The Church as a Feeding Community in Acts 2:42-47 And its Implications for Corporate Social Responsibility in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The duty of the Church extends beyond spiritual teachings such as personal transformation, financial upliftment, moral growth and human behaviour. The New Testament emphasizes the Church's role in responding to people's needs, as depicted in Acts 2:42-47. However, the Church's response to these social issues has been the subject of debate among scholars. Hence, this study examined the role of the Church as a feeding community in Acts 2:42-47 and its implications for corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Ogun State. The study employed a mixed-methods approach that included a descriptive survey and a historical-critical hermeneutical approach. While the survey used a questionnaire to gather information from respondents, content analysis was used to analyze the biblical text under study. The study population comprised all members of the RCCG in two LGAs of Ogun State. 300 respondents were selected using a stratified sampling technique. Secondary data were drawn from Acts 2:42-47, and the study employed a self-administered, unstructured questionnaire for primary data collection. Findings revealed that although the RCCG has demonstrated acts of kindness by engaging in various CSR initiatives to address poverty, food insecurity, lack of education, among others, these initiatives have not addressed the aforementioned social challenges. Thus, the study recommended, among others, that the RCCG should prioritize personal growth over the distribution of unsustainable material aid. Also, the church should establish microfinance banks across Nigeria that can facilitate loans at low interest rates.

Keywords: Acts 2:42-47, corporate social responsibility, feeding community, RCCG

Introduction

The responsibility of the Church is not limited to spiritual growth and the edification of the body and soul; rather, it extends to personal growth, moral development, social equity, financial empowerment, social justice, and overall societal welfare. There are several New Testament passages that portray the Church's role in caring for the poor, promoting justice, showing compassion, and addressing the needs of society (Matthew 25:35-40; Luke 14:13-14; Acts 2:44-45; Mark 10:45; John 13:12-15; Galatians 6:9-10). The early Church demonstrated the importance of catering for the poor, widows and orphans, which played a crucial role in the spread of the Gospel (Diseko, 2019; Ede, 2020).

The Church through faith-based organizations like the World Council of Churches (WCC), Compassion International and World Vision among others caters for the people through food palliatives and other development projects (WCC, 2019, World Vision, 2020). Other societal issues like gender-based violence, human trafficking, child abuse, girl-child abuse, domestic violence, Homicide, etc., have been tackled by different Christian denominations and Christian organizations (Smith, 2022 & Francis, 2020). In

Africa, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church provided food items and microfinance schemes to Christians in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana (Johnson, 2018).

The introduction of Western education and free medical care enhanced the growth of Christianity in Nigeria, which led to mass literacy, financial education and Church-based social responsibility programs (Amaeshi et al., 2016). The character played by the Church in addressing social issues has been a subject of debate among scholars in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large. While some argue that the Church has a moral responsibility to engage in personal growth and social transformation, others opine that the Church's primary duty is spiritual growth, rather than political or social involvements. Previous studies have shown that the RCCG in Nigeria has contributed to addressing high poverty rates, food insecurity, and inadequate medical care through various CSR initiatives (Nwosu, 2019; Oladipo, 2020; Oluwaseun, 2022). However, this study takes a different approach by exploring the role of the Church in addressing social issues from a New Testament perspective (Acts 2:42-47), with particular reference to the RCCG in Ogun State. Therefore, the study employed the mixed research method–descriptive research survey and historical-critical hermeneutical approach to examine the relationship between the Church and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Church Context

The concept of corporate social responsibility has been defined by scholars from different perspectives just as other constructs in humanities with no univocal definition. Setiawan, Milla and Pada (2021) perceive the motive of CSR from four perspectives; economical, legal, ethical and philanthropical. This implies that CSR is done for several reasons, especially within profit and non-profit organizations, which means it may be adopted for economic, legal and ethical purposes. So, the purpose of each CRS is determined by the organization spearheading the initiative. The Church as a non-profit organization has been found to adopt CSR considering the fact that the initiative is a service to humanity and it is biblical. This brings us to the discussion on the intersection between the Church and CSR. One of the ways the Church has contributed significantly to social problems is through poverty reduction. Religion may possibly reduce the rate of poverty through spiritual guidance and motivation (Akpan, et. al., 2024).

The Church is one of the notable social institutions providing humanitarian services through various poverty alleviation programs and other welfare schemes. This benevolent act can be traced back to early Church's tradition (Djupe & Neiheisel, 2022). According to Umanah, Ekanem, Oko and Olusakin (2025), the Church and congregants have organized various poverty alleviation programs and provided social and health services as forms of CSR. These programs include the provision of food banks through welfare departments, establishment of Church maternities for delivery of babies, free medical care, special packages for the aged, counselling services to address gender-based violence and other forms of abuses, and so on (Akpan, Umoren & Mboho, 2024).

Churches as religious organizations are capable of addressing poverty through spir-

itual guidance, mentorship and financial supports since the Church specially cares for the needy through provisions of food and material things (Olowookere, 2023). No wonder, Christians are mandated to care for those who are in need as part of their responsibilities as believers (Olowokere, 2023). Several Churches organize food relief programs, vocational training and empowerment schemes in a bid to reduce the high rate of poverty on African continent (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). For instance, Nigerian Churches play vital roles in addressing food insecurity, poverty, illiteracy, and economic challenges by organizing feeding programs, discounted/free medical services, free education (scholarships), donations, business grants and loan facilities to elevate communities (Nwosu, 2019).

Greek Rendition of Acts 2:42–47 (NA28)

i. Ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς.

ii. Ἐγίνετο δὲ πάσῃ ψυχῇ φόβος· πολλά τε τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγίνετο.

iii. Πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά,

iv. καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν, καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν εἶχεν.

v. καθ᾽ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλῶντές τε κατ᾽ οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας,

vi. αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν. Ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει τοὺς σωζομένους καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

English Translation (RSV)

i. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

ii. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

iii. And all who believed were together and had all things in common;

iv. and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.

v. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts,

vi. praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Exegetical Analysis of Acts 2:42-47

The book of Acts of the Apostle is one of the canonical gospels in the New Testament. Acts is traditionally attributed to Luke, who is a companion to Paul the Apostle and the author of the Gospel of Luke (Bock, 2015; Williams, 2023). The exact date each gospel was written is a difficult task to achieve in general. However, scholars differ in their opinions as to when the gospel of Acts of the Apostle was written. Some propose an early date around 62 AD, in connection with Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Bruce, 1988; Seltzer, 2021). Others suggest a later date, between 80-90 AD, based on the text's theological development and its relationship to other New Testament writings, the place of the composition of Acts' gospel remains uncertain, though suggestions include Rome, Antioch, or Ephesus.

Baker (2010) argues that the purpose of Acts is to reveal why Israel did not participate in the evangelical work after the death of Christ. It also serves as continuation to Luke's gospel, providing an account of how the Christian gospel reached the Roman Empire from Jerusalem under the guidance of Holy Spirit (Bruce, 1988). Another main purpose identified by scholars is to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering the apostles and establishing the early Church.

Acts 2:42-47 portrays the daily life of these new believers. Prior to verse 42, Acts chapter 2:1-41 is solely dedicated to the early activities of the believers, telling the story of how they received the Holy Spirit and the expansion of the Christian community. It also encompasses the teachings, fellowship and apostles' response to their fellow Jews who misunderstood the manifestation of Holy Spirit. Afterwards, the passage that follows Acts 2:42-47 transitions into specific accounts of apostolic actions, such as the healing of the lame man in Acts 3, showing the apostles' continued ministry and the growth of the Christian community.

Verse 42 reaffirms the continued support and loyalty of the newly converted to the apostles, abiding by their teachings virtually in all areas of life, including their table manners and prayer lives. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (NIV). "Devoting themselves" translates the Greek term "προσκαρτεροῦντες" (proskarterountes), meaning an unwavering and continued commitment. "κοινωνίᾳ" (koinōnia) – 'fellowship', signifying a strong communal bond beyond just ordinary association. "Breaking of bread" probably means shared meals, including the Lord's Supper, emphasizing shared spiritual and physical sustenance, while the word "Prayer" is written in Greek plural ("προσευχαῖς" proseuchais), which signifies involvement in several forms of joint prayers, possibly both traditional Jewish prayers and emerging Christian practices.

Vs 43 - And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles (RSV). This shows that the level of the believer's commitment towards the gospel goes beyond people's expectation. The Greek word "φόβος" (phobos), often regarded as "fear", but in this study, it shows the reverence and amazement as a response to divine activity. "Wonders and signs" ("τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα" terata kai sēmeia) are terms frequently associated with divine validation of the apostles' ministry, echoing the miraculous works of Jesus. Vs 44- All who believed were together and had all things in common (RSV). According to this verse, both the Apostles and new converts did everything together and shared almost everything among themselves with love. 'Together' ("ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό" epi to auto) signifies unity and love among them, demonstrating the communal life of the believers. "All things in common" reveals a system of economic sharing, that is, joining resources together to meet communal needs and not personal needs. Vs 45- And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need (RSV). This reflects their collective spirit to help each other financially, responding to the need of brothers and sisters. It also suggests ongoing, continued actions rather than one-time events, indicating a continuous practice of kindness.

Vs 46 - And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts (RSV). This reflects the continued practice of fellowship through communal meetings and prayers. It also extended to their homes as the passage reveals. "In the temple" signifies that early believers still

participated in Jewish worship practices, integrating their new faith with traditional rituals. "Breaking bread in their homes" suggests that, the believers met in their homes to worship, solidifying the unity within the Church.

Verse 47 - Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (RSV). This describes how much the Church grew and believers increased rapidly day by day. "Praising" ("αἰνοῦντες" ainountes) shows continuous acts of worship and thanksgiving for God. "Having favour" ("χάριν" charin) suggests that the believers' conduct was positively regarded by the broader community, while "the Lord added" ("προσετίθει" prosetithei), showing an ongoing increase in their numbers, attributed to divine action. The passage (Acts 2:42-47) recounts the early Christian community's life, characterized by devotion to apostolic teaching, fellowship, collective meals, and prayer. The Greek language highlights the intensity and continuity of these practices, reflecting a community deeply transformed by the Holy Spirit and committed to living out the implications of the gospel in both spiritual and practical dimensions.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1: Corporate social responsibility initiatives in RCCG, Ogun State

	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	The RCCG in Ogun State distributes food items for the needy within and outside the Church.	68 22.67%	148 49.33%	55 18.33%	29 9.67%
2	The RCCG in Ogun State provides shelter for vulnerable people.	53 17.67%	128 42.67%	78 26%	41 13.66%
3	The Church helps covers medical bills for waiting mothers and others who are financially handicapped.	72 24%	157 52.34%	55 18.33%	16 5.33%
4	The RCCG also provides free and discounted medical services for the people.	98 32.66%	101 33.67%	63 21%	38 12.67%
5	The RCCG in Ogun State provides study grants through scholarships for students across all levels.	42 14%	115 38.33%	93 31%	50 16.67%

The above table shows that 72% of the respondents agreed that the RCCG in Ogun State distributes food items for the needy within and outside the Church while 28% disagreed. 64.34%% agreed that the RCCG in Ogun State provides shelter for vulnerable people while 35.66% disagreed. 76.34% agreed that the Church helps covers medical bills for waiting mothers and others who are financially handicapped while 23.66% disagreed. 66.33% agreed that the RCCG also provides free and discounted medical services for the people while 33.67% disagreed. In addition, 52.33% agreed that the RCCG in Ogun State provides study grants through scholarships for students across all levels while 47.67% disagreed. Based on the above results, the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Ogun State has engaged in Corporate Social Responsibilities to a great extent.

Table 2: Ways RCCG can improve CSR initiatives by exemplifying Acts 2:42-47 in Ogun

	Items	SA	A	D	SD
11	RCCG should focus on schemes that can bolster people's finance.	72 24%	96 32%	56 18.66%	76 25.34%
12	RCCG should establish microfinance banks that can facilitate loans at low interest rates.	124 41.34%	121 40.33%	43 14.33%	12 4%
13	RCCG should prioritize personal growths over the distribution of unsustainable material aids.	135 45%	99 33%	53 17.67%	13 4.33%
14	The Church should organize training and empowerment programs for jobless and struggling members.	87 29%	134 44.67%	58 19.33%	21 7%
15	RCCG should adopt a more practical and collective approach to address social and economic injustice in Nigeria as depicted in Acts 2:42–47.	48 16%	133 44.34%	59 19.66%	60 20%

Table 2 shows 56% of the respondents agreed that RCCG should focus on schemes that can bolster people's finance while 44% disagreed on this premise. 81.67% agreed that RCCG should establish microfinance banks that can facilitate loans at low interest rates while 18.33% disagreed. 78% agreed that RCCG should prioritize personal growths over the distribution of unsustainable material aids while 22% disagreed. Furthermore, 73.67% agreed that the Church should organize training and empowerment programs for jobless and struggling members while 26.33% disagreed. In addition, 60.34% agreed that RCCG should adopt a more practical and collective approach to address social and economic injustice in Nigeria as depicted in Acts 2:42–47 while 39.66% disagreed.

Theological and Practical Implications for RCCG's CSR Initiatives

The text (Acts 2:42-47) has several implications for CSR initiatives in RCCG, Ogun State. It emphasizes themes such as loyalty, communion, togetherness, shared life – shared miracles, shared assets, care for the indigent, Christian worship and the growth of Christian community. First, the text portrays the level of devotion and trustworthiness among the believers and the apostles in the early Church. It signifies that the early Church was more of a family gathering rather than just being a Church, bonding with one another as brothers and sisters. As such, the early fathers moralize loyalty, communion and prayer in their teachings. They did not only teach believers the word, instead they showed them how to love one another by being loyal and selfless. The breaking of breads was cultural, depicting their table manners as one within the body of Christ. This shows that believers shared so many things in common, which cut across every area of life.

The first verse of the text (vs42) sets the stage for what happened in subsequent verses. This brings us to what paved the way for 'sense of belonging' and 'shared life' among the believers as they were rooted in apostles' teachings on loyalty and communion. Therefore, CSR is evident in Acts 2:42-47 as it requires some certain level of loyalty,

commitment, unity and fellowship. For the RCCG to engage in CSR effectively, the highlighted attributes must accompany its CSR initiatives. Loyalty and communion are key to effective CSR in the Church since Christianity preaches compassion. Thus, the RCCG in Ogun State must continue to teach her members the essence of loyalty in order to effectively engage in CSR initiatives appropriately.

As the ministry continued to grow during the days of the Apostles, people were amazed by the miracles they performed through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The text (vs43) shows that the Church has been saddled with responsibilities to offer spiritual guidance, particularly response to Christians' divine needs as the Apostles consistently worshipped together to help believers grow spiritually. Apart from the spiritual upliftment, the Apostles and the believers shared everything in common. This is the most important area of the text under study (vs. 44). As such, they helped themselves financially, especially those who were not well to do among them. The early Christians displayed an economic system that involves sharing of resources in order to meet the need of the poor. The next passage (vs. 45) emphasizes deeper commitment of the Apostles and believers towards sharing resources by selling properties and possessions to meet common needs among the believers and not personal needs.

The implication of both verses 44 and 45 is that the Church must respond to communal needs rather than personal needs. Within the context of the RCCG, engaging in CRS initiatives is the best way to respond to societal problems. The apostles then did not just dispose properties to share material things like food items, schooling items etc., instead they help each other grow by sharing resources among themselves. For the RCCG, a microfinance bank and other non-profit financial institutions can be put in place to facilitate loan requests at low interest rates, thereby helping people grow their businesses and careers, rather than giving them material aids that cannot totally reduce poverty rate in Nigeria. The early Christians went as far as selling their personal properties to supply people's needs (Acts 2: 45) and not to fund Church building projects. This reflects the original purpose of the gospel, which is to uplift the body and soul through spiritual guidance and collective responsibility to meet individual needs. Although many Churches have created welfare departments, responsible for taking care of the needy and other categories. However, this study notes that the practice of CSR in RCCG has not been effective in tackling poverty, unemployment, economic depravity etc. One of the reasons why CSR initiatives are put in place is to support the people in any form.

Going forward, the text reveals that the apostles and the believers bonded beyond Church settings as they fellowshipped in their homes. They dined and wined together with sincerity and love. The particular verse (v46) reflects continuous practice of fellowship among the believers as it extended to their homes. It also shows that Christianity transcends culture as the people practiced their new religion alongside Jewish traditional practices. This applies to Churches in Nigeria that they should engage in fellowships in order to solidify togetherness and respond to societal problems such as social and economic injustice, human rights violations, gender-based violence among others. The text (Acts 2:47) also shows how the Church increased in numbers. Overall, Acts 2:42-47 portrays the Church as a feeding community, helping believers grow spiritually and physically. By implication, the RCCG must imitate the early Church in responding to poverty, food insecurity and social problems in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the role of the Church as a feeding community in Acts 2:42-47 in relation to the practices of CSR in the RCCG, Ogun State. It justifies the Church's position as a community of hope rather than being a community of faith alone through an exposition of Acts 2:42-47. More importantly, the study situates the Church as a religious organization, providing shelter, food, clothes, grants among others through shared resources. In contrast to biblical principle of communal living (Acts 2:42-47), this study examines CSR practices in RCCG. Findings revealed that the RCCG in Ogun State engages in various CSR initiatives such as feeding, empowerment schemes, educational grants, and free or discounted medical services, among others. However, these CSR initiatives have not provided lasting solutions to social problems such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and other social vices. The RCCG engages in CSR activities that are temporary rather than permanent, since the provision of shelter, clothing, and food is a continuous exercise which the church cannot sustain for the same sets of people indefinitely. Instead, people need to be empowered and established so that they can, in turn, contribute positively to society. The exegetical analysis of Acts 2:42-47 revealed the following themes; loyalty, unity, friendship and shared resources. It laid more emphasis on 'shared resources' among believers. Drawing insights from the analysis of the text, the Church is charged with the responsibility to help each other grow spiritually and physically through collective efforts. Additionally, the text showed the conditions to be met in carrying out the activity, which include the demonstration of loyalty, trust, happiness, communion, fellowship and, most importantly shared possessions. The study concludes that although the Redeemed Christian Church of God, as one of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria, has demonstrated acts of kindness by engaging in various CSR initiatives to address poverty, food insecurity, lack of education, unemployment, and other social challenges, these initiatives have not provided lasting solutions to the aforementioned social upheavals.

The study suggests the following recommendations based on the findings of the study: The Church (RCCG) should prioritize personal growths over the distribution of unsustainable material aids. RCCG should establish microfinance banks across Nigeria that can facilitate loans at low interest rates. Also, RCCG should establish schools with affordable tuition rates accessible to every person in Nigeria. The Church should organize training and empowerment programs for jobless and struggling members in Nigeria. Additionally, RCCG should empower women to address social and economic injustices as well as gender-based violence in Nigeria.

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