

# **OPERATION REACH ALL (ORA) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORAY BAPTISTS**

– Simon Kolawole

## **INTRODUCTION**

Glory, Praise, Adoration and Thanksgiving be unto the Lord God Almighty, the God of History, times and seasons, for the 2024 Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Annual Gathering which has afforded participants a wonderful opportunity of sharing, fellowship, learning, growing and transformation to the intent that they shall be better Baptists and greater instruments in God's hands.

I place on record my sincere appreciation for the unique and historic privilege of presenting a paper on "Operation Reach All (ORA) and Its Implications for Contemporary Baptists." In view of the fact that the ORA Decade is one of the very best in the history of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), it has great historical value and perennial lessons and challenges for every generation of Baptists. This is the thrust of the paper. The paper essentially gives an overview of the ORA Decade highlighting especially the factors for its amazing and tremendous success and articulates its implications for Contemporary Baptists.

## **OVERVIEW OF OPERATION REACH ALL**

Articulating the ORA Concept, Banjo Ajao opines:

Operation Reach All of the Nigerian Baptist Convention was an attempt of the Convention to join other evangelicals around the world for a decade emphasis on World Evangelization by AD 2000. The vision was shared with the Convention Executive Committee by Late Rev. R. L. Locke, who was the Executive Secretary for Evangelism and Stewardship Department of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. At the 1989 meeting, the Executive

Committee of the Nigerian Baptist Convention accepted the proposal and asked Rev. Locke to suggest plans for 'reaching every person with the gospel by AD 2000.'<sup>1</sup>

In his own reflection, S. A. Adekunle links the ORA Decade with the Consultation on Evangelization of Nigeria by AD 2000 Movement at Ilorin in November 20-24, 1989 which was attended by 306 participants representing nearly 100 denominations. The participants included a dozen from NBC. The Consultation was a follow up of the AD 2000 Movement in Singapore in January and Manila in July 1989.<sup>2</sup> It was observed that there was need for a paradigm shift with regards to NBC participation in World Evangelization.

Consequently, the NBC saddled the Evangelism and Stewardship Department with the responsibility, sequel to which a proposal was submitted and adopted by the NBC Executive Committee.<sup>3</sup> "Thus, in April 1990 Operation Reach All was officially launched during the 77th Annual Convention in Session at Kaduna by the General Secretary, Rev. Dr. S. T. Ola Akande.... It was expected that every conference, association and church would do the same during the year."<sup>4</sup> It can be seen that ORA was carefully conceptualized and its vision diligently pursued. This was a critical factor in the great success of the concept.

Membership of the ORA steering committee was drawn from both the Baptist Mission of Nigeria and the Nigerian Baptist Convention. These included Russell Locke, the first Coordinator, Don Reece, Sola Aworinde, Adeyemi Adekunle and Jiire Adeoye. Sola Aworinde became the first indigenous National Coordinator of ORA from 1991 to 1992. Stephen Adekunle took over from Aworinde and led the movement from 1992 to 1997 when he moved to the pastorate of Iwo Road Baptist Church, Ibadan. The mantle of leadership then fall on Banjo Ajao who became the National Coordinator from 1997 to AD 2000, the close of the programme. It is to be noted that the vision and planning for ORA came into being

during the tenure of S. T. Ola Akande while it became operational during the tenure of S. Ola Fadeji.<sup>5</sup>

### **Operation Reach All Strategies**

At the heart of Operation Reach All were the strategies devised to achieve the vision, goals and objectives of the concept. Summarily, the following strategies were employed.<sup>6</sup>

1. **Prayers.**
2. **Cooperation of other Organizations,** Departments, Parastatals and Institutions of the Convention, like the Nigerian Bookstore and Baptist Press.
3. **Evangelism Explosion** which birthed churches as Baptist Church, Arulogun and Baptist Church, Onisago, Ibadan. It was also the antecedent of the Evening Rally at Convention Sessions.
4. **Mission Explosion** which focused on all mission fields and also adopted some of the unreached people groups (several of these later became Mission Fields). An example was Abakaliki where Rev. Evang. Johnson Adeleke, Rev. Dr. Supo Ayokunle, Prof. John Obineche and Rev. Philip Atogi ministered. The mission explosion also had an international dimension, for example, Corte D'Ivoire.
5. **Church Planting:** NBC Churches were challenged to plant churches and organize them within 5 years. It was the Church Planting emphasis that birthed Church Planters' Training Course organized in Ibadan, Osogbo, Lagos, Benin, Owerri, Kaduna and Jos. The Church Planting drive, which

was vigorously pursued, was the most successful and impactful of the ORA Concept. Churches like New Estate Baptist Church, Lagos used existing House Fellowship Centers to birth new churches. Significantly, at the beginning of the decade, the NBC had 3, 200 churches; in 1999 the churches had grown to 5,450.

6. **Witness Training Course:** To overcome the fear of witnessing, the booklet, Witness Training Course, was produced in hundreds of thousands to teach Baptist members dynamics of soul-winning, with increased confidence, and active participation, in witnessing. The writer recalls that as a Pastor in Ire-Akari Baptist Church, Isolo, Lagos, and as the Evangelism Committee Chairman of the defunct great Ola-Oluwa Baptist Association, he was very actively involved in the training with great visible results.
7. **Funding:** ORA did not lack funding. The Baptist Mission of Nigeria, a partner in the ORA project, funded most printing and other projects. The NBC leadership also trusted the leaders of the ORA Committee and complimented the efforts of the Baptist Mission.

The success of Operation Reach All was great and tremendous. It remains one of most coordinated, vigorously pursued and amazingly wonderful projects of the Nigerian Baptist Convention till date. In the words of Ajao, “The aims and objectives in setting up the decade of evangelism were vigorously pursued. At the end of the decade in the year, 2000, as envisioned, ‘Operation Reach All’ programme was able to achieve ninety-five percent (95%) of its set goals and

objectives.”<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Adekunle affirms, “There is no doubt that any emphasis well planned and backed with prayers will yield result. The account enumerated positive ways by which ORA has improved mission efforts of the Nigerian Baptist Convention through unity.”<sup>8</sup>

## **IMPLICATIONS OF OPERATION REACH ALL TO CONTEMPORARY BAPTISTS**

The thrust of the paper is that ORA has great historical value and perennial challenges and lessons for contemporary Baptists. Seven implications are hereby isolated.

### **1. The Power of Vision**

The power of vision in the success of any project and in leadership cannot be overemphasized. Just like an individual, an organization cannot rise about its vision, its propelling revelation. In the words of the Scripture “Where there is no vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Consequently, the various leaders are enjoined to articulate their visions, ensure that members buy into the visions and discover great men and women who will run with the vision.

### **2. The Necessity of Synergy in Leadership**

The synergy in leadership was a major factor in ORA’s outstanding success. On the one hand, the Baptist Mission and the NBC collaborated in the project. While ORA was launched by the then General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Akande, the Executive Secretary of the Evangelism and Stewardship Department, Rev. Locke preached. Indeed, it was Rev. Locked who initiated the ORA emphasis, and presented a proposal which

the NBC Executive Committee approved. And as the account underscored above, the Baptist Mission actively funded the ORA project.

On the other hand, there were synergy, unity and cooperation between the ORA Steering Committee and other organizations, departments, institutions, and parastatals of the NBC. Yearly goals and objectives approved by the Committee were cascaded down, adapted and incorporated into the working operations of the various arms and units of the Convention. This is wisdom for contemporary Baptists. Leaders should be deliberate and intentional in involving various arms and units of the denomination in every land. Similarly, various arms and units should work passionately to achieve maximum success of denominational goals.

3. **The Imperativeness of Dedication**

Dedication is imperative to achieve great success in any project or goal. Dedication shares with sacrifice as a sine qua non for success and great achievement. Truly, sacrifice is a perennial phenomenon in life and human existence. The birthing of a new life and mining of the great resources locked up in the earth's crust and so on, all entail sacrifice. Today, we pay glowing tributes to Rev. Locke, Revs. Drs Sola Aworinde, S. A. Adekunle and Banjo Ajao who chaired the ORA Steering Committee during the most significant and historical decade.

5. **The Necessity of Funding**

The role of adequate funding for any project, programme or emphasis cannot be overemphasized. The ORA goals and objectives were achieved to a very great extent because of the availability of funds to do its printing and execute its projects. This is the way forward. Those who are saddled with major assignments by the denomination should be provided adequate resources for the achievement of their goals and objectives. Truly, money has its roles in the scheme of activities and programmes, and Mainline Churches should reconcile themselves to this reality and seek ways to break the jinx of perennial inadequate funding of most projects and institutions.

6. **The Beauty of Records**

ORA achievements were tracked because there were records kept of events, projects, goals and objectives. All major arms of the Convention should work on having very active and functional Research and Statistic Units. This challenge applies to Global Missions Board and the NBC more than it applies to the various units.

7. **The Need for Follow Up**

The writer agrees with Adekunle who underscores follow up thus: “Since Mission efforts consist of in-reach and outreach ministries of the church, another emphasis should be planned on relational discipleship as a follow-up for ORA programme.”<sup>9</sup> A follow up project would bring the best out of those saddled with the responsibility of coordinating the project,

provide a rallying point for members and arms of the Convention, and produce extraordinary results.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper has reflected on the Operation Reach All of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1990 - 1999, and drawn implications therefrom. I challenge denominational leaders to reevaluate their visions, articulate same and seek men and women who would run with the visions to realize their achievements. Similarly, I challenge every participant to leave this historical gathering with renewed visions of their lives, and greater dedication and sacrifice to bring about their actualizations. In the words of Jesus Christ, "If you can believe all things are possible to him/her who believes" (Mark 9:23). I remind us all that what God has done through others, He can also do through us, even more. Like the father of modern missions, William Carey, observed, "Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God." I challenge each participant to attempt great things for God, for the greater glory of God, the growth and advancement of our denominations and the blessing of multitudes, leaving great legacies at the end.



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Banjo Ajao, "Operation Reach All's Contribution to Nigerian Baptist Missions Effort (A)," Oluwafemi Adewumi, Olusegun Making and S Ademola Ajayi, eds. *A History of Global Missions Board of the NBC: 1953 2023* (Ibadan: Wright Integrated Publishers Ltd, 2022), 222.

<sup>2</sup> S. A. Adekunle, "Operation Reach All's Contributions to Nigerian Baptist Mission's Effort: 1990-2000 AD (B)," *A History of Global Missions Board*, 238.

<sup>3</sup> Adekunle, 239.

<sup>4</sup> Adekunle.

<sup>5</sup> Ajao, 221.

<sup>6</sup> Adekunle, Interview (Ogbomoso: The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, March 16, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Ajao, 225.

<sup>8</sup> Adekunle, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Adekunle.