

TITLE PAGE

**THE BAPTIST WORK IN OFFA TOWNSHIP:
ITS BEGINNING, DEVELOPMENT AND
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES.**

**AN ESSAY PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST
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**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIRMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

This essay is titled "A study of Baptist work In Offa Township: Its Beginning, Development And Contemporary challenges: The work highlights the fact that for over seventy years of existence, Baptist work in this area has not been properly documented. The role of the founding fathers remain at the level of oral tradition, hence the need for adequate written record. Moreso that all the founding fathers are dying one after the other.

The researcher talks about the position of the town as the headquarter of Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State Nigeria which is about 55km away from Ilorin the Kwara State Capital; and discusses the tradition, socio-political, economic and religious practices of the people such as marriage, naming and burials. It also examines the emergence of Christianity in Offa beginning from 1907 through the effort of Revrend and Mrs. A. W. Smith of the Church Missionary society (C.M. S.)

The work concentrates on the beginning of Baptist work in 1924, through the effort of few indigenes and non-indigenes who were mostly Railway Workers. This resulted into the foundation laying of the first place of worship in 1936. Today the Church which started from the small room of one of her members has witnessed the establishment of five Baptist churches within and five outside Offa township. These include : Ifeoluwa, Calvary, Itafa and Ikotun Baptist Church to mention but a few.

The researcher spelt out the peaceful atmosphere in which the church started and co-exists with other denominations. The Church made her initial converts among the adherent of ATRs and Islam. The work also identifies the problem posed by the wave of Pentecostalism.

Finally the researcher gives a general evaluation of Baptist work in Offa . He identifies factors that were responsible for the show pace of work in this area; and recommended the way out.

Among the recommendations are: increase in member's financial commitment, commitment to evangelism and church planting and training of indigenes as pastors.

CONCLUSION

A. General Evaluation of Baptist Work in Offa

From the researcher's findings, Baptist work started in this area more than seven decades ago. From 1945 to 2001, only four organized churches can be found in Offa, "where the population is over one hundred thousand people"¹.

Considering the population density of this place, one would expect more churches than what it is now. Also one would expect members to be more than what it is at present. The question is what then could have been responsible for this slow pace of development.

The factors that were responsible for the slow pace of work in this area were multi-various ranging from:

(a) Lack of commitment to evangelism :- it is observed that majority of the members are not committed to evangelism. They see the work of evangelism and church planting as solely for the pastor. As a result they would not make themselves available for evangelistic outreach. In fact, many of such people were contented by remaining in the church to worship than to go out for evangelism.

(b) Lack of financial commitment : it is generally observed that many of the members are not committed financially. "Many are not ready to sacrifice their financial substance, they were more committed to the worldly things than what goes on in the church"². Evangelism and church planting will become impossible unless there is a strong financial commitment. These lack of financial and human commitment have contributed to the slow development of Baptist work in this area when compared with the Pentecostal churches that came into the town recently.

¹The Kwara State Diary, Ministry of Information Ilorin, 1983, p.8

²Interview with Pa D. O. Olatunji. Ifeoluwa Baptist Church Offa: 28-7-2001.

(c) Lack of Pastoral commitment: the fact remains that some pastors lack evangelistic zeal and mobilization strategies. Some were contented the moment the church can pay their salaries. What they considered as growth and development are when new auditorium is built, new pastorium constructed and possibly new vehicle for the church. All within the confine of the church premise.

(d) Method of training the pastor: the method employs in training pastors also contributed to the slow development. "A situation where Pastors have to undergo three to five years of seminary training can not support rapid growth"³. When compared with the pentecostals who receive little or no formal training at all.

(e) Islamic Influence: One cannot rule out the Islamic influence as one of the factors responsible for slow work of Baptist in this area. Offa is populated with muslims some of whom are very difficult to evangelize. In the contrary, with prayers and commitment, their population can be a blessing for accelerated development of Christianity in this area. As said earlier that this area is a potential harvest field for Christianity. In concluding this section, the above identifiable factors pose a serious challenge which all Baptist Pastors and Laymen alike must address; if the work must experience appreciable development within a shortest time possible.

B. Recommendations

In an attempt to fulfill the great commission and at the same time provide for the physical, social and spiritual needs of the people, certain steps must be taken by all the churches in this area.

(a) Each of the Baptist churches in Offa, and the Offa Baptist Association as a body should be ready to invest greater percentages of their income on evangelism and church planting.

³Ojo, lecture from church planting / growth 579, Ogbomosho: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, 18th October, 2001

As it was rightly submitted that “Individual member should be ready to give financially in order to increase the presence of Baptist work and the tempo in the area in order to face and meet up with the challenges of the Pentecostal churches”⁴.

(b) One recognizes the fact that ‘money is the vehicle that carries evangelism to places’ yet we must face the reality of time that money alone can not do the work of evangelism. The old saying that “if you can not go, your money can go” should not be applicable in evangelizing the local areas. Therefore, members should submit themselves to evangelistic outreaches and not church planting not only within the town but in other neighboring towns and villages around Offa.

As it was observed that:

“the rate at which Pentecostal churches are growing in this area, at the end of the day, if Baptist members are not careful enough more of her member will still check out to join the Pentecostal churches”⁵

More importantly that the word of God says “go and make disciples”⁶

(c) Health facilities: another serious challenge facing the work here which needed urgent attention is a medical centre, which will be controlled purely by the Baptist. A denomination that has been functioning for more than seventy years without a medical unit for physical well-being of her members could not be said to be growing, when considering the hazard facing the members in the public hospitals.

⁴Interview with Dn. Taiye Opaleke, Leader in-charge: IfeOluwa Baptist Chrch Offa : 16th July, 2001.

⁵Interview with Ogunniyi, E.D. Ifeoluwa Baptist Church Offa 18-7-200⁶Bible: Mat. 28:19-20 (NIV)

