



Congregationalism and Multiplicative Church Planting within the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), 1946-2018: Focus on the Bamenda Urbanity

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Abstract

The Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) distinguishes itself not only as the pioneering evangelistic mission in Cameroon but also by its Indirect Administrative chain of command known as the Congregational System. By this system of administration, the central administrative unit shifts virtually all responsibilities including infrastructural, personnel, financial and even evangelistic to affiliated local congregations. In spite of the weighty responsibility required from them, the local congregations of the CBC have not compromised the critical duty of evangelism and church planting. As a corollary to this predilection to spread the gospel, many of these congregations have transformed themselves into Church-planting movements. This has invariably reverberated into mind-boggling surge in the number of CBC Churches in Bamenda, Cameroon in recent years. From this background this paper launches an inquest into the mutualism between the Congregational System of Administration and the multiplicative growth of local CBC congregations since 1946 when the first CBC Congregation was planted in Bamenda. The paper employs oral, written and archival materials to succor its thesis.

Keywords: Cameroon Baptist Convention, Church Planting, Evangelism, Bamenda, Congregationalism.

Introduction

The Baptist mission like other Christian missions all over the world believes that “the best way to fulfill [the] mandate of evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching obedience is through the planting of contextualized churches among the various people groups and population segments of the world”.¹ This mission of the church is emboldened by the Biblical edict in Matthew 28: 19-20 which hands down the responsibility of evangelizing, teaching and baptizing to the Church. Within the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), it is both a critical and sacred responsibility. However, though the CBC agrees on the necessity and urgency of this duty, its administrative system which emphasizes the autonomy of the local church (indirect administration) has invariably affected the manner in which this critical duty of the church is being pursued. This paper attempts an inquiry into the correlation between the Indirect Administration and the Multiplicative Planting of CBC Churches in Bamenda, Cameroon.

An excursion into existing literature reveals that a few authors have harped on an aspect or two of the present study. While maintaining that the Biblical injunction to “make disciples of all nations...” does not suggest church planting, Payne (2009) agrees that there is no better way to fulfill the injunction without the planting of churches but proposes the motivations and methods of church planting.² According to the CBC Training for Results (TFR) Seminar Booklet (2018), Church planting is a major step in the fulfillment of the Biblical Great Commission but also spotlights the need for the internalization of a church-planting philosophy within the CBC and the transformation of existing CBC Churches to church-planting movements.³ The Document emphasizes the centrality of church-planting within the CBC. Admittedly, god-designed mission for the church in the world has always been and remains the planting of more churches.⁴ The church’s conviction must thus align with its multiplicative mission.⁵ In fact, Bryan Collier (2013) maintains that there is the need to focus on those who are still out of the church rather than continuing to focus on those already in the church.⁶ Meanwhile, the CBC Constitution (2014) declares that the CBC has accepted the Congregational form of government which emphasizes the autonomy of local churches.⁷ This system highlights the features of the CBC Church administration to rotate around the principle of “Selfs” which include “Self Governance”, “Self Finance”, “Self Propagation/Reproduction” and “Self Theologizing”.⁸ On his part, Ndi analyses the processes of integration and affiliation in the CBC in which he establishes the status of the local CBC churches within the broader CBC system.⁹

While the foregoing literature reveals that the CBC upholds the Biblical injunction of “Making Disciples” as critical, the Church’s system of administration which emphasizes the autonomy of

¹ Jervis David Payne, *Discovering Church Planting, An Introduction to the Whats, whys and hows of Global Church Planting*. (USA: Authentic Publishing, 2009), 4.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Training for Results Seminar Booklet*. (CBC Evangelism and Missions Department, Bamenda: Shiloh Printers, 2018).

⁴ Alan Hirsch, “Missional Communities”. *Movemental Ecclesia*. www.VergeNetwork.org.

⁵ Wilson Todd, *Spark, Igniting a Culture of Multiplication*. (2014).

⁶ Bryan Collier, *The Go-To Church*. (np: Abingdon Press, 2013)

⁷ Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Constitution*. Revised and Updated (Bamenda: CBC, 2014), 6.

⁸ Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Church Handbook*. Revised Edition. (Bamenda: CBC, 2017), 26-27.

⁹ Richard Tanto Ndi, “The Processes of Integration and Affiliation in the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), 1954-2004”. (The University of Yaounde I: PhD Thesis in History, 2013).

local CBC Churches has more or less shifted this responsibility (and more) to the local Churches. However, given that the local CBC churches dwell on and also consider Biblical instructions as sacrosanct, they have in recent years jumped up to the responsibility of Evangelism and Multiplicative Church-planting which has resulted in a phenomenal growth in the number of CBC local churches in Bamenda, Cameroon. This forms the nub of this paper.

Sketch History of the Baptist Mission in Cameroon and Bamenda

Missionary bodies generally and the Baptist mission in particular were born from a background of the desire to multiply in accordance with the Biblical edict of Matthew 28: 19-20, “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”.¹⁰ The history of the Baptist mission in Cameroon is inextricably linked to the narrative of the abolition of slave trade in the entire British Empire.¹¹ More precisely, the establishment of the Baptist mission in Cameroon was a congenital aspiration of some emancipated slaves from Jamaica who pressed for an “evangelical mission to return to their African home land”.¹² In fact, most of these slaves had been converted into Christianity by the Protestant Baptist Denomination.¹³ Consequently, they requested the London Baptist Missionary Society (LBMS) to “...give the light of life to that ‘Dark Continent’, and to atone for the crimes that English greed had for centuries committed, by proclaiming in Africa itself the glad tidings of a Divine liberty front high”.¹⁴

The unremitting requests of the Jamaicans and the readiness to offer themselves for the achievement of this goal were fundamental to the decision by the Baptist Missionary Society to act accordingly.¹⁵ Consequently, in 1840, the Baptist Missionary Society took the following decision with regards to the requests of the Jamaicans. They resolved that; “... in compliance with the [requests] of our brethren in Jamaica, and following what we... apprehend to be the clear indications of providence, we determine, in reliance on the divine blessings to commence a mission in West Africa”.¹⁶ This was followed by the dispatching of the first missionary team composed of Reverend John Clarke of Jericho, Jamaica and Dr. G. K. Prince to Africa in 1840 whose mission was to carry out a survey on the possibilities of establishing a Baptist Mission in the territory.

More pointedly, Clarke and Prince left London on Tuesday, October 13, 1840 for Fernando Po where they were expected to join a Niger Expedition which the British had sent on an explorative

¹⁰ International Bible Society-Africa, *Holy Bible, New International Version*. (International Bible Society-Africa: Nairobi, Kenya, 1973), Matthew 28:19-20.

¹¹ Solomon Nfor Gwei, “History of the British Mission in Cameroon with Beginnings in Fernando Po, 1841-1886” (British Theological Seminary, Rüsckukon-Zurich, Switzerland: B.A. Long Essay, 1966), 4.

¹² V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-Present (2018): The History of a People*. (Limbe: Design House, 2019), 31.

¹³ V.G. Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges: From Prehistoric Times to the Twenty-first Century*. Revised and Updated Combined Edition. (Bamkika’ay, Kumbo-Cameroon: Team Work Press, 2017), 126.

¹⁴ Edward Bean Underhill, *Alfred Saker, Missionary to Africa: A Biography*. (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1958), 18. Cited in V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-Present (2018): The History of a People*. (Limbe: Design House, 2019), 31.

¹⁵ Mark Bolak Funteh, “Intra-Cameroon Baptist Convention Conflicts, 1954-2002: A Historical Investigation”. (The University of Yaounde I: PhD Thesis in History, 2008), 12.

¹⁶ Ida Lowards, *Baptists of the World*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 77. Cited in Funteh, “Intra-Cameroon Baptist Convention Conflicts”. 12.

mission to West Africa. They reached Fernando Po on January 1, 1841 but the Niger Expedition failed to turn up. This was to mark a turning point in the history of the Baptist mission in Cameroon. These missionaries visited the then Governor of Fernando Po, Lieutenant Colonel Nicolls and obtained a letter of introduction to visit the mainland of Cameroon. They accompanied a goat trader in a tiny boat to Bimbia and Douala.¹⁷ While in Douala, Clarke and Prince received a favorable welcome from the Kings and indigenes of Akwa and Bell Clans but were greeted with aversion in Bimbia where King William preferred to continue links with Spanish slave traders from which he made his fortunes.¹⁸ By 1842, Clarke and Prince returned to London having achieved their intended purpose of exploring the areas for possible missionary works. The missionaries indeed seemed to be enjoying providence as in 1843 they were assured of religious plurality and freedom in the Island of Fernando Po.

The Reports of the Clarke and Prince mission and the assurance of religious plurality in Fernando Po encouraged the missionaries to enroll more members and by 1845, more missionaries including Joseph Merrick, Alfred Saker and wife as well as Duckett had arrived the Island of Fernando Po. Merrick and Duckett started work in Bimbia on the coast of Cameroon and Merrick quickly learned to speak the Isubu language with precision and went ahead to writing and also translating Mathew's Gospel into Isubu language. He also with Saker's assistance erected the printing press for the printing of Bible translations and Christian leaflets.¹⁹ On his part, Saker started witnessing to the Dualas who inhabited the broad estuary of the Cameroons River (Wouri). In fact, in spite of the initial favorable welcome that was reserved for Clarke and Prince, Saker's mission in Douala still faced sporadic attacks from the indigenes which served as dissuasion to the advancement of the mission. It was undoubtedly due to these attacks that Saker himself remarked that "Douala is dark, grossly dark-dark as death".²⁰ It is worth mentioning that in spite of their activities on the Cameroon coast, the missionaries had established their base in Fernando Po and functioned fairly freely until the arrival of a new Consul-General for the Island.

Despite assurances of religious freedom in Fernando Po, in December 1845, the Spanish Consul-General, Don Carlos Chacon arrived Fernando Po with instructions to expel the Baptists unless they agreed to operate in "a private capacity only".²¹ In 1858, Chacon issued a declaration stating that; "...1- The religion of this Colony is that of Roman Catholic Church.... [and that]...2- Those who profess any other religion, which is not the Catholic, should confine their worship within their own private houses or families and limit it to members thereof".²² Following the issuance of this Order, the Baptist missionaries made efforts to have the decision reversed but only received the full-throated response from the Consul-General, "I cannot, I will not grant it. Do not ask me again".²³ It became clear that the Baptist missionaries' stay on the Island of Fernando Po was no longer secure and they had to begin exploring possibilities of permanently

¹⁷ Nfor Gwei, "History of the British Mission". 7.

¹⁸ V. J. Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800* (Limbe: Presbook, 1996), 49.

¹⁹ L.E. Kwast, *The Disciplining of West Cameroon: A Study of Baptist Growth*. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 1971), 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 68.

²¹ *Ibid.* Cited in Funtteh, "Intra-Cameroon Baptist Convention Conflicts". 15.

²² J.J. Lippert, "Confrontation Sets in a Blink". *Baptist Herald No. 13*. (1933), 164-5. Cited in Funtteh, "Intra-Cameroon Baptist Convention Conflicts". 16.

²³ *Ibid.* 66. Edward Bean Underhill, *Alfred Saker, Missionary to Africa*. Second Edition. (London: The Carey Kings Gate Press Limited, 1958), 96. Cited in Funtteh, "Intra-Cameroon Baptist Convention Conflicts". 16.

moving the mission base to the Cameroon coast. Consequently, in February 1858, Saker bought a piece of land from King William of Bimbia who claimed its ownership and established his mission from where evangelistic activities continued to burgeon along the coast and eventually spilled over into the interior, notably to the Bamenda Grasslands.

The spread of the Baptist missionary activities to the Bamenda Grassland was thanks to the alacrity of such men as Joseph Mamadou of Bum, Bobe Robert Jam, Gaduma, Thomas Ntoh, Nteff from Kom, Daniel Hangu and Tonto who were converted into Christianity while at the coast.²⁴ They were converted thanks to the missionary activities of Joseph Burnley who at the same time mentored them and eventually dispatched them to their respective areas of origin in the grasslands to preach the gospel to their people. By 1922, the first Baptist Church in the Grassland was established in Bum thanks to the missionary activities of Joseph Mamadou. He also extended his activities to the Nkambe area and established other churches in Bih, Binka and Ndu while the works of Nteff and Daniel Hangu also led to the planting of other churches in kom and Bangolan areas.²⁵ By 1946, Nkwen Baptist Church (the first Baptist Church in the Bamenda urbanity) was created thanks to the missionary efforts of Rev. Doctors George Dunger and Paul Gebuaer.²⁶ Nkwen Baptist Church initiated the multiplicative church planting process in Bamenda by planting twelve (12) Churches between 1952 and 2005. These include the Baptist Churches in Menteh (1952), Ntanka (1954), Bambili (1957), Bafunge (1959), Musang (1960), Mile 1, Up Station, (1961), Mubang (1961), Menda, Mile Three (1962), Bayelle (1994), Hope Ndamukong (1995), Mount Carmel Old Town (1999) and Emmanuel Sisia (2005).²⁷

Ostensibly, the CBC churches seemed to have caught this vision of multiplicative church-planting early enough in their existence. For instance, the Nkwen Baptist Church after existing for barely six years already planted its first church in the Bamenda urbanity, in Menteh in 1952. This was indicative not only of the urgency of this assignment but also of the determination of the local CBC churches to engage church-planting efforts as of necessity. This has been responsible for the phenomenal growth witnessed in the number of CBC churches in Bamenda. It is evident that, in spite of the hefty onus imposed on these churches by the CBC administrative system of “autonomy of local churches”, they have jumped up to the duty of multiplicative church planting in Bamenda leading to the proliferation of CBC Churches in nearly all corners of the City. This has transformed the number of CBC Churches in Bamenda from one (1) in 1946 to multitudinous array of worship houses associated with the CBC.

Congregationalism within the CBC

There exist four approaches to church government. These include, the Episcopalian form of church government (Episcopacy) in which there is a single head of the church from whom power emanates to the local congregations.²⁸ Examples of churches that practice this kind of system are the Roman Catholic Church, The Episcopal Church, the Orthodox Church, the Lutheran church

²⁴ Lawrence Nformi Koyoh, *Drinking the Gospel in African Cups: Case Study-The Wimbun People of Donga Mantung Division, North West Region of Cameroon*. (Bamenda: CBC Printing Press, 2015), 6.

²⁵ Koyoh, *Drinking the Gospel*. 6-7.

²⁶ Nkwen Baptist Church, “Nkwen Baptist Church is 70”. A 70th Anniversary Publication, November 2016. 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 2-3.

²⁸ Larry Oats, “A Theological Basis for the Congregational Government”. *Proclaim and Defend, a Ministry of the FBFI: Prioritizing the Local Church*. (March 2016). Found online at <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org>. Accessed on August 12, 2019.

and to a lesser extent, the Methodist Church.²⁹ In the Roman Catholic Church for instance, ultimate power emanates from the Pope based in the Vatican in Rome. The basic assumption in this system is that the church obeys the authority of the Pope because he speaks with Christ's authority. It follows that the system is also Biblically founded on the Doctrine of Apostolic Succession which holds that divine authority was passed from Christ to the apostles. A second approach to church government is Presbyterianism which is a form of representative government by which each church elects representatives to the presbytery which controls the local congregation.³⁰ Representatives of the presbytery serve at the Regional Synod and finally, Delegates from the Regional Synod serve at the National Synod or the General Assembly which is the ultimate decision-making body.³¹ The Presbyterian and Reformed Churches are typical examples of churches that practice this system of governance. In contrast to the Episcopacy, Presbyterianism does not claim any form of Apostolic Succession.³² Another form of church administration what has been described as "No Polity" is a system by which its practitioners argue that there should be no formal organization of a church, but that the church members depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, run the day-to-day business of the local congregation as well as the entire church structure.³³ The Quakers are the known practitioners of this system of church administration. Lastly, there is Congregationalism which is practiced by the Baptists in general. It believes that earthly authority rests in the hands of the local congregation beyond which there is no other authoritative organization.³⁴ But what have been the bases of Congregationalism as practiced in the CBC?

First and foremost, the Congregational approach to church administration is doctrinal. In fact, Richard Apongnde holds this widely held view within the CBC. He states unequivocally that, "Our belief of the congregational form of church government is rooted in scripture as you will find out that the New Testament churches operated on this principle".³⁵ As a Bible-believing Church, the CBC adheres to the scriptural bases of Congregationalism. In fact, it is based on three major assumptions found in the New Testament, namely; The Headship of Christ; the priesthood of the believer and the practice of the Early Church.³⁶ Accordingly, Congregationalism is anchored on several scriptural passages. Writing from this background, Enns asserts that;

Matthew 23:8 introduces the idea of a single level of church membership-all are brothers. Jesus' teaching in Luke 22:25-27 indicates that the leaders of the coming church are actually to be servants. The congregation elected the deacons in Acts 6:3-5 and elders in Acts 14:23; the entire church sent out Paul and Barnabas in Acts 11:22 (and compare Acts 13:1-3 with Acts 14:27, when they returned to the church as a whole to give a report) and Paul and Titus, according to 2 Corinthians 8:19. The congregation then

²⁹ See "Is Congregational Government Biblical?". *Keep Believing Ministries*. (May, 1992). Found Online at <https://www.keepbelieving.com>. Accessed on August 12, 2019.

³⁰ Oats, "A Theological Basis".

³¹ See "Is Congregational Government Biblical?"

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Oats, "A Theological Basis".

³⁴ *Ibid.* See also Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Constitution*. Revised and Adopted (Bamenda: CBC, 2014), 6; Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Church Handbook*. Revised Edition. (Bamenda: CBC, 2017), 26-7.

³⁵ Richard Apongnde, (CBC Pastor, Harvest Baptist Church and Administrator of the Nkwen Association Council of CBC Churches), in discussion with the Authors, on August 11, 2019.

³⁶ See "Is Congregational Government Biblical?"

received Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:27;15:4). The entire church was involved in the decisions concerning circumcision (Acts 15:22-25). Discipline was carried out by the entire church (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:12; 2 Cor. 2:6,7; 2 Thess. 3:14). All the members are responsible for correct doctrine by testing the spirits (1 John4:1), which they are able to do since they have the anointing of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20).³⁷

Based on the foregoing biblical injunctions suggesting the authority of the local church, and mindful of the fact that the Baptist Church holds the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith and practice, Congregationalism became a germane governance system for the church. However, other factors might also have been responsible for the adoption of this system of church governance-hinging on historical circumstances as well as staffing and financial difficulties.

The history of the Baptist Mission in Africa is inextricably linked to the history of British colonialism. After about three (3) centuries of slave trade (which began in the 15th Century), in the 19th Century, the British were determined to end the savage activity. To achieve this end efficaciously, the British decided to back the efforts of the British Missionary Society (who at the moment were being pressurized by the Jamaicans to take the gospel to Africa) to "... atone for the crimes that English greed had for centuries committed, by proclaiming in Africa itself the glad tidings of a Divine liberty front high".³⁸ It is thus hardly surprising that the Niger Expedition of 1841 was backed by the British Government to "... make treaties with the native peoples, introduce Christianity and promote increase [legitimate] trade".³⁹ Eventually, when Saker established his mission on the Cameroon coast after being expelled from Fernando Po, he named his base, Victoria after the then Queen Victoria of England. This suggests a close reciprocity between the Baptist mission and the British administration. It therefore goes without saying that the British administrative policy of Indirect Rule influenced the Baptist missionary system of administration.

It is worth mentioning that the British administrative policy in Africa, and particularly in Cameroon, was generally misguided.⁴⁰ Ostensibly, the British niggardly attitude was determinant to her administrative style. It is undeniable that in her administrative traditions, the British generally opted for a secondary/supervisory position in administrative responsibility without compromising the desire to take unmediated credits for any administrative achievements in her colonial venture. It follows that by her administrative system, the British could easily be censured by their "sins of omission" (what they did not do) rather than by their "sins of commission" (what they did). Britain was opposed to direct colonial administration especially when this entailed extra financial burden for the British tax payer. In this way, the British administration was poised to stay true to the subtle colonial dictum which maintained that "they came to exploit, to the maximum, African resources and markets at the minimum cost"⁴¹ and to

³⁷ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 358.

³⁸ Underhill, *Alfred Saker*, 18. Cited in V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-Present (2018)*. 31.

³⁹ "Niger Expedition of 1841". Found at https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger_expedition_of_1841. Accessed on August 8, 2019.

⁴⁰ Reymond N. Budi, "Colonial Administrative Integration of African Territories: Identity and Resistance in Nigeria's Southern Cameroons, 1922-1961". *IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 6, Issue 1*, (Spring, 2019). 109.

⁴¹ B. Barkindo et al, *Africa and the Wider World 3: Africa Since the Scramble*. (Nigeria: Longman PLC, 1994), 43.

open up the economies of the colonies to outside exploitation.⁴² The British colonial administrative tradition when juxtaposed with the congregational system of administration of the Baptist mission reveals a lot of similitude. Perhaps, the Baptist mission by her indirect administration hoped to achieve great evangelistic exploits at the minimum cost or at least at a cost borne by the local affiliated churches rather than by the central administrative chain of command.

The challenges faced by the early missionaries necessitated the adoption of an indirect administrative system to stay afloat. Among the numerous difficulties faced by these early missionaries was the paucity of evangelistic staff to engage full time missionary work in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. To surmount this difficulty, the British Missionary Society invariably relied on indigenous staff to continue the task of evangelism. Little wonder therefore that Jamaicans were enrolled into the mission to Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. While in Cameroon, the task of taking the Message of the Gospel to the interior was the work of indigenous peoples who were converted at the coast, mentored and eventually dispatched to the Grassland. Cases in point included the disciples of Joseph Burnley among whom were Joseph Mamadou of Bum, Bobe Robert Jam, Gaduma, Thomas Ntoh, Nteff from Kom, Daniel Hangu and Tonto who were converted into Christianity while at the coast.⁴³ They were tasked with the duty of expanding into the Grassland with the gospel while the white missionaries offered supervisory roles and mentorship. This also undoubtedly formed the basis of indirect administration in the Baptist mission in general and the CBC in particular.

Similarly, the dearth in financial resources was unequivocally responsible for the indirect system of administration adopted by the Baptist mission in Cameroon and elsewhere. Before the emergence of the Baptist mission as an independent Christian body in 1954, the erstwhile Cameroon Baptist Mission (CBM) was being supported financially by the North American Baptist Mission (NABM). The gulfing distance between the local and donor missions authenticated the use of an indirect administrative system by which the NABM sent field supervisors to oversee the works of local missionaries on the ground. This in itself set the stage for the patronization of the indirect administration. The financial reinforcement from the NABM however did not suggest that the CBM was financially sufficient. Financial needs continued to surge as the mission area dilated into the remotest parts of Cameroon making effective centralized administration laborious. With the independence of the CBM in 1954, the CBC was born and financial challenges somewhat indurated thereby fortifying the indirect administrative system. It thus becomes clear that the indirect administrative system of the CBC has been a result of a conspiracy of both historical and circumstantial factors.

Based on the foregoing arguments on which Congregationalism of the CBC is anchored, the CBC Constitution in its preamble unambiguously states that;

The Cameroon Baptist Convention Churches; Having accepted the *congregational form of Church government* whereby the local church, using the Bible as the highest authority,

⁴² V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon, 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History*. (Limbe: Navi Group Publications, 1987), 165. Cited in William Ngala Ali, "The Wimbun of the Western Grassfields of Cameroon: A case Study of the Impact of Colonial Rule, 1902-1961". (The University of Yaounde: *Maitrise* Dissertation in History, 1991), 49-50.

⁴³ Koyoh, *Drinking the Gospel*. 6.

exercises autonomy within the structural authority of the CBC to which she belongs (emphasis is mine).⁴⁴

Furthermore, a CBC church is called upon to comply as a matter of obligation to the “self-governing”, “self-supporting”, “self-propagating”, “self-reproducing” principles and to other responsibilities as may be determined by the General Session or the General Council of the CBC.⁴⁵ This is re-echoed in the *Church Handbook* which spells out the responsibilities of the local church with greater lucidity than the *CBC Constitution*. It maintains that among the characteristics of the local church, the CBC churches must be;

(1). Self-governing: The members of each local church using the Bible as the authority shall govern themselves concerning the following matters; standards of church membership; standards of Christian living; doctrinal beliefs; bases of disciplining members (Matt. 18:15-17); methods of instructing inquirers; *ways of spreading the Gospel in the immediate areas and throughout the world*; administration of Ordinances; election of its own leaders [and] administration of the church.

(2). Self-supporting: The members of each local church are responsible for; *supporting their pastor; building, equipping and maintaining of its various church buildings including the pastor’s house; supporting and running the ministries of the church; helping the poor and needy among its membership and beyond; meeting the evangelistic needs of its own area and beyond*; securing literature material needed in evangelistic and training program of the church from the Crusade Ministries, the theological and Christian Education department and the Evangelism and Missions Department; *the giving of financial support to Association and the Field to which it belongs to the Central Administration*.

(3). Self-propagating/ self-reproducing: The members of each local church have the responsibility and privilege of *winning others to Jesus Christ and of establishing other churches of like faith* (Acts 8:1-12; 11:19; 15:35).⁴⁶ (Emphasis is mine)

A slapdash re-examination of the foregoing responsibilities of the local church of the CBC leaves one with the feeling that the local church is encumbered by administrative, financial, evangelistic, infrastructural and theological/doctrinal responsibilities.

Meanwhile, though shouldering the greatest responsibility, the local church within the CBC is the lowest in the hierarchical structure of the church. The *CBC Constitution* states that; “The structure of the Convention consists of the following organs: the General Session [highest and supreme policy-making organ]; the General Council; the Central Administration; Mission Areas; Fields; Associations and Local Churches [lowest organ]”.⁴⁷ The local church virtually bears all responsibility and finances all the other organs of the CBC while carrying out the other *bona fide* functions assigned to it. While the prodigious responsibility has the potential of rendering the church unavailing in the area of evangelism and spread, the local congregations have not let this critical responsibility down. They have adopted different mechanisms which has been rewarding

⁴⁴ Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Constitution*. Revised and Adopted (Bamenda: CBC, 2014), 6.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* 9.

⁴⁶ Cameroon Baptist Convention, *Church Handbook*. Revised Edition. (Bamenda: CBC, 2017), 26-7.

⁴⁷ CBC, *Constitution*. 9-10.

as testified by the multiplicative effects on CBC church growth in the City of Bamenda, Cameroon.

Church Planting Mechanisms and Efforts of local CBC Churches in Bamenda

The CBC churches have witnessed a mind-boggling growth in the City of Bamenda, Cameroon in recent years. This has been thanks to the initiatives taken by local CBC congregations; transforming themselves into Church-planting movements to expand the base of the CBC in the city. This was initiated by the oldest CBC Church in Bamenda, Nkwen Baptist Church which is now credited as the begetter of church planting dynamism in the CBC churches. As far back as from 1952, barely six years after its implantation, Nkwen Baptist Church was already in the business of planting churches. It planted twelve (12) Churches between 1952 and 2005 which are still vibrant and also planting other churches across Bamenda. These include the Baptist Churches in Menteh (1952), Ntanka (1954), Bambili (1957), Bafunge (1959), Musang (1960), Mile 1, Up Station, (1961), Mubang (1961), Menda, Mile Three (1962), Bayelle (1994), Hope Ndamukong (1995), Mount Carmel Old Town (1999) and Emmanuel Sisia (2005).⁴⁸ Even more recently, Nkwen Baptist Church has planted Philadelphia Baptist Church, Mboung, Bambui and the Charis Community (on August 25, 2019) in Ntaghem Quarter in Bamenda. Ostensibly, both Nkwen Baptist Church and the Churches it bore remained loyal to and, in fact, considered sacred the philosophy of multiplication. This explains why some of these churches continued the process of church-planting even with more determined enthusiasm. A representative case of these churches is the Christ Memorial Baptist Church in Musang, Bamenda which has planted virtually all the other churches (with only few exceptions) that make up Mankon Association of CBC Churches in Bamenda.⁴⁹

In line with the responsibility of planting churches, Christ Memorial Baptist Church, Musang (founded as Musang Baptist Church) has planted among others Gebauer Baptist Church-Atuakom, Trinity Baptist Church-Mulang, Berean Baptist Church, Mile 8-Mankon and Grace Baptist Church-Mbengwi Road in partnership with Mankon Association Council of Churches (MACC). As a strategy to intensify church planting, some of planter-churches resorted to partnership either with the Association or Field Councils of CBC Churches or with other churches. On this basis, Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Old Town in partnership with the MACC planted the Antioch Baptist Church in Ntaturu. Similarly, Christ Memorial Baptist Church Musang in partnership with MACC planted the Grace Baptist Church-Mbengwi Road. As part of the partnership, Christ Memorial Baptist Church, Musang and Gospel Baptist Church, Nghomgham jointly planted the New Life Baptist Church, Nitob 4-Bamenda in 2017.⁵⁰ Currently, Christ Memorial Baptist Church-Musang, Gospel Baptist Church-Nghomgham, New Life Baptist Church-Nitob 4, Gebauer Baptist Church-Atuakom and Grace Baptist Church-Mbengwi Road are in partnership to establish another church plant in the Back Travellers Neighborhood in Bamenda.⁵¹ Another church that has virtually been caught in the whirlpool of church planting is Hope Baptist Church, Ndamukong, Bamenda which itself was planted in 1995 by Nkwen Baptist Church.

⁴⁸ Nkwen Baptist Church, "Nkwen Baptist Church is 70". 2-3.

⁴⁹ Liberty Ayeah, (Associate Pastor of Christ Memorial Baptist Church, Mankon, Bamenda), in discussion with Authors on September 11, 2019.

⁵⁰ *Idem.*

⁵¹ *Idem.*

Though apparently encumbered by huge responsibilities, Hope Baptist Church Ndamukong Street in Bamenda has been able to establish nine (9) churches in six (6) years. As a matter of fact, the Pastor of this congregation, Reverend Joel Ngoh in an interview with the *Baptist Voice* has revealed the secret to this mind-blowing successes recorded by his church in the area of church planting alongside other responsibilities. He avers that;

I strongly believe that if we were not doing the will of God, this [church] building will not be where it is today. ... We have funds that are raised and tailored for specific needs of the church; for the church project, welfare ministry, and evangelism ministry among others. Currently, Hope Baptist Church has about 20 permanent staff on her payroll. We also have a church planting account. Church management is a big challenge but the Holy Spirit has been assisting us in this Great Commission. In all this, we set our priorities. We cannot focus on buildings or structure at the expense of the spiritual needs of the community.⁵²

Ostensibly, the church's ability to expand by planting more churches alongside other responsibilities has been financially demanding but a conspiracy of determination and effective leadership made the puzzle surmountable. The aftermath of this has been the planting of nine CBC churches by this particular Church. The church plants include, Kingdom Aroma Baptist Church, Ntasen (2007), Corban CBC Church, S-Bend (2015), Passion CBC Church, Buea-Bamenda Street, Manifold Arena Baptist Church, Mile 4 (2014), Koinonia Baptist Church (2014), Countenance CBC Church, K-Town (2019), *Le Vrai Cep* Abangoh (2016), Mahanahim Baptist Church, Ntamulung and Watergate Baptist Church, Widikum.⁵³ Hope Baptist Church has remained hopeful that it will continue to plant more churches in and around the City of Bamenda in spite of its burdensome financial responsibilities.

The efforts of Bambili Baptist Church resulted in the successful planting of Antioch and Triumphnat Baptist Churches in Bambili in 2012 and 2016 respectively. Also, Menda Baptist Church's efforts have led to the implantation of Macedonia Baptist Church, Ntamuche, Salvation Baptist Church, Mile 6, Nkwen and Harvest Baptist Church, Mile 5, Nkwen.⁵⁴ Temple Baptist Church has also been explosive in church-planting efforts resulting in the planting of the Baptist Churches at New Town, Banja (2011), Ntenefor (2016) and Ntasia (2017) while Bayelle Baptist Church has borne Kenelare Baptist Church. Victory Baptist Church, Bambui on its part has also made efforts which have led to Peniel and Transformation Baptist Churches seeing the light of day in the first half of the 2010s. Two other churches that were established in Bamenda by the US-based New England Training and Sending (NETS) Center for Church Planting and Revitalization and affiliated to the CBC include Redeemer Baptist Church, Mile 3 Nkwen and Gospel Baptist Church Nghomgham led by Rev. Sam Jato and Rev. Shadrack Vegah respectively. Though of 'unusual birth', these churches have been part of the church planting dynamism within the CBC churches. In fact, Baptist churches in Bamenda have not only considered the task of church planting as sacred but have whole-heartedly taken up the responsibility. There is practically a healthy competition among the Baptist churches in Bamenda in the task of church planting. Each local congregation struggles to outsmart the others (and even

⁵² Austine Laila, "Hope CBC Takes Strides in Church Planting". *The Baptist Voice*. (The Newspaper of the Cameroon Baptist Convention), No. 70. February-March, 2019. 5.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Discussion with Apongnde (Rev).

its mother and sister-churches) in the planting of churches. This has been responsible for the exponential growth in the CBC churches in Bamenda in recent years.

An observation of the trends in CBC church planting in Bamenda reveals a number of peculiar features of the time. This ranges from the naming of the new churches, the level of enthusiasm in involvement in church planting between churches, and the spread of the CBC churches in the Bamenda urbanity. As far as the christening of the churches is concerned, there is a shift from the traditional labels when churches generally adopted the names of their local vicinities to the attribution of titles which did not only have biblical implications but also defined the specific assignment of the church plant. Musang Baptist Church was re-baptized Christ Memorial Baptist Church-Musang while the nascent CBC churches that have adopted names with biblical implications have included Gebuaer, Gospel, Grace, Trinity, Redeemer, Mount Carmel, Antioch and Macedonia among others. On the other hand, some of the churches went under names that defined their specific assignment. A representative case was Harvest Baptist Church Mile Five, Nkwen Bamenda which was so named to “harvest souls for Christ”. This explains why the slogan of the Church has been “harvesting the harvest that is ripe”. Some of these sacral names are typical of churches planted by Hope Baptist Church Ndamukong, Bamenda. They include, Kingdom Aroma, Corban Passion Manifold Arena, Koinonia, Countenance, *Le Vrai Cep*, Mahanahim and Watergate Baptist Churches.

Implications and Challenges

The huge task of church planting has necessitated administrative and financial restructuring at the level of local churches to stay afloat. Some CBC churches in Bamenda have entered into partnership with individuals, associations and other churches as well as church departments to be able to sponsor the church planting mission. Besides, training programs, radical evangelism and discipleship as well as the creation of church planting funds and “Mission Boxes” have been some of the strategies adopted to ensure the planting of churches in Bamenda. Similarly, some churches have created departments and ministries or committees in charge of Evangelism and Missions to be able to foster the task of church-planting. Ostensibly, many CBC churches have become more and better organized to be able to ensure the promotion of the idea of church planting. In an encapsulating manner, one of the pastors of the CBC that has been very radical as far as the planting of churches is concerned, Rev. Joel Ngoh of Hope Baptist Church Ndamukong has maintained that;

When I came to Hope...As time went on, the motto was transformed into a vision statement which is, ‘we are a family of believers determined to experience, express and expect the Kingdom of God’. This vision statement captures all that we are doing. Primarily, our target was to get a multiplication culture and this has been through discipleship. The next step was to build and empower leaders who can capture this vision and express it. Thirdly, we are now decided to set a clear church planting mission. To accomplish this mission, we developed a church planting institute where we are able to train our church planters. In our church planting strategy,...we focus on Christians who are not yet in Christ. We start by evangelizing in the community, then proceed with

discipleship and finally end up by planting a new church....Our target is to win Bamenda for Jesus by planting churches in areas that there are no churches to worship.⁵⁵

The foregoing statement does not only demonstrate the intentionality of local CBC churches in Bamenda to multiply but also both the strategy and the stratagem adopted by these churches to achieve the objective of multiplication.

The inevitable denouement of the churches' strategy and stratagem in church planting has been the spread of the CBC church in Bamenda urbanity. Arguably, the CBC Church is the most visible in terms of spread in the study area.⁵⁶ In fact, Takor remarks that one of the striking things about the CBC Church has been the fact that they are found in virtually all the corners of the city of Bamenda.⁵⁷ The CBC churches have thus greatly expanded both in extent and adherents in recent years thanks to the multiplicative efforts of the CBC churches. This has necessitated administrative readjustments to accommodate the growing changes that the church has been witnessing. One of these administrative changes was the splitting of Bamenda Field of the CBC into two in December 2005. The decision was taken at the a meeting of the Bamenda Field Council of the CBC Churches that held at the Baptist Center in Bamenda on June 18, 2005.⁵⁸ As the number of churches increased in and around the Bamenda urbanity, it became both urgent and necessary to carry out administrative adjustments to accommodate the new changes and expedite administrative formalities. Consequently, Bamenda Field of the CBC which was initially made up of Nine (9) Associations was split into two including Bethel Field (five Associations) based in Tuabi-Mbengwi and Bamenda Field (four Associations) based in Nkwen-Bamenda. In fact, the CBC recently received an award from the Baptist World Alliance as the fastest growing denomination in Cameroon.⁵⁹

Apart from the foregoing, some of the implications of the multiplicative church growth in Bamenda within the CBC Congregationalist system of administration are reflected in the challenges faced. In the church plating business;

The first challenge is that of tradition, that is how churches have been planted in the past. Most people fail to understand that church planting is about meeting unbelievers. People feel that church planting is all about coming to take members from their church. This constitutes a major hurdle.... Another difficulty we face is the church plant sticking to our DNA. This is because when we are planting a church, we want to see the church have a kind of DNA which is that of multiplying, staying biblical in their thinking and worship as well as planting other churches. Hope CBC Church encounters financial difficulties as well....Besides, the price for rents and plots in Bamenda keep increasing. Finally, it is not

⁵⁵Laila, "Hope CBC Takes Strides in Church Planting". 5.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Woloko, (Head of the Archives Division of the CBC) in discussion with the Authors on August 12, 2019.

⁵⁷ Nixon K. Takor (University Professor and former member of the CBC), in discussion with the Authors on October 17, 2019.

⁵⁸ Jeff Ngawe Yufenyu, "CBC Bamenda Field to Split into Two". Found Online at <https://www.postnewsline.com>. Accessed on December 5, 2019.

⁵⁹Discussion with Woloko.

always easy to successfully manage the mother church and the church plant at the same time.⁶⁰

These difficulties and more have adversely affected the churches' financial situation and in some cases leading of the churches into indebtedness. This has created a feeling of aversion for congregationalism among some Christians of this church who are laden with huge financial responsibilities of church planting, construction and pastoral care.

Conclusion

The paper sought to establish the nexus between congregationalism and multiplication church planting among the CBC churches in the Bamenda urbanity. The paper argues that historical and circumstantial factors were responsible for the adoption of the congregational system of church administration within the CBC which emphasizes the autonomy of local CBC churches. The study reveals that though this system of administration has shifted huge financial, administrative, infrastructural, theological and even evangelistic responsibilities to the local CBC churches, these churches have remained faithful to the biblical injunction of Matthew 28:19-20. This state of affairs has led to the burgeoning of local CBC churches in virtually all the districts of the city. This is because the CBC churches have not only accepted the responsibilities but have also engaged strategies and stratagem to ensure that more souls are won for Christ. This has created a form of positive competition among CBC churches as each church struggles to outsmart the others in the planting of churches. This has however not been without some challenges including financial, infrastructural, administrative as well as theological.

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⁶⁰Laila, “Hope CBC Takes Strides in Church Planting”. 5.

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