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**AN EVALUATION OF 4- DECADES (1960 - 2000) OF  
BAPTIST WORK IN AROGBO IJAW HOME MISSION FIELD**

**By**

**Blessing Orimisan Eshofonie**

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## ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this research work was to find out why growth in Baptist work has been rather slow and the effects of this on the generality of the people and to recommend possible solutions to the problem.

This evaluation involved interviews and surveys through the use of questionnaire to gather needed data. The sample for the evaluation involved four representative churches in the mission field and questionnaires were served on one hundred church members that were randomly chosen in the entire mission field.

A literature review on socio-political, economic and religious background of the people was embarked upon with a brief look at missions and church growth. The growth pattern of the work can be seen on decadal basis from the write-up while the analysis of the findings from interviews, records and responses to the questionnaires revealed probable reasons for the stunted growth.

The study consistently pointed in the direction of lack of capable and adequately experienced trained workers as a primary causative factor in the stunted growth of the work, hence a seven point recommendation is given to remedy the problem.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Very evidently clear from this write up is the fact that the Baptist work which started in the Arogbo Ijaw Home Mission Field some four decades ago has actually not attained much, proportionately, in terms of its growth whether in quality of spiritual life or physical development. According to Prof. J.A.

Ilori,

Concern for evangelism and church growth is an essential part of the Christian faith and an irreplaceable part of the work of the church <sup>1</sup>

This seems not to have been the experience of most of the churches in this area as there is no numerical strength nor truly Christian and revolutionized character for attestation.

The gospel or the Christian message has power to transform any culture especially when the culture contradicts the gospel. Baptist work in Arogbo Ijaw Home Mission Field has not significantly influenced the church members not to talk of the community as a whole. Family life is generally still poles apart from the biblical standards. "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" <sup>2</sup> is the

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<sup>1</sup> J.A. Ilori, lecture on Qualities of Healthy Churches, Ogbomoso: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, 16 July, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 5: 17 (NIV).

injunction of scripture. Till now there is not much recognition, power, prestige and honour to the clergy as practiced in other communities. This view is the personal observation of the writer which was confirmed in discussions with Pastors Abodunrin & Turray<sup>3</sup> (holiday pastors) and Pastor Julius A Awotunde who was Pastor of First Baptist Church, Arogbo from 1991 – 1993<sup>4</sup>

In the words of Rev. L.E. Torhukerhijo (the pioneer of the work) when asked his assessment of Baptist work in Arogbo Ijaw Home Mission Field, he says “I will evaluate the work as below average”.<sup>5</sup>

Prof. Ilori has identified one of the essentials of a healthy church as “Empowering Leadership” He says,

Leaders of growing churches concentrate on empowering other Christians for ministry, they do not use lay workers as “helpers” in attaining their own visions. Rather, they invert the pyramid of authority so that the leader assists Christians to attain the spiritual potential God has for them. These pastors equip, motivate, and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Michael Abodunrin, Arogbo, 28 July 1993

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Julius Awotunde, Arogbo, 5 December 1993

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Lawrence E. Torhukerhijo, Arogbo, November 6, 2001

<sup>6</sup> J.A. Ilori, lecture.

This study has consistently through various revealing indices pointed in the direction of lack of capable and adequately experienced-trained workers as a primary causative factor in the stunted growth of the work. Thus, not much can be said in terms of developing in the people Christlikeness, which is the hallmark of Christian maturity.

Knowing fully well that no situation is beyond God's redemption, and to really hit the nail on the head, the need of the area primarily is in purposeful and adequately supported leadership. To be able to save the situation and bring forth fruit meet for the labour require pastors. In pursuing this line of action I would recommend seriously the taking into consideration of the following steps.

### **Recommendations**

In the first place there must be a realization on the part of any would be worker that this is no virgin land as far as Baptist work is concerned, but nevertheless has not been very productive for forty years. This may be more difficult to attack than a fresh work. It thus require experienced hands or at least the would be worker should be prepared for the task ahead.

Secondly, considering the fairly large geographical expanse of the mission Field which has scattered all over it "diseased" or "Plateaued" churches, a situation where a handful of trained workers will work simultaneously will be most advantageous for the work as well as for the workers themselves.

Since it now appears as if the work is taking off afresh, in order to lay necessary scriptural foundations, it will be advisable as a third

step to see that such pastors are initially adequately sustained from “outside” with a clear programme of gradual disengagement and the individual local church taking up full responsibility.

Before and during the work, the dimension of spiritual warfare should be given primary importance. The bible is very clear on this. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”<sup>7</sup>. The manifest upsurge of diabolic and satanic fire works and devices during the resent Ugbo Ilaje and Arogbo Ijaw war that broke out on the September 19, 1998 has made it abundantly clear that there are spiritual forces of wickedness in dark places to contend with in order to establish the kingdom of God in the mission field.

Fifthly, a practical measure for any would –be worker is to have a clear picture of what the situation should be and to painstakingly educate the people, motivate them and move them gradually to the desired standard for God’s glory.

As a sixth step there must be a great emphasis on discipleship. The people must be reached for a genuine conversion experience and be properly disciplined. This will bring forth the needed commitment that will in turn sustain the work in terms of personnel and material resources.

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

