

The Rediscovery of the Role of the Laity in the Mission of the Church – with Reference to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA)

Peter Christofides

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Supervisor: Prof. P. G. J. Meiring

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617498892



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SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis was to study the current status of the laity in South Africa, especially the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) in order to establish whether the Church is advancing or not – both numerically and spiritually.

In missiological studies, we become very aware of different paradigms and models. These standards can often determine the goal of the research and the criterion for testing models which are presented or approached. In this case, the paradigm and standard is found in Scripture. The important problems facing Christianity and missiology today, centre on an understanding of the doctrine, and distinguishing factors, of the Church and its implications. These distinguishing factors of the Church have been discussed and made clear in this thesis as it is a burning issue today – that is certainly true in the BUSA.

Within the commands and paradigms given in Scripture, there is a need to plant churches. These churches are made up of people of the world gathering together into meaningful, worshipping and obeying groups. These groups are distinguished by teaching – (Kerygma) (Κήρυγμα). Each member, according to the priesthood of all believers, has an equal opportunity to make a contribution to the life of the church and together are the driving force, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ. Christ's purposes are worked out through local churches and this is tied inextricably with His Word.

This Church that is incarnated is distinguished by fellowship – (Koinonia) (Κοινωνία). This fellowship of love reaches out to include mankind giving rise to loving God and loving one's neighbour. Under the Lordship of Christ there is a constraint of love to live for Him with responsible compassion for others.

This Church that is incarnated is distinguished by ministry – Diakonia (Διακονία). The Body of Christ is a living organism because each member partakes of the life of Christ. The nature of this life is to be like Christ as it comes to visibility in local churches reflecting a basic organization which conforms to its nature by looking to Christ.

This Church that is incarnated is distinguished by Worship (Λειτουργία). Christ is worshipped by the local church serving in the world. Those who have faith in Christ serve and minister as representatives of Christ.

The Body of Christ which is the Church functions as a community and has some form of organisation. This does not mean that people strive for positions of power, but rather serve through sacrificial giving. Down through the ages the church has observed the tendency to a hierarchical view of church leadership. The church should be defined and stated by spiritual gifting rather than hierarchical status.

Research has been ventured upon through questionnaires and interviews to determine the status of the laity. This was done across denominations of the Christian faith. From the research undertaken and the data collected, it would be an adequate observation, therefore, to state that most South Africans do not have strong and clear beliefs, largely because they do not possess a coherent biblical worldview – that is, they lack a consistent and holistic understanding of their faith. Millions of South Africans feel personally committed to God, yet they have their own “belief system” or are “spiritual people” in their “own way”.

Although one needs to be cautious about reading too much into figures, one needs to be cautious not to become too casual among those who move too far from basic accepted, traditional views. It eventually raises the question, to whom and what are people committed to? Also, people are spiritually active, but to what end in their “own way”?

There is always the possibility that the changes in the behaviours observed will produce some permanent transitions in beliefs. For example, it may be that there may be a dramatic increase in Bible reading that could produce a new understanding of biblical content. It is possible that more church attendance would lead to a deeper relationship with God. It is reasonable to expect more widespread involvement in home-cells and small groups to produce some degree of change in people's lives – if there is correct and appropriate teaching and if there is a conscious effort toward this intention. While such transitions do not occur often, there is always the hope that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, lives will be changed. Since God works through people to accomplish His purposes, it is an exciting challenge for Christian leaders to seek His guidance toward facilitating a genuine period of renewal and revival in this country.

Looking at the current status of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA), field research was done to establish the current situation and maturity (or immaturity) of the churches under the BUSA. This phase of analysis was entered, conscious of limitations, yet confident that the problem was serious enough to demand further analysis that significant data emerged. From this data, we discovered where the problems lay and through analysing this data, recommendations for the BUSA have been made in building mature churches in the denomination. By diagnosis and prognosis, analysis has determined a way forward.

A church without responsible action for the Christian mission is an abnormality. Its own health, growth and maturity which give praise to God are dependent on the Spirit's guidance in the obedience of faith to all nations. Something is wrong when people spectate and expect others to do the task of Christian missions.

Suggestions were articulated and the proposals reached were from the doctrine of the Church and the analysis of the data from the research done. These

submissions are ways the BUSA can become an influence which will be felt among the nations of the world.

In this analysis, the researcher puts forward that there seems to be a position of passive dependence of the laity on the clergy. The researcher believes that each member, both clergy and laity, has their own distinctive contribution to make to the life of the church and the expansion of God's kingdom in the world.

Although the BUSA may be growing numerically, there is a growing concern over the stability of many of the churches and their leaders. Without a greater emphasis on church strengthening, education and equipping, churches under the banner of the BUSA are going to be faced with troubling consequences.

The researcher believes that the role of the laity is on the cutting edge of the Christian mission. If there is no rediscovery of this role, the church will be faced with many more difficulties. The biblical view of the priesthood of all believers or every-member ministry (EMM) illustrates that empowering the laity at grass roots level to be ministers of the Gospel should be standard. This view alerts churches to change their priorities so that more people can engage in ministry that serves the nations of the world – hence the term missional member ministry (MMM).

KEY WORDS

1. Clergy
2. Laity
3. Church
4. Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA)
5. Evangelical
6. Preaching/Teaching – Kerygma (Κήρυγμα)
7. Fellowship/Communion – Koinonia (Κοινωνία)
8. Serving – Diakonia (Διακονία)
9. Worship – Leitourgia (Λειτουργία)
10. Missional
11. People Ministry
12. Missional Member Ministry (MMM)

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