

## THE PLACE OF OGBOMOSO IN BAPTIST MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

Ogbomoso occupies a crucial place in the annals of Baptist missionary history in Nigeria. Even though it was not the very first place where Baptist work was first firmly planted in Nigeria, the town today has a richly textured and exciting history, and has played a unique role in the lives of the Nigerian Baptist community. In myriad ways, the Baptists of Ogbomoso have clearly motivated Nigerian Baptists as catalysts of social and religious change not only in Nigeria but in other parts of Africa. Undoubtedly, “the evangelistic vocation of the town was realized as Ogbomoso converts traveled far and wide, beginning from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as they appropriated the new opportunities offered by the colonial dispensation”<sup>1</sup>. This paper is an inspiring account depicting the growth of Baptist missionary work in Ogbomoso and the vitality of its witness throughout the nooks and crannies of Nigeria and beyond. The account herein contained, is important, not just to Baptists, but to Christians of all traditions and denominations who take their ecumenical calling seriously. It gives us some insight and a deeper awareness of the place and contributions of Ogbomoso as the most potent and versatile of all Baptist communities in Nigeria.

### **Thomas Jefferson Bowen’s Exploratory Venture to Ogbomoso**

The credit of planting Baptist missionary work in Nigeria goes to Thomas Jefferson Bowen, who arrived Yorubaland in 1850, under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, USA. The life and works of Revd T.J. Bowen and the role he played in bringing the Baptist faith to Nigeria, as well as his pioneering activities in the country, especially in parts of Yorubaland where he ventured, have been well documented in earlier works<sup>2</sup>. A repetition of these, therefore, need not delay us here. Suffice it to say that after his appointment as a missionary by the Foreign Mission Board in 1849, he ventured into Nigeria, where

he landed at Badagry on August 5, 1850 to commence his missionary work. From there he moved to Abeokuta where he never did much evangelistic work. Rather he spent his time there in studying the Yoruba language, and also offered military assistance to the Egba people in their fight against the menace of Dahomey. After an eighteen-month stint in Abeokuta, the Bowens relocated from there and attempted visiting Igboho but were forced to detour to Ijaye on the orders of Are Kurunmi. There in Ijaye, Bowen established his base and planted the first Baptist church and mission station in the area.

In September 1854, William H. Clarke joined the Bowens in Ijaye. With Rev. Clarke to oversee the Ijaye station,<sup>3</sup> and apparently convinced that the work there was in good hands, the Bowens were able to move northward through Ogbomoso, a town that has been described as “the most important centre of Baptist work in Nigeria”,<sup>4</sup> to found the Mission’s second station in the country there. That was in 1855<sup>5</sup>. It had not been the initial intention of the pioneer missionaries to establish a station in Ogbomoso. Settling there and establishing the Mission’s second and most important station there in 1855 was by sheer providence, as shall be demonstrated presently.

### **Bowen’s Venture in Ilorin**

As earlier indicated, when Revd and Mrs Bowen left Ijaye, their plan, ostensibly, was not to settle in Ogbomoso, but Ilorin. The missionaries apparently preferred Ilorin with a view to using it as a launch pad to penetrate the Muslim North. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the hold of Islam on Ilorin and environs had been very strong. At about this same period, Christian Missions, generally, which had been wielding a modicum of influence in Southern Nigeria, were eager to spread the Gospel to Northern Nigeria. And to realize their northward ambition, Ilorin, a northern Yoruba town, which was then in the hands of the Muslim Fulani, was uppermost in the missionaries’ minds. It thus had to be penetrated as they moved northwards from the coast to the Muslim-dominated Sokoto Caliphate.

It has been suggested that for three reasons, Christian Missions were eager to establish a station in Ilorin in their northward drive.

First, the venture was seen as an integral part of the wider effort to carry the gospel to the Muslim north. In this wise, it is argued that being on a strategic location, the town would be able to act as a springboard from where missionary activities could penetrate the Sokoto Caliphate. The second reason adduced is that the interest there was because of the 19<sup>th</sup> century trading connections which the town had with many areas up to Kano, a role which neither the jihad in Ilorin in the 1920s nor the civil wars in Yorubaland at about this same period could diminish. Thomas J. Bowen's assertion, lends credence to the second reason advanced for missionary venture in Ilorin. He observed after his first visit to that town as follows:

In my first journey to Ilorin, I travelled with a caravan of traders, which could not have numbered less than three thousand persons. Large caravans are constantly arriving at Ilorin from all directions, and the same is going at all of the other great centres of central African trade...<sup>7</sup>

Prior to this observation, he had earlier remarked in a correspondence to the Executive Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention<sup>8</sup> thus: "... should Ilorin give free access to the gospel, the case is decided hence to Sokoto is a journey of less difficulty than from Lagos to Ilorin"<sup>9</sup>.

The town, Ilorin, was thus conceived as a veritable ground for missionary advancement. Finally, it has been argued by H. O. Danmole that the success of the Baptists in establishing mission stations in neighbouring Ogbomoso seemed to have acted as a morale booster for missionary societies<sup>6</sup>. That the venture in Ilorin was in furtherance of this process of evangelization according to him needs no debate and was as part and parcel of the whole objective of spreading the gospel to the nooks and crannies of Africa by the pioneer missionaries.

The attempts by the Christian Missions to establish in Ilorin during the 19<sup>th</sup> century failed. Missionaries who visited the town from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century were all rejected. In 1855, for instance, Rev. W. H. Clarke of the Baptist Mission went to preach in Ilorin

but he was not granted permission<sup>12</sup>. T. J. Bowen's attempt to found a mission station there, also in 1855, equally failed. Though the emir had earlier consented allowing him to establish a mission station in that town<sup>13</sup>, by the time Bowen returned later in the year, the emir had rescinded his earlier decision and promise<sup>14</sup>. Towards the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rev. Charles E. Smith of the Baptist Mission compound at Oke Osupa quarters in Ogbomoso made series of fruitless attempts in Ilorin. The efforts of Rev. W. T. Lumbley, Dr. Locket and Dr. George Green, a Baptist medical missionary in Ogbomoso, as well as that of Rev. B. Laniyi were all to no avail. Apart from the Baptist missionaries, Adolphus Mann, a German Missionary of the C.M.S. made fruitless efforts to establish in that town. Similarly, attempts by Bishop Ajayi Crowther<sup>15</sup>, and Reverend S. S. Farrow<sup>16</sup> to spread the tentacles of the C.M.S. in Ilorin, all during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were to no avail. The town thus remained a centre of hostility against Christian Missionary endeavour throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With this failure of the attempt in Ilorin, the missionaries fell back to concentrate on Ogbomoso in particular, and the Yoruba country south of Ilorin in general, for over half a century.

### **Planting the Biblical Mustard Seed in Ogbomoso**

When attempts to establish in Ilorin failed, the then *Soun*, or paramount ruler of Ogbomoso, Baale Ogunlabi Odunaro Apaebu (1855-1869), extended his hands of friendship to Revd and Mrs Bowen, and encouraged them to regard his domain as a safe haven for their missionary enterprise. While they had been despised and rejected in Ilorin, they were gladly received in Ogbomoso. Meanwhile, before then, William Clarke, Bowen's missionary companion, had, in February 1855, embarked on an exploratory visit to Ogbomoso and had secured the permission of the *Soun* to establish a station there. On arrival, Clarke, who had caught a vision that Ogbomoso would become a great stronghold of Christianity, made very complimentary remarks about the town. On account of this, Bowen and his wife gladly accepted the *Soun's* invitation and settled in Ogbomoso to give the town a trial where Ilorin had failed. The *Soun* exchanged gifts with the Bowens and offered them

suitable accommodation at Ikolaba Ayoola's compound in the *Masifa* section of Ogbomoso, along the road then leading to Ilorin. There they established a Day school and Sunday school. Several conversions were made among the adherents of the traditional religion. The first and most prominent of such converts was one Pa Fasanya of *Isale Afon* in Ogbomoso.<sup>17</sup>

Deriving from the discussion above on the establishment of Baptist missionary enterprise in Ogbomosho and Ilorin, one would regard as wrong and misleading the assumption by that the Baptists church by 1855, has been successfully planted in Ogbomoso. It is not here denied that, Bowen, the pioneer Baptist missionary in Yorubaland, had made a stopover and preached in Ogbomoso on his way to Ilorin. But it is equally true that there at Ogbomoso he had not been very successful as he was molested by Mohammedans in that town<sup>10</sup>. What is more, preaching in a place is different from successfully establishing in that place. Moreover, by the time Rev. A. C. Mann of the C.M.S. visited Ilorin, also in 1855, during the interval between the first and second visits of Bowen, followed later by William Clarke, the Baptists had not settled down effectively in Ogbomoso. As a matter of fact, Bowen only had "a temporary residence in Ogbomoso" and had all that time "an eye on Ilorin"<sup>11</sup>. From all available evidences in the history of Baptist work in this area then, it was after the failure of the Ilorin venture that Bowen and his pioneer colleagues seemed to have made a really concerted effort to establish permanently in Ogbomoso. What is being emphasized, therefore, is that it is difficult to see how the so-called "success" of Baptist work in Ogbomoso as early as 1855, could have inspired missionaries to establish in Ilorin as noted earlier and credited to H. O. Danmole. It was, indeed, following the failure of the Ilorin venture that Baptist missionaries made moves to concentrate on Ogbomosho and to pursue aggressive policy of Baptist expansion.

Bowen was, however, not destined to stay long in Ogbomoso. His adventurous and selfless service to the advancement of Baptist cause in Nigeria had not been without cost. His failing health and that of his wife compelled his retirement from the Nigerian field early in 1856.<sup>18</sup> Bowen's withdrawal closed the pioneering era of

Baptist work in the country. It is important to stress at this juncture that the favourable consideration given to Ogbomoso by the pioneer missionaries to experiment Baptist enterprise in the town was indeed a momentous decision. The spiritual mustard seed so planted by the Bowens was watered by William Clarke and nurtured in later years by succeeding generations of missionaries. Baptist influence in the town has ever since been growing in leaps and bounds, producing remarkable effects, not only on Nigeria but also on the continent of Africa as a whole.

### **The Resilience of Baptist Witness in Ogbomoso during the Formative Years of Baptist Work in Nigeria**

The period 1860s down to mid 1870s was in many respects a critical period in the history of Baptist work in Nigeria. Indeed, with the exception of Ogbomoso, Baptists during that early period were neither numerically nor socially a powerful community in any of the towns where they had established.<sup>19</sup> In Ogbomoso itself, in 1875, William Joshua David preached to ‘many hearers’ under trees planted by former missionaries at the Baptist Mission Compound, Oke-Oshupa. He described the congregation there as “disorganized, dispirited and dying”<sup>20</sup>. At the same time it was in that town that some indigenes firmly held forth for the missionaries during the period of their absence from Nigeria. Foremost among such indigenous converts who served as pillars of the missionary work was a man named Babalola Barika, who had hoped still for the return of the missionaries.<sup>21</sup>

It is significant to note that in Ogbomoso where the Baptist Mission station had been abandoned as early as 1859<sup>22</sup> after the departure of W. H. Clarke for the United States, Baptist work was resiliently sustained; thanks to the dynamism and charisma of the Oyerinde family. There, Bishop Ajayi met a group of about twenty converts some of whom were ‘ready for baptism’, praying together at Oshupa quarters of the town under the leadership of the Oyerinde family. That was in 1872 when Bishop Crowther was returning from his celebrated tour of the Niger to Lagos<sup>23</sup>.

During the years when Baptist missionary work was in abeyance, however, it was still sustained through the help of Negro

Baptists such as the Hardens, and the Vaughans, as well as by the indigenous Baptists of Ogbomoso extraction, like the Ladejo Stones and the Oyerindes. In Lagos, Moses Ladejo Stone with Mr & Mrs. J.M. Harden, throughout the dark and trying days of the American civil war (when the Southern Baptists were unable to send a helping hand) became the mainstay and pillar upon which the Lagos Baptist Church rested. Even after the death of her husband, Mrs. Sarah Marsh Harden still carried the banner, while Moses Ladejo Stone looked after and encouraged the men, thus keeping the work going in Lagos during the gloomy years. Among those destined to play very prominent role in the advancement of Baptist work in Nigeria, the life and works of Moses Ladejo Stone,<sup>24</sup> later Pastor of Ogbomoso and Lagos, merit a brief discussion.

Born in Ogbomoso, Ladejo came to Ijaye as a schoolboy and studied with other Yoruba lads under Revd R.H. Stone until the incursion into Ibadan forced the missionaries to Abeokuta in 1862. Young Ladejo went with them and continued to study and serve his beloved benefactor and friend until again in 1867 they had to flee to Lagos at the peak of the Yoruba wars.<sup>25</sup> The following year, 1868, Rev. Stone, the only Baptist missionary then remaining in Nigeria, left for America on a furlough. Before his departure, however, he baptized Ladejo who at that time took the name of his foster father and became known as Moses Ladejo Stone. During the period of inertia when, for six years (1868-1874), there was no Southern Baptist missionary on the field, Moses Ladejo Stone was one of the leading indigenous Baptists whose succour held the Baptist constituency together safely and wisely, keeping it from destruction and peril. He was ordained into the full gospel ministry on 22 February 1880, and stayed in Ogbomoso till 1884 when he relocated to Lagos, where he first served as assistant Pastor to W.J. David before becoming the substantive pastor of the First Baptist Church in his later years. Ladejo Stone was undoubtedly exceptional. Unusually bright, articulate, energetic, and committed, he stood head and shoulders higher and appeared distinctly above his times. He became an eloquent evangelical preacher and giant of the pulpit under whose pastorate the First Baptist Church, Lagos became one of the leading churches in the Lagos area. Ladejo served in this

capacity for nineteen years until his death on April 30, 1913. His eloquence in preaching earned him the appellation of “Spurgeon of Yorubaland”<sup>26</sup> as he was called upon to speak at nearly all the great gatherings of the churches in Lagos.<sup>27</sup> At a time when white racism was the norm and black ability was deemed low, he awed even white listeners and observers, who, even if they were not willing to abandon their prejudices, were at least willing to make an exception for this budding evangelist. On the strength of Ladejo Stone’s charisma, Samuel G. Pinnock, a one-time Southern Baptist missionary in Nigeria, remarked:

By the power of his message, he filled the large auditorium to the doors; led the church to complete self-support; paid off the \$2,500 indebtedness of the church building, inaugurated a church at Ibadan; opened up work in the Jebu country, where he baptized hundreds of converts.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ogbomoso Baptists and the Expansion of Baptist Work outside Yorubaland**

Up to the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Yorubaland in south-western Nigeria remained the pivot of Baptist enterprise in Nigeria. The only location outside the Yoruba country that had a taste of Baptist presence was Buguma in the Niger delta area where Baptist work was opened by Revd William Hughes in 1898, and thereafter handed over to Dr. Mojola Agbebi to nurture from 1898 onwards. The period between 1914 and 1950 represented an era of rapid expansion of Baptist work in Nigeria. Certain developments were associated with this period, the most salient of which was the expansion of Baptist work from Yorubaland to other parts of the country. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, opened with fresh Baptist missionary initiatives and greater outreach outside the Yoruba country. In particular, Northern Nigeria, which for long remained a veritable stronghold of Islam and a no-go area for Christian Missions, began to feel the presence and impact of Baptist missionary enterprise. It is significant to indicate here that while the missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention, USA, were the planters of the nucleus of Baptist



enterprise in Yorubaland in Western Nigeria, expansion of the work outside this region to other parts of the country owed much to indigenous efforts of ‘native’ Baptists, especially Ogbomoso Baptists, before being complemented in later years by the American Baptist missionaries. This development, in a sense, helped to debunk the myth of the so-called “white man’s burden” in Christianising other Nigerian groups outside the Yoruba country.

The period of consolidation equally witnessed the spread and expansion of Baptist missionary work to Northern Nigeria, which had hitherto been regarded by many, as a region of the exclusive preserve of Islam. The spread of Baptist work to Northern Nigeria was quite fascinating. It would be recalled that while the pioneer American Baptist missionaries, especially Thomas Bowen and William Clarke had been desirous of spreading the gospel work to the region around and north of the Niger River, that is, the entire geographical enclave covered by the Sokoto caliphate, that area for long remained a no-go area for Christian Missions. The 1914 amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria created greater avenues for mass geographical mobility and relocation across the two erstwhile independent regions. Specifically, there was mass exodus of lay Baptist missionaries of Yorubaland extraction, notably those from Ogbomoso, to every nook and cranny of Northern Nigeria to trade or pursue their vocations. Among the first places where they settled were Zungeru, Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Jos, and other environs. As Ogbomoso in particular had at that time become a stronghold of Baptist work, a majority of the traders from the town were of the Baptist faith. To these traders go the credit of extending the frontiers of the Baptist denomination geographically towards Northern Nigeria. The drift of civil servants of Southern Nigeria origin who were then on transfer to the North added a fillip to consolidating and expanding Baptist work in the area. By the time of the centenary celebration of Baptist enterprise in Nigeria in 1950, the work had spread all over the country.

## **The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso and Baptist Expansion in Nigeria**

The Christian instruments for the propagation of the Christian faith have been the full-time professional missionaries and the mission stations. The evidences at our disposal clearly reveal that these were fully tapped and appropriately utilised by the Baptists all through their history in Nigeria, especially from 1914 onwards. These instruments served as invaluable agencies that accelerated the growth of the Baptist work in the country.

The provision and training of ministers had long been a matter of interest with the more thoughtful missionaries of the Baptist denomination. Thus, the need for the provision and/or utilisation of indigenous field workers as a strategy for the success of the mission's work in Nigeria had been realised as early as 1851, barely a year after Thomas Bowen, the first Baptist missionary, landed. His brief experience in Yorubaland had convinced him of the necessity for this. It was the contention of Bowen that if Christianity was to take a permanent root in the country, and not be wiped out as was the case in earlier attempts at planting the religion in this area in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was the urgency to train indigenous hands quickly<sup>29</sup>. A native African pastorate to minister to Africans, it was hoped, would supplement and eventually replace the white missionaries from America. Bowen had on several occasions in his correspondences to the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) advised that "...native agents are of the highest importance to our operations...we cannot do without them".<sup>30</sup> While the pace of his work was slowed partly as a result of the absence of indigenous helpers, his Anglican and Wesleyan counterparts in Abeokuta were recording remarkable success and progress; thanks to the assistance being offered by the *Saros*, that is, the ex-slaves who returned to the country from Sierra Leone. This prompted Bowen to advise the Foreign Mission Board to pursue vigorously a programme of raising African auxiliaries in Nigeria. As a first step towards realising this, he solicited for fifty scholarships for Nigerian children, with the hope that beneficiaries would become workers for the Mission.<sup>31</sup> Even after leaving Nigeria as a result of his ailing health, Bowen still

seemed committed to the realisation of his dream. Soon after his withdrawal from the country, he wrote to remind the Board:

I am really afraid that our African Missions will stand on a sandy foundation until we have more colored laborers. What if the brethren now in Yoruba should unexpectedly return or die, the Mission itself might be lost.<sup>32</sup>

To forestall such a calamity, Bowen pleaded with the Board for the establishment of a Training College for raising African teachers and preachers. This, he advised, should be sited at Biolorunpelu, Oyo or Ogbomoso, under his fostering care.<sup>33</sup> From all these evidences, it can be conjectured that despite Bowen's physical absence from Nigeria, he was still very enthusiastic about the progress of the work that he pioneered. Sadly enough, Bowen's wish and ambition could not come to reality during his lifetime, and indeed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, ushered in enlarged plans and brighter hopes.

The founding of a theological/training institution in 1898 has been the most significant event in the history of Baptist work in Nigeria. In a sense, it depended on suitable conditions already in existence. For, without the imagination and initiative of the Baptist missionaries on the field, the necessity for a centre of post-primary education and training of pastors would hardly have been felt. Similarly, without the existence of supporters as committed and dedicated as the Foreign Mission Board of The Southern Baptist Convention in the United States of America, the financial requirements of the new venture would not have been met. And further still, without the imagination and ambition of the field workers, the experiment would never have been attempted.

The inspiration behind the founding of the Theological Seminary came from Rev. Charles Edwin Smith, a missionary of the FMB of the Southern Baptist Convention of U.S.A. who was then based in Ogbomoso,<sup>34</sup> and on whose shoulder the leadership of the Baptist Mission in Nigeria fell by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Smith, like Bowen, believed that a trained national leadership was necessary for the evangelization of Nigeria. It was he who

inaugurated the nucleus of what was to become the Theological Seminary. By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, owing to the rapid expansion of churches and mission work in general, it became glaring that the creation of a viable Baptist community in Nigeria could be achieved only if African teachers, pastors and evangelists were given a more substantial training than that which individual missionaries had been able to provide. The need for new and more hands to manage the new wave of expansion thus became more than ever before a pressing issue. Throughout the nineteenth century, that is, for about half a century of Baptist work in Nigeria, there was only one ordained Nigerian Baptist minister – Moses Ladejo Stone. Either because of, or in spite of, this dire need for more indigenous hands to pursue a policy of aggressive evangelism, Rev. Smith preferred training such additional hands locally. He believed that training them abroad “unfits them for the best work here...”<sup>35</sup> On May 3, 1898<sup>36</sup> therefore, a general Baptist training school<sup>37</sup> was established in the Oke-Oshupa Baptist Chapel, Ogbomoso, growing “out of the preacher-training plan”<sup>38</sup> of Rev. C.E. Smith.

For over two decades of its existence, that is, from its very inception up to about 1920, the institution had a chequered history that has been described as a “peripatetic existence”.<sup>39</sup> It existed in Ogbomoso from 1898 to 1904 when it was moved to Abeokuta where it operated between 1904 and 1905.<sup>40</sup> Between 1906 and 1914, the institution was moved back to Ogbomoso, from where it was transferred to Shaki in 1914 due to the lack of missionary personnel to carry on the work at Ogbomoso.<sup>41</sup> In Shaki, the institution operated between 1914 and 1919.<sup>42</sup> During those years of its chequered history, the institution’s leadership was said to have changed thirteen times.<sup>43</sup> In June 1921, the Seminary was moved from Shaki to Ogbomoso where it was renamed ‘Baptist Academy and Seminary’.<sup>44</sup> Soon afterwards, in January 1922, a teacher-training programme was added to the curriculum of the institution, consequent upon which the Mission changed its name to ‘Baptist College and Seminary’<sup>45</sup>. When Dr. Charles E. Maddy, the then Executive Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention visited Nigeria in 1938, part of his proposal, among many other revolutionary moves, was for the College to be

separated from the Seminary.<sup>46</sup> The College was afterwards moved to the Industrial Institute in Iwo, thus leaving the Seminary at Ogbomoso as a full-fledged theological institution. It has remained so ever since.

The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary is an academic institution providing theological education and professional training for God-called men and women to meet the need for effective leadership in the work of local churches, schools and other areas of denominational life.<sup>47</sup> This training institution for Baptist workers has since remained an indispensable agency in the development and growth of Baptist work in Nigeria, and it still remains so. It “helps the Nigerian Baptist Convention, not only by equipping and training its leadership, but also by studying its life and by involvement in its programmes”<sup>48</sup>. At the Seminary, theological courses are arranged on levels to meet the needs of students with varying degrees of education. The curricula of the institution are broadly based, covering the areas of theology, religious education and church music. These programmes of study are designed to offer a comprehensive theological education of high quality for the development of Christian leaders, including lay leaders, and to provide specialized training in professional skills demanded by the various church-related ministries<sup>49</sup>. Throughout the era of consolidation, the Seminary produced, on a regular basis, African sons for work in the ministry. And to this day, the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, remains a veritable training ground for the Nigerian Baptist Convention work.

To complement the above functions, much of the Mission’s effort and money provided the resources for some of their converts in Nigeria to travel to America for advanced theological and secular education. A notable example of such beneficiaries was Dr. J. Tanimola Ayorinde<sup>50</sup>. Others included Isaiah Olajuwon Gilbert and Isaac Alade both of who became outstanding members that played leading roles in the First Baptist Church in Lagos and the Nigerian Baptist Convention in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The Tower Building of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, the major 'factory' of Baptist enterprise in Nigeria. The structure was completed and dedicated in 1955, under Dr & Mrs J. C. Pool.

### **The Prominence of Baptist Missionary Enterprise in Ogbomosho: An Evaluation**

No doubt, socio-economic changes were brought about by the various policies and projects initiated by the Baptists. Such changes were, however, not evenly distributed, as Baptist concentration in the different parts of the country was equally not evenly distributed. Of all the areas of Baptist missionary operation in Nigeria, the one that has felt the Baptist touch most, and which has made the most significant contribution in extending the geographical landscape of the Baptists, is Ogbomosho. Indeed, "the word Ogbomosho in ecclesiastical parlance is a synonym of the Baptist church"<sup>51</sup> in Nigeria. It is equally believed that "about half of the Baptist church ministers serving in the entire Yorubaland are from either Ogbomosho or its environs"<sup>52</sup>. This has earned for the town the appellation of "the most important centre of Baptist work in Nigeria"<sup>53</sup>. The denomination wields so much influence there that as at the end of 2005, there were about ninety Baptist Churches within Ogbomosho township alone, while there were close to three hundred

in the outstations or district towns and villages that form part of Ogbomosoland.<sup>54</sup> As a matter of fact, the influence which the Baptists wield in Ogbomoso is widely acknowledged throughout Nigeria and this is aptly summed up by a non-Baptist observer in the following words: “ a mere mention of Baptist in Nigeria readily suggests Ogbomoso town”<sup>55</sup>.

A number of descriptive names have thus been given to refer to the town, ranging from “Baptist City”<sup>56</sup>, “City of Baptist citadel”<sup>57</sup>, “Baptist Centre”<sup>58</sup>, to “Baptists’ major ‘factory’”<sup>59</sup>. Indeed, a popular aphorism to capture the prevalence of Baptists in the town goes thus: “the most prestigious ‘factories’ or ‘industries’ in Ogbomoso are Baptist buildings”<sup>60</sup>. Such is the influence which Baptists wield in the town that the Soun<sup>61</sup> of Ogbomoso, who is a Muslim by faith, acknowledges in clear terms: “I and my people [sic] can aptly be termed, ‘people called Baptists’”<sup>62</sup>. A former Baptist missionary to Nigeria has epitomized the Ogbomoso factor in the history of Baptist work in Nigeria in the following words: “A visitor to Nigeria hasn’t seen our Baptist work without a visit to Ogbomoso”<sup>63</sup>. This was echoed by one of his American colleagues thus: “The story of Nigerian Baptists is properly told through the story of Baptist witness in Ogbomoso”<sup>64</sup>. He concluded, and rightly too, that “it exemplifies outreach throughout Nigeria”<sup>65</sup>. Against a background of these descriptive names and appellations, therefore, the stamp of Baptist influence which Ogbomoso bears, surpassing any other place in Nigeria, is a matter of common knowledge. A clear indication of how far Ogbomoso effort extended eastwards in the establishment of Baptist churches in Yorubaland is epitomised by the fact that up to 1946, churches in the geographically distant land from Ogbomoso stretching to Ila Orangun, Offa and Igbominaland were all classified under the Ogbomoso Baptist Association. Indeed, the fame and historical significance of Ogbomoso in Baptist history extends far beyond Nigeria. As rightly observed by Travis Collins, “Southern Baptist withdrawal from China due to the communist takeover in the late 1940s makes Ogbomoso the oldest mission station in which Southern Baptist missionaries still reside”<sup>66</sup>.



Today, Ogbomoso vaunts a galaxy of Baptist institutions or establishments apart from producing many 'firsts' in Nigerian Baptist history. These establishments include the second oldest surviving Baptist church in Nigeria, namely, Oke'lerin (formerly Oke Oshupa) Baptist Church, established in 1855, the same year Baptist work was planted in Lagos; the first Baptist primary school; Baptist Seminary; Baptist Hospital; Baptist School of Nursing; Motherless Home (a.k.a Kersey Home); Lepers Settlements (a.k.a. Camp of Hope); School of Midwifery; Baptist Bookstore; Smith International School; Smith Baptist Academy; George Green Memorial College, among others. By the same token, the town has been privileged to produce many 'firsts' in the Nigerian Baptist history. Ogbomoso was the first town in Nigeria to host the Nigerian Baptist Convention (following its metamorphosis from the Yoruba Baptist Association) in 1919; the first graduate of the Baptist Seminary, Nathaniel D. Oyerinde, was an indigene of Ogbomoso. Oyerinde equally doubled` as the first Baptist Professor in Nigeria. Similarly, the first indigenous female university graduate in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, Mrs. Joanna Mobola Ayorinde, was a native of Ogbomoso. Indeed, "...in no other part of Nigeria is there to be found in one place, investment in men, buildings and projects concentrated by a single Christian mission as the American Baptist Mission in Ogbomoso".<sup>67</sup> Today, the town is reputed as the largest single Baptist community in the whole of Africa.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A review of Baptist work in Nigeria demonstrates clearly that Ogbomoso occupies a prominent place in the mission's history in the country. The founding fathers of Baptist missionary work in the town were concerned with the salvation of souls there, as well as with the fortunes of the gospel in other places where they ventured, mostly as short and long distance traders. Efforts were therefore geared to establish churches and preaching stations wherever they ventured. Such efforts grew steadily, yielding enormous fruits. The result is that the town has recorded landmarks and left a lasting imprint in the annals of the Nigerian Baptists for over one and half centuries. The town not only has an enduring Baptist heritage,



Ogbomoso Baptists have been vanguards of Baptist enterprise and remain unrelenting in spreading Baptist work, not only through the nooks and crannies of Nigeria, but in other parts of the African continent, especially within the West African sub-region. Admittedly, there is much more to be said about the place of Ogbomoso in Nigerian Baptist history than is presented in this chapter. On a final note, the Ogbomoso factor in the history and spread of Baptist work in Nigeria is aptly captured, as quoted from a missionary observer, in the following words:

The introduction of the Gospel to the people of Ogbomoso was a pivotal event. God has used indigenes of Ogbomoso, who are known for travelling and trading, to spread the Gospel all over West Africa. The diaspora of Ogbomoso Baptists has resulted in the establishment of churches and the evangelization of areas across Nigeria and beyond.<sup>68</sup>

The above summary and description of the significance and contribution of Ogbomoso, which is arguably the most potent and versatile of all Baptist centres in Nigeria is a valid and vital fact and factor.

## Notes and References

1. S. Ademola Ishola, "Foreword" in I.A. Adedoyin, *The Place of Ogbomoso in the History of Nigerian Baptists* (Ibadan: Penthouse Publications, 2005) p. vii
2. Readers, who may be interested in the advent and growth of Baptist Mission work in Nigeria, as well as the place of Revd Thomas Jefferson Bowen in the foundation years of the denomination's history in the country, will benefit from the comprehensive account by this writer in S. Ademola Ajayi, *Baptist Work in Nigeria, 1850-2005: A Comprehensive History* (Ibadan: BookWright Publishers, 2010) Chapter 1
3. S.O. Omotoso, *The Exemplary Pastor: The Rev. E.O. Agboola* (Ibadan: Baptist Press, 1969) p.21
4. T. J. Bowen: Letter to Bro. Taylor, April 13, 1856, cf. C.E. Maddy, *Day Dawn in Yorubaland*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1939) p. 47.
5. Rev. Bowen's Diary: Entry for September 29, 1854
6. H. O. Danmole, "The Crescent and the Cross in the Frontier Emirate: Ilorin in the Nineteenth century" in *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XVII, No, 1 June 1985 pp. 23-24.
7. T. J. Bowen: Letter to the Senate of the United States (To accompany Bills 607) to provide for the exploration of the River Niger in Africa. Dated February, 18, 1857 and published in *The Southern Baptist*, March 10, 1857. See also Bowen Papers, p. 326.
8. The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A. was the mentor of Baptist enterprise in Yorubaland in particular and Nigeria in general.
9. T. J. Bowen, Letter to Bro. J. B. Taylor, Executive Secretary, Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, U.S.A. dated October 1, 1855.
10. Bowen's Journal: Entry for April 19 1855.

11. J. A. Atanda (ed.), *W. H. Clarke: Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland (1854-1858)* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972) p. 92.
12. Ibid. Pp. 80-86
13. T. J. Bowen's Journal: Entry for April, 1855
14. Bowen Letters: T. J. Bowen to Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, U.S.A., January 3, 1856, cf. Bowen's Diary: Entry for October 24, 1855. See also Mrs. Bowen's Diary: Entry for October, 20 and 24, 1855.
15. C.M.S. CA3/04(b) Annual Report for 1873 by Bishop Crowther.
16. C.M.S. "A visit to Ilorin by S. S. Farrow" in *Niger and Yoruba Notes*, Vol. 10 (1895)
17. J.A. Atanda, 'Editor's Introduction' in J.A. Atanda (ed) *W.H. Clarke, Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland (1854-1858)*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972) p. xv.
18. Mrs. Bowen's Diary: Entries for September 20 and 23, 1855.
19. In his annual report for the year 1875 to the Foreign Mission Board, Rev. W.J. David who had just arrived Nigeria to revive Baptist work reported 33 *bona fide* members found in combined number from all the Mission stations after a six years absence of the missionaries. See David Papers: "Annual Report for 1875". This he re-echoed on May 12, 1888 in his answer to a query from Dr. Bell, the then Executive Secretary of the F.M.B.
20. W.J. David Diary: Entry for September 3, 1876
21. See W.J. David Diary: Entry for August 30, 1876 where, according to David, Barika was especially happy at his (David's) arrival, glorifying God for answering the prayers of the little congregation. He received David with wild demonstration of joy and enthusiasm.
22. Though R.H. Stone visited Ogbomoso in 1860 on his return to Ijaye after being held captive in Ibadan, he

- never stayed for long. That was during his flight from Ibadan via Iwo to Ijaye.
23. Bishop Ajayi's Journal: Entries for January 12-14, 1872 in C.M.S. Papers CA3/01.
24. He was so named after Rev. R.H. Stone, his great benefactor. For more about the life and times of this young and charismatic trailblazer, see I.A. Adedoyin, *Moses Ladejo Stone* (Baptist Heritage Series 4) Ibadan: Nigerian Baptist Bookstore, 1998).
25. The flight was sequel to the persecution of Christians in Abeokuta about this time. A fairly elaborate discussion on this episode tagged *ifole* is found in S. Ademola Ajayi, *Baptist Work in Nigeria, 1850-2005: A Comprehensive History* (Ibadan: BookWright Publishers, 2010), Chapter 2
26. C.E. Maddry, *Day Dawn in Yorubaland*, p. 76  
**NB** Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a powerful Baptist preacher and the greatest British evangelist of his time. He owed his fame as a preacher to his great oratorical gifts and keen sense of humour. A diverse author, he was, from 1855, publishing a sermon a week. His church had the largest congregation in Great Britain at that time. Moses Ladejo Stone was thus described as the 'Spurgeon of Yorubaland' because he was gifted with some of the qualities of C.H. Spurgeon.
27. S.G. Pinnock, *The Romance of Missions in Nigeria*, p. 76.
28. Ibid.
29. T. J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labors*, pp 339-400
30. Bowen Letters: T.J. Bowen to Bro. Jas B. Taylor, July 1, 1851.
31. Bowen Letters: Bowen to Bro Taylor, October 27, 1853.
32. Bowen to Bro. Taylor, 23 November, 1857.
33. Bowen to Bro. Taylor, 30 November, 1857

34. Rev. C.E. Smith was in Ogbomoso from 1888 to 1906. See C.E. Smith's Papers, in microfilm, at the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan.
35. C.E. Smith Diary: See his entry for February 14, 1898.
36. Campus Directory, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, 1983-84, p.4
37. This school was made up of two sections, a five-year primary education and three-year theological sections respectively. See C.E. Smith's Diary: Entries for June 6 and August 4, respectively.
38. Cecil F. Roberson, "Baptist Theological Seminary: How it all Began" in *Vertical File* (hereafter referred to as V.F.) NO. 216B, N.B.T.S. Library Ogbomoso).
39. Campus Directory, N.B.T.S. Ogbomoso, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4
40. *Ibid.*
41. C. E. Maddry, *Day Dawn in Yorubaland*, p. 95
42. Campus Directory, N.B.T.S. *Op. Cit.* p. 4
43. *Ibid.*
44. Cecil F. Roberson, "Baptist Theological Seminary: How it all Began" *Op. Cit.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. By the late 1930's, it had become apparent that the teaching course was swallowing up the theological course. This made the necessity for separation to become quite glaring and imperative.
47. Campus Directory, N.B.T.S. Ogbomoso, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. I.A. Adedoyin, *Dr. J.T. Ayorinde: A Study in the Growth of the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Ibadan: Baptist Press, 1974) pp 27 – 31.
51. Dickson Adeyanju, "Baptist Convention at the Crossroads" Special Report in *The Guardian*, Sunday, September 15, 1996 p A8
52. *Ibid* p. A8

53. J.A. Atanda, "Editor's Introduction" in J.A. Atanda (ed.) *W.H. Clarke: Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland*, p.xv.
54. Dr Ezekiel Akanni Bamigboye, in a recent study puts the figure of churches in Ogbomosho Township and districts at 371 at the end of Year 2003. For details see, Ezekiel A. Bamigboye, *150 Years of Baptist Work in Ogbomosho* (Ibadan: Flourish Books and Sceptre Prints, 2005) pp. 62-63
55. Dr. Ozzidi Bariki, Oyo (now Osun) State College of Education, Ila-Orangun (currently, in the Department of French, University of Ilorin), in an impromptu discussion with this writer, November 1988.
56. Oba Jimoh Oladunni Oyewumi Ajagungbade III, Soun of Ogbomosoland. Text of an address delivered at the 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Session of the Nigerian Baptist Convention held at the First Baptist Church, Oke'lerin, Ogbomosho, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 1984, in Minutes of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Session, Ogbomosho, April 14-19, 1984, p.27. Quite interestingly, the then Chief Imam of Ogbomosho, Alhaji Hamzat Alawiye, in an oral interview in April 1989, equally acknowledged this fact.
57. "Editorial" in *Nigerian Baptist*- the monthly official Journal of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, Vol. 62, No. 2, February 1984, p.3.
58. S.O. Omotoso, *The Exemplary Pastor: The Rev. E.O. Agboola* (Ibadan, Baptist Press, 1969) p. 21.
59. Ibid.
60. E. A. Bamigboye, *150 Years of Baptist Work in Ogbomosho*. Op.cit., p. 13
61. This is the official title of the paramount ruler of Ogbomosoland.
62. Oba Jimoh Oladunni Oyewumi, Address delivered at the 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Session of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Op.cit.

63. Carlton F. Whirley, *The Baptists of Nigeria: A Story To Tell*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1988) p.3
64. Stanley A. Nelson, "Introduction" in Carlton F. Whirley, *Ibid*.
65. *Ibid*.
66. Travis Collins, *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria, 1850-1993* (Ibadan: Associated Book-Makers Nigeria Limited, 1993) p.9 fn 1.
67. E. A. Ayandele "Ogbomoso Baptists: Rip Van Winkles in the Kingdom of Western Education" An Inaugural Lecture in VF 1286A, NBTSL, Ogbomoso, p.36
68. Travis Collins, *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria*, p.10