 3), A MODEL FOR MULTI-STAFF MINISTRY

REV. CLIFFORD ANUMAKA (PhD)
Life Theological Seminary,
79, Obafemi Awolowo Road,
Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria
+2347081258184
ifraku@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper discusses "Antioch church leadership (Acts 13:1 – 3), A model for multi-staff ministry". This church is a model because of the multi-staff nature of its leadership. Though, it was sociologically diverse, it worked as a team and its leadership was plural rather than singular. This is a rare thing today where ordinarily, leadership is hierarchical, pontifical and competitive, where the winner grabs it all and the looser stands so small. The thematic thrust of this paper therefore is the fact that God designed the church as a body and not a single member. Team ministry is His way. Adopting a descriptive narratology, the purpose of this paper is to persuade that ministry must be done in association with other believers and workers. Ministers need one another for support, correction and fellowship. Structured in a trilogy: the founding of the church, its leadership and its model, the writer recommends that ministerial leaders and workers must adopt the priorities of the early church leaders as well as guide against solo ministry, spiritual myopia and denominational insularity.

Keywords: Antioch Church, Leadership Model, Multi-staff Ministry, Team work, Apostolic age.

Introduction

Observation has shown that some churches don't seem to co-operate with other churches. They give impression that they can do ministry in their own way without involving others. The fact is that ministry is best done in a setting. It is correlative and complimentary, rather than competitive and antithetical. This paper looked back at the New Testament Antioch church to find a biblical model of what multi-staff ministry should look like today. Advising a biblical perspective in the context of this contradistinction, the purpose of this paper was to persuade that ministry must be done in association with other believers and workers. According to J. E. T (1989:27-39).

> The church has long confused that God created persons for community, and that only within the context of community can authentic Christian life be nurtured and sustained.

The church should foster synergy and be corporate friendly. The fog of minority seclusion must be broken and diversities of gifts and abilities must be recognized as assets and not liabilities.

I. The Founding of the Church (Acts 11:19 – 30)

Persecuted travelers from the Island of Cyprus and Cyrene were responsible for initially bringing the gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch. Their venture someoness marked a new stage in the extension of the church from a Jewish fellowship in Jerusalem to a universal community, Pfeiffer and Harrison, (1962:1144). It was a radical paradigm shift for Christianity because it produced a community that was "neither Jewish nor traditionally" Gentile. It was heterogeneous rather than homogenous community.

Prior to this, the believers who scattered as a result of the persecution by Saul, preached the gospel to the Jews only. They failed to grasp the universal nature of the Great commission and consequently monopolized Christ to the Jews only. However, the brethren from Cyprus and Cyrene as it were, broke down the middle wall of partition (Eph. 4:14 – 16), proving that a multi-cultural church is possible.

> The church in Jerusalem was still so prejudiced against the Gentiles that it could never have sponsored an untrammeled campaign for the evangelization of the Roman Empire. Christianity could not have become a worldwide religion if it did not shift its base of operations to a great Gentile Centre, ABC (2006:1321).

On hearing that Antioch had received the goodnews, Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to go, investigate, confirm and consolidate it. On arrival the expanding church in Antioch needed gifts he did not have. Consequently, he co-opted Saul to help him in the growth of the new church. By this gesture, Barnabas showed that he was not selfish. He was willing to link others to his ministry, Cater and Earle (1959:173).

> Barnabas recognized the rich potentialities of the situation for further advance and saw the need of additional help in evangelism and teaching. He therefore hunted out his old friend Paul who was at work in Tarsus and persuaded him to join in the work at Antioch, Marshall (1980:202).

Antioch as a city was third in the Roman world after Rome and Alexandria and it had over a half million people in it and was also tolerant to all religions, the preachers outline, (1988:161). It was there that the first Christian Church among the Gentiles was started and the first worldwide missionaries sent. It was also in this city that believers were first called Christians.

> The Jesus movement shifts from a predominantly rural movement in Galilee to urban movement in Jerusalem to a Cosmopolitan movement in Antioch. Such a rapid transition is virtually unparalleled in antiquity and indicates considerable social flexibility. That Judaism had already adapted to these various settings over the centuries provided a conduit for there rapid transitions within the Jerusalem community (Ibid).

II. The Leadership of Antioch Church (Acts 13:1-3)

The leadership of Antioch church was composed of five men, namely: Barnabas, Simon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul.

i. **Barnabas was a Wealthy man from Cyprus and a Hellenistic Jew:** According to Acts 4:36-37, his real name was Joseph but the apostles renamed him Barnabas. The name meant son of encouragement. He sold his property and brought the money to the church. It was done voluntarily.

ii. **Simon or Niger:** The name Niger means black, implying he was dark complexioned. It was possible he came from Africa. Some have suggested he was the one who helped Jesus to carry his cross (Mark 15:21).

iii. **Lucius:** He was from Cyrene and an African. He may have been one of the persecuted believers who fled from Jerusalem to Antioch and therefore may have been one of the founders of the church at Antioch

iv. **Manaen:** He was from Palestine, a Greek or Herodian. Being a foster brother to Herod Antipas, he was of the higher class of society. This Herod was the very person who had tried Jesus and murdered John the Baptist.

v. **Saul:** He was from Tarsus and a Hebraic Jew. He was also, one of the religionists of society. Craig (1993:354) observed,

> Mark pointed out that " in a time of racial tensions, the church today would be wise to raise up leaders from a variety of socio-economic strata to evangelize and represent the diversity of people we find in our cities."

The Antioch Church leadership was described as "prophets and teachers". It was an interesting mixture, showing an interracial and cross cultural church. The church became the gentile headquarters of missionary Christianity.

> The Lord had called into the fellowship and into leadership positions, people from several nations. A fellowship from the then known world could be led to the decision of wanting to reach the world. This could never have happened in the Jerusalem church, (Moore.htm.files).

A remarkable thing about this church is the fact that the prophets and teachers worked together. The leaders functioned as a team. It is "significant because, usually, prophets and teachers have an opposite focus and opposite gifts (Olivine, 1983:207).

> By this time in the growing church at Antioch, God had raised up others besides Barnabas and Saul to aid in ministering to the church. They are called prophets and teachers. As prophets they were used by the spirit to bring edification, exhortation and comfort or encouragement. As teachers, they received gifts from the Holy Spirit which could enable them teach the word of God effectively (Horton, 19815:155).

III. Antioch Church As A Model

A model is anything that is used as an example to follow or imitate. Some things in Antioch church clearly distinguish it as a model for today's church. Three of such are treated here

i. **It was a Team Ministry Church:** "The leadership of the church was a broad based team where all of the leadership gifts were present. The evangelistic gift, the prophetic

> gift, teaching gift, the pastoral gift and the apostle gift were all evidenced and in operation" (Bill, Antioch).

The five man team waited upon the Lord together and worked together in leading the church. Presently, it is difficult for anointed ministers to co-operate and work in unity and togetherness. The teachers don't value the evangelists and the evangelists seem to isolate from pastors and other workers.

> Some segments of the church value good teaching but deny the need for prophets and prophetic ministry. Sound doctrine becomes an idol and there is no room for the supernatural manifestations of the Spirit,(Kail: P and T).

The leadership in Antioch church was not a one pastor leadership. It was characterized by multi-gifted leaders, "many churches are still strongly affected by the overly structured Roman catholic church or the modified reformed churches which makes the church content with their one priest or pastor", (Brucknel: Freedom.net).

ii. It was Multi-racial and Cross-culture: The Antioch church was a blend of races and culture. It could be easily described as an international church. It was not involved in the "single focus" of Jerusalem church. This background of diversity helped to reach out to everyone in its community.

The Jerusalem church seemed to have marginalized non Jews and their culture, but in Antioch church, there was no such a thing. The Antioch church was open hearted in its preaching. It thrived in diverse setting, culture and religious plurality.

> The world is fast becoming a global village. Mono-culturalism is given way to multiculturalism. In any set up, people of diverse languages, classes, tribes, cultural and racial backgrounds interact more frequently than ever before. The interaction occurs both by default and design, and so human beings are confronted by the reality of adversity. The church in 21st century needs to actively embrace the idea of a diverse membership. Church leaders at various levels need to espouse vital multicultural leadership skills in order to remain effective and relevant to the dynamics and demographics of the church (NdoVu: 2018:2).

iii. It was a generous church (Acts 11:27 – 30). Based on the prophecy of Agabus, the Antioch church sent relief to Jerusalem church. "Serious foot shortages occurred during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius (A.D. 41 – 54) because of a drought that had extended across much of the Roman empire for many years". The generosity of Antioch church was remarkable in the sense that in spite of the fact that it was a daughter church, it contributed to help the mother church. What is in vogue today is the fact that most daughter churches look up to their mother church for financial support. Antioch church was different. In this regard, it combined spiritual ministry with social work.

> The people of Antioch were motivated to give generously because they cared about the needs of others. This is the cheerful giving that the Bible commends

> (2 Cor. 9:7). Reluctant giving reflects a lack of concern for people. Focus your concern on the needy, and you will be motivated to give (Life Apple 1973:1831).

The giving by Antioch church to Jerusalem church was "a glorious and gracious revelation of the consciousness of oneness into the spirit, obedience to prophecy, expressing itself in love" (Morgan, 1946:226), Danny was correct when he pointed out that "the person you befriend today may be the person who saves your life tomorrow" (McCain, 2001:147).

Conclusion

This paper examined the concept of multi-staff ministry with reference to Antioch Church leadership. The purpose was to persuade that ministry must be done in association with other believers and workers. Ministers need one another for support, correction and fellowship. It recommended that ministers and indeed all Christian workers must adopt the priorities of the early church leaders as well as guide against solo ministry, spiritual myopia and denominational insularity.

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