

**LIFE AND WORKS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON BOWEN  
AND THE CHALLENGES FOR CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN BAPTIST  
MISSIONARIES**

**BY**

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**(09/NBTS/0130)**

**A Thesis in the Department of Missions and Evangelism  
Submitted to the Faculty of Theological Studies  
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
OGBOMOSO**

**In Partial Fulfilment of Course Requirements  
For the Award of MASTER OF DIVINITY in MISSIOLOGY**

**JUNE, 2012.**

## ABSTRACT

The essay, "Life and Works of Thomas Jefferson Bowen and the Challenges for Contemporary Nigerian Baptist Missionaries", is an historical work that reflects on the good, the bad and the ugly experiences of a Southern Baptist missionary, T. J. Bowen and the relevant applications for contemporary missionaries in Nigerian Baptist context. The significance of the study lies on the ability to pioneer missions among the people of strange culture, language, colour and values successfully. This project researches into problems observable in the life and works of Bowen that need clarification. They are problem of contextualizing mission, developing means and strategy for language barriers, mission funding and support, neglecting education as mission tool and ill-health challenges of missionaries which usually truncate dreams. This essay adopts historical method using library research, interview, and online resource tools. Through critical analysis of the adventure of Bowen, it was discovered that he pioneered Baptist missions in Central Africa and Brazil from 1850 to 1860 where he faced war against slavery and gospel. It was observed that Bowen had a good beginning but ended with discouraging and pathetic trauma. In the process of the research, the mission of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) in line with Bowen's pioneering task was analyzed. It was discovered that the weakness and external threat of NBC missions in comparison with Bowen's and churches outweighs her strengths and opportunities. The weak points are funding system, welfare of serving and retired missionaries, health matters and unhealthy rivalry with churches on missions. It is however recommended that the Global Missions Board (GMB) of NBC should be pragmatic in strategic making. She should be aware of the psychological welfare of her missionaries and provide a health insurance scheme for serving missionaries.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

Missions as the heartbeat of God need men that are ready to sacrifice comfort for uneasiness. Bowen left as a pioneer missionary to Central Africa with the aim that was

set by the sending Board, Foreign Missions Board. Missions in the strange land call for determination, enthusiasm to missions and ability to contextualize the gospel. Adventure of gospel promotes opportunity to transform, civilize, and educate uncivilized and uneducated through the obedience of those who disregarded their lives and gave up their worldly ambition. Bowen was efficacious by the support of his wife, the strong ability to translate context of field to mission strategy and keen interest in the people (culture, language and values) of the field. The life and works of Thomas Jefferson Bowen conclusively itemizes courage, intellectuality and professionalism, non-bias missions, ordeal and difficulties on field, and the torment of ill-health during and after pioneering work in both Central Africa and Brazil.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This long essay has researched deeply into the life and works of T. J. Bowen in both Central Africa and Brazil and also analyzes the current situation of Nigerian Baptist Missions through SWOT and thereby recommends the following for the restructuring and development of Missionaries and missions in Nigeria Baptist Convention in facing the contemporary challenges of missions.

1. The Global Missions Board of NBC should promote culture under gospel. The approach to pioneering mission should adopt contextualization of gospel for the field and the missionary be cultured in and as the indigene to be able to reach them and preach the gospel with culture of the land. Also missionaries should be friendly and accommodating to the environment, culture and state of wellbeing in the land.

2. The Global Missions Board Missionaries should know the code of law of the state of any field. Ignorance of the people and the state might hinder fruitful missions. Bowen lost missions in Brazil because of wrong information. The dos and don'ts of a country keep the missionary alert and his right in the land.
3. The GMB with Missions institutions should liaise to update the missions' curriculum with "Pioneering Missions" as a Course. There is need to study both theoretical and practical aspect of pioneering missions.
4. The NBC Missionaries are to be appreciated after service. Bowen was not celebrated. His life was spent in awful poverty and psychological imbalance. Let missionaries after retirement feel satisfied by providing a special scheme for them as sustenance which church benefits from.
5. The GMB should inaugurate new approach to missions in relation with past pioneers' strategy. The historical activities of our missionaries can still be reviewed to adapt strategy and correct mistakes of the past with cumulative strategy of the contemporary.
6. The GMB needs to guide the affairs of missionaries on the field yet must be compassionate and unexploited with on the matter of his the freedom of expression. The coordination of the assignment from home to the field should be done in levelheadedly by the reality of suggestion of missionary who are active there. Bowen was in tight corner with the Foreign Missions Board, SBC. Let the missionary formulates strategy in line with the board's policy.

7. The Nigerian Baptist Missionaries should place high priority on education as continuity tool in pioneering missions. The ability to educate the converts is a benefit of missionary to the community. The education tools make transfer of gospel continuity possible to the indigenes. GMB should place value of building of schools as past missionaries did for NBC.
8. The GMB should emphasize on the importance of language learning for the missionaries. Need to communicate in the mother tongue of missionaries make them real and approachable on the field. The GMB should have language school that will train her missionaries on the intending field.
9. Consistent and timely payment for the missionary should be the precedence in the responsibility of GMB.
10. The GMB should be aware of the psychological welfare of her missionaries. The needs of missionaries should be cared for in time. A mentally disturbed or worried missionary cannot be effective on the field. There are a lot of financial problems, feeding and personal issues that missionary could not care for but to borrow to meet up. Let there be a scheme or programme to cater for the welfare and psychology state of missionary on the field on monthly basis.
11. The GMB should provide a health insurance scheme for missionaries. Their health determines their efficacy. Bowen could not do much in Brazil because of his deteriorating health day by day. Let there be upgraded health scheme and consistently health orientation on the field. Give a forum of relating their health troubles with the board and study the environment on health basis before posting any missionary. Also,

the GMB should know the health status of any potential missionary before appointment. Sound health record should be considered in the process of pioneering missions.

12. The GMB should now encourage "Faith Missions" as part of her missions' style. Ability to trust God for the sustenance on the field should be inculcated in the heart of her missionaries.
13. The GMB should arrange for the adoption of dying churches on field. The progress of church planning should involve old but not growing church in their mission work than to start another one.
14. The GMB should make policy in consensus with other mission churches in the convention. This will increase her strength and opportunity to cover more lands with less resource. Policy with churches should be done with open hands of getting more strategies that small churches will also follow. Missions in isolation will crumble and with little or no result.
15. The GMB should be pragmatic in her strategy. The strength of the board should go beyond paper work for strategy compilation and should be more pragmatic action on the strategy. The board should review her strategy formation with keen interest in doing the written.