



DIACONAL ECONOMY OF THE EARLY CHURCH: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Historical assessment of the diaconal economy of the early church is fundamental in the recent historical discourse. This so-called economy was neither utopian idealism nor primitive communism, but a contextually responsive expression of gospel identity. Its organizational and theological logic offers a durable framework for contemporary churches seeking to embody holistic mission. Fundamentally, the Nigerian church needs a re-appraisal in the light of welfare practices that characterised the early Christian church era. It is obvious in recent times that Nigeria is a nation filled with moral and ethical lapses such as individualism, self-centeredness, wealth acquisition by extortion and violation of fundamental human rights which is also apparent in church leadership. The existing scholarly works have focused on church emergence and the persecution in the early church era but an area which seems to have been largely eclipsed that requires academic engagement is the implications that the welfare and benevolence practices of the early church had on church leadership. Therefore, this study examines leadership effectiveness using welfare and benevolence practices in growing and expanding the church. It employed historical and analytical research approach; data were also gathered from secondary sources. The findings of the study established the lapses of the contemporary church leadership in the mis-management of church resources, living a flamboyant lifestyle, acquiring material wealth in excess, extorting church members things rendering them destitute than meeting their needs by fulfilling Christ's mandate to take care of His fold. The paper recommends that, church leadership should be judicious in the right use of church resources to meet members need and that wealthy members of the mystical body should be encouraged to inculcate the habit of willful donations to the church to assist the indigent members without coercion or manipulation.

Keywords: Church Leadership, Early Church, Diaconal Economy, Implications, Welfare practices

Introduction

There is a wide gap between welfare practices in the contemporary church and the early church era of the early centuries. Issues like Modernism, economic recession, unemployment, racial segregation, capitalism and high cost of living have negatively affected welfare and benevolent practices. The early church is noted for deep welfare practices such as Koinonia (fellowship), mutual love, Pastoral visitation, generous giving and donation of personal possessions (land and other properties) for the well-being of brethren administered by church leadership, supply of needs is the practice of an egalitarian lifestyle in the faith community where there is no rich or poor amidst faith members (Acts 4&5). Some contemporary churches prioritize capital projects such as building Cathedral, purchasing a church bus, musical instruments over the welfare of the poor.

In the contemporary time, welfarism in form of giving to the poor and hospitality are dwindling in some churches and the society. There is a shift from communal spirit entrenched in genuine love for one another in the today's church to individualism and self-centeredness. Even, some men of God promote the later through their preaching, teaching and lifestyle. This is contrary to what was obtainable in the early church (Acts 6:1-6), where generous giving, fervent prayer, fasting, ascetic living and egalitarian lifestyle were the order of the day. This study projects the welfare practices of the early church era and its implications to church leadership. The specific objectives of the study include; examining the emergence of the early church, concept of church leadership, discourse on welfare practices of the early Christian church and identification of its implications for church leadership. The study employed historical and analytical research approach and rely on literature to achieve the purpose and specific objectives of the study.

The Early Church

Scholars have traced Church's emergence through the testaments (Old and New Testaments) of the Bible. Kehinde Ogunsanya articulates that, the word "Church" derived from the Greek word *Ekklesia* which means "people's assembly" or "public assembly of people".¹ Harvie M. Connviews church as the people of God in the society and an agent of Christ's kingdom on earth. An assembly of God's people with the purpose of unity, holy living and in relation to new life² The definition of the church as given by E.W. Bullinger is down-to-heart and more explicit than the one given by Kehinde Ogunsanya. Bullinger views church as an assembly especially of citizens of God's elect for divine purpose.³ He supplements his view by defining church as a new body composed of the Jews and Gentiles (1 Corinthians 10:32) ⁴ It can be deduced that church is the called-out people from the world, separated for divine purpose by God. It is instructive to note that just like the Israelites were called out for the purpose of worshipping God and occupying the promised land, so also the church is called out to show forth the praises of God and be his ambassador in the perverse world (2 Corinthians 5:29). Hence, Israelites denote and designate a special nation and people of God. The above assertions imply that, those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, confessed their sins and have been baptized in water now become God's family known as church.

Samson Fatokun elucidates that, the Greek word for church does not indicate that Jesus wants to build a *kuriakon*; that is a house of worship but rather an *Ekklesia* that is called-out people of God from the thralldom (bondage) of sin to holy living; a redeemed community.⁵ Carl S. Meyer in his own substantiates that, Church is the assembly of saints and true believers arising from the preaching of the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus and the administration of

His sacrament, especially holy baptism and the Eucharist.⁶ He further asserts it as the body of Christ, the pillar of truth, the temple of God, the communion of saints which indicate the gift of Holy Spirit⁷ Greg Livingstone has a different opinion, he elucidates that, church simply means the followers of Jesus Christ, believers called out from all that is not of God to gather in His name.⁸ Stretching further, he cited Evans defining church as believers that gather under the lordship of Christ in a new relationship, not solely between them and God, but also between them and their brothers and sisters in Christ⁹. Hence, the definition of the term church is not complete without laying emphasis on redeeming the called out from the world, darkness and sin, their fellowship together in making them live holy life demanded by God and being set apart for divine purpose as God's instrument.

David J. Bosch's submission underscores the fact that, Church is a place where the gospel of God is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly.¹⁰ Dag H. Mills submits that "A regular gathering of Christians for the purpose of teaching is called a church."¹¹ Simon A. Ishola gave another insight citing Emiola Nihinlola defining church as the assembly of believers called out from the world by the father, saved by the Lord Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹² Proceeding further that church was derived from Greek word *Ekklesia*. *Ek* denote "from," or "out of," *ka-leo* means "to call out from."¹³ His submission classifies church as an assembly, a movement or a congregation of people in the world that were called out by God from darkness into light through Jesus Christ to be different.

Strengthening the assertion in another paper, Ishola adds that church is an autonomous spiritual body under the leadership of Christ.¹⁴ However, Bruce Power opines that church is the assembly of those who have listened to the word of Christ, broken down by divine power, leading such to true repentance of their sins, turning away from darkness into Jesus Christ and fully committing themselves to him.¹⁵ Sequence to the deep elaboration of the above subject matter, *Septuagint* was translated from Hebrew word *qahal* to mean the nation of Israel that assembles before God and under His theocratic rule.¹⁶ Going through the above assertions, it is affirmed that church is an assembly of the people be it Christian or not. The specific definition attests to Christianity as the body of Christ on earth. The event of the Pentecost day marked the manifestation and emergence of the Christian church in the New Testament; and which can be traced to Old Testament when God separated for Himself a nation called Israel.¹⁷ The New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local assembly of baptized believers that were associated with the covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to his teachings, exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His word and seeking to extend the gospel to the end of the earth.¹⁸ Benebo F. Fubara describes church from generic sense when he observes that, church is the people and community bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ and called to declare the wonderful deeds of God who has called them out of darkness into the marvelous light.¹⁹ He posits further by referring to church as the people who have experienced God's salvation so explicitly that they can speak of the Holy Spirit as living in their heart and in their midst. Moreso, church is the family that God is forming on earth and has already made perfect in heaven to relate with.²⁰ This depicts that a church member must have experienced God in life and had an encounter with the Holy Spirit, followed by repentance that will prompt him to walk in the light.

The Lord Jesus Christ instructed believers to preach the word which should involve gathering of people together for the purpose of teaching them from the scriptures. The definition of church is

incomplete without an assembly of people that gather together to learn the word of God through discipleship. Taking such instruction into account will reshape life anew and transform it positively. The clue here shows church as those that had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, accepted Him as their Lord and saviour, living separate holy life and ascetic lifestyle under the guidance of theocentric leadership with the motif of submitting their lives to God regardless of challenges they might encountered. It can be established that, church is an autonomous body operating through the democratic process under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is the kingdom of God where members should strive to seek salvation of their souls.

The prediction of Christ captioned in Acts 1:8 “That you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit falls on you, you shall be my witness in Jerusalem, Judea Samaria and other nations,” this statement manifests on the Pentecost Day when the apostles experienced Holy Spirit baptism by speaking in tongues which later gave birth to emergence of the Christian church in the early first century. Christ’s ministry increased as 3000 converts were added to the church through the power of Holy Spirit and exhortation delivered by Peter in Acts 2:36-41. Samson K. Oyeku corroborates this fact by saying that, “Christianity began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost on (12th Day Sivan A.D. 30) and spread through the Mediterranean world.”²¹ There follows discipleship training where peoples’ needs were met. Acts 4 & 5 expatiates how those who possessed properties sold them and brought the money to Apostles’ feet in the gathering. Such money was shared among the needy and nobody claimed any property personally but for the usage of the church to care for the needy and such later gave birth to equality and communal living where there was no rich or poor, no oppressor but people with the nature and spirit of a good Samaritan in the church and the society. The power of Holy Spirit moved among Christ followers as their souls were convinced through their conscience to be righteous and truthful in all dealings, taking lesson from Ananias and Saphira his wife in Acts 5:1-10.

The conflict and criticism that arose within the church is the event of unequal distribution of bread among believers in Acts 6:1-10, John C. Neige postulates that “Criticism can be God’s shaping tool that transform us from self-centered (individualism) into people who live and act like church.”²² The critics had influenced church leadership to correct mis-management in the church governance which later gave room for division of labour in ministry that reformed church leadership. The exercise opened room for good church leadership and administrative structure for those to manage the table while the Apostles faced gospel ministry squarely. Supporting Pauline Lere assertion, James Eckman claims that events of Pentecost Day gave birth to the early Christian church in Jerusalem as the spirit filled the 120 believers waiting and praying before the miracle of tongues occurred.²³

At Pentecost, the Spirit-inspired sermon delivered by Peter ignited the congregation and about three thousand converts confessed their sins and repented from their sinful way. This aligns with about three thousand Israelites that died by the sword in their act of rejecting the Lord God of Israel in the wilderness worshipping calf image when Moses extended his interaction with God on the mountain where he claimed the decalogue or Ten Commandments (Exodus 32:28). The new converts were baptized and added to the Christ believers and followers. James Eckman sharing similar opinion with Pauline Lere that attests to the event of Pentecost remained the yardstick upon which Christian church emanates and continues to grow numerically in strengths, winning more converts and penetrating the heathen lands.²⁴ The early converts were mostly Jews from Judaism religion and those came from eastern Mediterranean regions.²⁵ Harry Boer

developed a different idea that, at the Pentecost, fundamental changes took place in the character and structure of the people of God which base on the followings: The New Testament universal church replaced the strictly Israelites congregation expressed as Temple and Synagogue. The people of God ceased to be a national people and became international, a universal community. Preacher replaced the Priest, the pulpit replaced the altar and the church witnessed to the sacrifice of Christ which replaced the ceremonial sacrifice of animals.²⁶ The event took a new turn as the Church grew and expanded rapidly in Rome, Palestine and neighboring regions. The event of Pentecost day made believers assemble in Jerusalem from various countries which marked the expansion of the church in Jerusalem and diaspora as those involved in the event manifested their faiths in their host nations.

Church Leadership: Conceptual Framework

This section demands stating definition of leadership before expressing that of church leadership. O. Adetunji citing Ordway Teads, defines leadership as the activity of influencing people to cooperate towards certain goal which they come to find desirable.²⁷ Lovett Weems views leadership as the development and articulation of a shared vision, motivation of those within who’s vision cannot become a reality and gains the cooperation of most people involved.²⁸ Donor box specifies church leadership as the art of cooperation, planning and unitedly achieving the goals of God set for humankind in the life, teachings, death, resurrection and the coming back of Jesus Christ. In essence, a church leader is a Christlike personality whose wisdom, self-sacrifice and labour cooperate with others in finding and doing the will of Christ.²⁹

Moreso, church leadership can be termed as art of exercising influence, guidance and direction to those in the church towards fulfilling the church goals. In another development, O. Adetunji postulates that church leadership is a process whereby a trained and competent Christian, Pastor or leader motivates and influences his work-team or work-committee to follow the Bible, contextualize modern skill and strategies, carrying out God-given assignment and continued until church is significantly transformed. Church leadership is about serving others and following Christ’s interest so that they can see and accomplish God’s purpose for them in the world.³⁰ He posits further stating the character traits for excellent church leadership as: Servant of God excellent listener, empathetic, healer, persuasive, follower of the big picture, sharer of experience, steward of others, committed to people’s needs and builder of community.³¹ Therefore, leadership in both secular and religious setting is to plan, execute the vision, and coordinate the people to achieve desired goals. But the church leadership should hearken and yield to the vision God purposely designed for His people and work towards achieving it.

Be it secular or church setting, there are designated leadership styles to put into operation. Gideon Adetunji expatiates the followings as leadership models that are attached to secular. These are authoritarian leadership that seek very little participation from the group in decision making, a forum where followers are dependent on the leaders. Also, there is laissez-fair leadership where complete permissiveness is allowed. The group lack direction because the leaders does not help in making decision, Next is the Bureaucratic that base on system of rules, policies and procedure to solve problem. The Charismatic leadership focus on himself as the one possessing certain supernatural power. The last of the leadership model is democratic which allows a leader to participate in formation of policies but does not dominate the group action.³²

Adetunji Gideon posits further stating four models of leadership in the church which are Servant-leadership as Jesus affirms that he who wants to be a leader must firstly be a servant just like Joshua served Moses, Prophet Elisa serves Prophet Elijah. Also there is transformational leadership where the leader lay good sample of what is saying and not wayward in deeds as a leader. Moreover, is situational leadership and eclectic leadership. Each of these models determine the type to use for church government that depict Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational and Single elder or Pastor led.³³ He posits further attesting to these qualities for a good church leader: He should be concerned with the institution value system which after words leads to principle and standards that guide the practice of the people in the church or institution. Moreso, he is responsible to brew and train future leaders. He should encourage contrary opinion as an important source of vitality.³⁷ Church leader should understand that he should lead the people to God having their lives being transformed so that the impact of church existence can be felt positively.

On the biblical perspectives of church leadership, Peter Mead postulates that the Bible provides framework for church leadership centered on the principles of servant leadership, spiritual maturity, delegation, accountability and wisdom. Jesus the ultimate leader modeled humility and service which are central to the roles of church leaders.³⁴ Hence, effective leader must be spiritually matured, delegate task to empower others, be transparent and accountable and seek wisdom and discernment. He submits further tracing the church leadership from Ephesians 4:11 emphasizing on different offices of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Teacher and Shepherd. ³⁵Gideon Adetunji attests to the New Testament, where Jesus is identified as an exemplary leader in the way he selected the twelve apostles, using servant-leadership and situational models to train them. In servant-leadership, he indicates that leader's heart, head, hand and habit should be transformed.³⁶ Other typical leaders that have led God's assembly in the Bible are Moses (Exodus Chapter 3&4), Joshua (Joshua Chapter 1&2), Nehemiah (Nehemiah Chapter 2 and Ezra in the book of Ezra and host of others.

Biblical Perspective of Welfare Practices

The issue of welfare can be traced to God in the Old Testament right from the garden of Eden when He made provision for Adam and Eve (Genesis Chapters 1-3). Also, a divine provision made for the Israelites in the wilderness with the provision of manna, quails and water for their sustenance in Exodus Chapter 16. The miraculous provision did not cease up to the entering point of the promised land. The discourse on welfare can be traced to New Testament where Jesus fed the crowd of people ranging from 4000 to 5000 (Mathew Chapter 14: 13-23), preaching against oppressing the poor and challenging the Pharisee on their hypocritical nature of their wickedness in inflicting the poor with man-made laws. The attributes of welfare practices are not limited to giving of food and properties alone but the communal living of equal economic status.

McGiffert J. W. Fretz gives an interesting description of the power of the spirit in the life of the early church brotherhood. He further asserts that Christians should treat all with whom they contact with respect, showing kindness as opportunity offered, avoid hatred, resentment and anger towards them." Moreover, the love and the feeling of unity seems to be strong enough to transcend boundary limit. Stressing further, he claims that the rich were not many but those with property and possession sold them and share with the poor their food and fellowship at common table.³⁷

From Paul's point of view, the newly established churches during the first century throughout the Mediterranean world confirm an

illustration on how mutual aid and welfare practices developed and fully expressed among early church Christians. Philippians 2:4 instructs believers that, not to take account of their own interest but the interest of others as well. The clarity was made on welfarism, benevolent giving and rendering service to the poor as the major essential truth of the Christian religion. Hence, the church has moral responsibilities and functions to take care of the poor, the needy, the widow, orphans and the helpless in the society. Equally, the poor should be empowered to be economically independent to the tune of making life meaningful for them and enjoying communal living of equal economic status.

A. Olubitan submits that, God acknowledges the state of the poor suffering from poverty. He loves and cares for the poor, His intension to rescue them brought about the statement "because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now rise and protect them from those malign them (Psalm123:3)."³⁸ Stressing his opinion further, he opines that God want the church to love and care for the poor as quoted that "he who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and He will reward him for what he has done (Proverb 19:12). The above assertions show that Welfare practices has been embedded in mission enterprise by God Himself and an attempt to negate it render mission enterprise incomplete. Going through the welfare practices embarked upon by the church in the early century, people's needs were met in the church individually as stated in Acts 4 & 5, and corporately (Acts 6 :1-10).

Welfare Practices in the Early Church Era

The early church of the first century in Jerusalem demonstrated welfare practice based on meeting the physical needs, the spiritual needs and living communal life of equal economic status.

Adeshina Olubitan postulates that, "The early church practiced some forms of communalism, sharing their shelters even to homeless, wealth from their properties, food and clothing to meet the needs of those belonging to their fellowship. Generosity was extended to the needy (Acts 2:41-47).³⁹ Preaching message of salvation of souls with materials and moral support will cushion the poor and improve believers' condition for better.

The welfare practices of early church era focused on the followings;

sharing food and resources to ensure everyone had basic needs. It manifested in communal meals and distribution of alms, care of the sick and the vulnerable through healing prayer, hospitality and outreaches and missionary work.⁴⁰Takanou Inoue articulates that Christian used the following approaches as welfare practices: -

- i) Christian beliefs, spiritual power and behaviour through humanitarian relationship and power of Holy Spirit to suppress demonic spirit.
- ii) Through exhibiting pure love in sharing goods and right use of wealth.
- iii) Justice in the distribution of goods and practice of sharing
- iv) Life linked with love for God and human being.
- v) Friendship and companionship by providing new norms, new kind of social relationship that enable men to cope with urgent urban problems.
- vi) Integrating teachings of theology into practice especially the word of God that improves man's knowledge of God do what is right.⁴¹

This affirms the relief procedure used to draw members to their fold with intimate care for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of others. It is important to meet the physical needs as developing the knowledge of believers to the way of God with

constant teaching and discipleship so as to have their lives transformed.

Charles Tidwell highlights the followings welfare practices by the church as: -

- i) Fellowship and Worship: This is a basic activity of coming together as a body of believers sharing the pain with an individual and procuring lasting solution to it. Moreso, leading an individual encountering God in experiences that deepen a Christian faith and strengthening His service. It is a natural expression of one's relationship with God.⁴²
- ii) Proclamation and witnessing: It is natural to give report of an encounter with Christ to others, affirming His greatness in one's life and thereby appealing to others to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and saviour.
- iii) Nurturing and educating: Highly important for a church to nourish, modify and develop individual within a fellowship. This fully involves discipleship training, Bible studies, Sunday Schools' class involvement, sound teaching and preaching with exegetical interpretation and application to contemporary time. Some well-to-do person thirst for true word of God like Cornelius and his household who adopted God's messages through Peter. Contrarily, some wealthy people lack giving to the poor but extorting them and skinning them to bone marrow. Sound teaching and education will illuminate them to share their properties with the poor on earth to have treasury in heaven.
- iv) Doing Ministry: This area involves engaging preaching and spreading of the gospel. It is also necessary to build members to invest in ministry with capital contribution to boost cross-cultural ministry. There is necessity for those who have seen the light, know the way to illuminate others, withdrawing them out of darkness into Christ the light for the world.

Tidwell further submits that, the functions of the church encompass worship, proclamation and witnessing, nurturing and educating, ministry and fellowship on mission enterprise.⁴³ Simon A. Ishola supported the assertion that the welfare practices or the spiritual mandate of the church depicts worship, nurture and education, discipleship, proclamation and witnessing, ministry and mission.⁴⁴ Kehinde Ogunsanya on his own opines that, church should bear in mind the following tasks; teaching biblical doctrines and evangelism, providing place of fellowship for believers, observing the Lord's supper, proclaiming the gospel of salvation, it should promote the gospel as well prepares her members to promote the gospel.⁴⁵ Since the church has been defined as the body of Christ on earth, for the body to remain lively and fulfil his mandate, the above ingredients discussed must be put in operation to keep it moving, existing and not force into extinction.

Implications for The Contemporary Church Leadership

Contemporary church leaders can learn from the leadership of the early church in the way of handling social justice and equity. In this dispensation, horrible things are attributed to Christians in area of bribery and corruption, moral laxity, money ritual, cheating the poor, denying them of their fundamental human rights by leaving the poor to suffer, even church leadership inclusive. Some wealthy people in the church shut their eyes to rescue the dying poor. The contemporary church leadership can preach real gospel message on giving to the poor as part of storing one's resources in heaven. To

actualize this, church leaders need laying example and maintain what they preach in their doings. Community engagement cannot be neglected as an avenue to develop our vicinity in making life meaningful to the inhabitants. The church pastor or leader should preach to the populace the importance of developing our area jointly rather than individually.

Servant leadership remains the practice of early church. Nowadays, there is wide gap in church and pastoral leadership status like senior pastors and associate pastors, more so is the class of degree attained, typical example is Certificate or Diploma holders' clergies are considered inferior to Doctorate Degree clergies in academic status without minding the flow of spiritual anointing that is mostly needed to operate effectively in ministry. Contemporary church leaders should preach humility and humbleness against ego of higher certificate. Some of the Apostles were older in age than Christ but they exhibited servant leadership style. Leader should employ collective expression like "We" then being a boss using "I" indicating he is relying on himself and his own personal decision.

Other notable thing is addressing the root cause of the identified problem. There is no challenge without a cause, poverty in family clan may be lack of good education, orientation to skill vocational training and idleness. Leadership of the early church worked and preach vehemently on both physical task and the spiritual aspect. Contemporary church leaders can establish a project to accommodate church members in employing them to earn their living so as to find lasting solution to poverty chain. Another area that needs be addressed is the issue of empowerment. There are some brilliant people without mentor and financial aids to help them in making their vision come to actualization and manifestation. The church leadership axis should preach sound gospel that will encourage the wealthy to finance the poor and also empower them in the area of mentoring and counselling. We should note that, Moses mentored Joshua, likewise Elijah mentored Elisha as Paul apostle did to Timothy.

In the present dispensation, some ministers are not fully called with the inspiration from God, some are not mentored, some half-baked and they remain as free-range livestock gaining independence for themselves. The church leadership of the early church did not leave the converts alone but gave them spiritual instruction that guided their ways of life so that they would not go back to sinning. In the society of today, they parade streets as church planters that had become General Overseer without mentors that can call such to awareness when they deviate before they shipwreck in ministry. Yielding to the above statement will improve one's ministerial life and ministry. Going through the practices of the early church, these reflections were noted in the church has it has brought a great change to the church in the following ways;

- i) It has increased the number of those who accepted Christ as their Lord and saviour. Some enlisted in the church as a result of the gospel preached, welfare disposition through Christian fold and communal living.
- ii) People were committed to spiritual matter than the worldly materials most especially keeping monastery. Some believers who were against worldly, corrupt life left the town and lived ascetic life, denying themselves against stumbling block to eternity.
- iii) More assemblies of Christians emerged, the practice has given birth to more churches and its extension beyond not only Jews but also to Gentiles and other regions.
- iv) People's lives were transformed e.g., Saul of Tarsus later known as Paul after conversion, Cornelius that surrendered his household for Christ after Peter's

intervention with the word of God (Acts Chapter 10:1-8) and a host of others.

- v) More labourers equipped feature as God's vessel most especially the appointed seven deacons in Acts 6:1-5. As gospel of Christ preached, it illuminates masses knowledge seeing the light and supporting the ministry with acquired knowledge.
- vi) Establishment of theological training centers where believers were trained and equipped.
- vii) More lives were saved and liberated from doom
- viii) It has brought about good administrative structure for church governance. Acts Chapter 6:1-6 analyzed church structure that gives room for division of labour and team spirit in evangelism.

Gabriel O. Olaniyan opines that God's word must be proclaimed to those in darkness to know Christ and confess Him as their Lord and saviour through meeting human needs by encouraging and practicing social justice, physical healing and wholeness, fellowship that enhance development of relationship amongst believers who share burdens and joy.⁴⁶ This assertion indicates that church has no excuses to present anything denying her from preaching the word of God to the unreached. Money should not be given as a genuine reason for not doing the work of evangelism. For the contemporary church leadership to be rate as good leaders, they must look into the followings: -

- i) Meeting the spiritual and physical needs of the people in terms of moral teachings, counselling, feeding and financing members must be given priority such assembly.
- ii) Provision of employment opportunity for the populace with prompt payment of emoluments and other benefits.
- iii) Structuring the nation economy to cushion the effect of poor economy. Economic recession and inflation that have dropped majority of middle-class people to barely zero level but structural adjustment on economy of a nation will serve as remedy if church leaders mount pressure on the government programs that will alleviate masses burden through sound biblical preaching.
- iv) Involving the lower class during policy making process to air their views, since conducive living and benefits are not meant for the people of the high class or calibre alone.
- v) Seeing to the security of peoples' life and properties. Situation of today has rendered the poor to suffer from insecurity of the nation by the bandits and Fulani's herdsmen that claim people's life unnecessarily.
- vi) Doing follow-up to have feedback on every policy or project embarked upon. Some relief policies were proclaimed and channeled through the officers that serve as middlemen between the church administration and the destitutes, but one is surprise as those packages hanging between the intermediaries and failed to reach the grassroots level being meant for. This shows poor evaluation and assessment of policies promulgated by the church government.
- vii) Prompt visitation to people in their abodes, to know the problems they are passing through on roads, electricity, water supply, feeding, health condition and other infrastructural facilities.
- viii) Relieving masses' burden through subsidizing essential commodities for masses' consumption (Petrol, Gas lubricating oil and electricity power supply) and reduction of heavy taxation or excise duties.

- ix) Supplying drugs by improving health sector. Some people with ailments lose their lives due to lack of fund to clear the exorbitant cost demanded by the health sector.

Conclusion

This paper discusses welfare practices of the early church era and its implications for church leadership. The task of the church and individual Christian is to save lives in meeting the need of the masses. The findings showed lacuna between the church leadership of the early church that made the poor enjoy the same status in sharing goods and properties compare with contemporary time that the gap between the rich and the poor in the church of God remains wide. Contemporary churches can boast of numerous multibillionaires and many poor. The hardship and poor state of living resulted to criminal act and social vices found among Christians which indicates that the spiritual and moral life of church leaders dwindle and diminish. If charity, welfare and egalitarian society is taken into account and consideration by the church leaders, there will be no need for people coveting and involving in funds embezzlement and fraudulent acts. As a result of this, there will be peace and smooth running of church governance than contemporary times that Christians and some clergies cannot be differentiated from public assault and criminal acts. The situation has given to actualization of an adage that depicts when the head is rotten, the whole body is damaged and rendered useless. If our society is to be transformed for better, it has to commence from our leaders who should live by example.

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