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BAPTIST MISSIONARY ENTERPRISES: SOCIO-
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHURCH GROWTH IN
URHOBOLAND

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ABSTRACT

This work has attempted a missiological assessment of the Baptist missionary enterprises in Urhoboland between 1917 and 2004. It discussed the missionary enterprises in Urhoboland and what these have achieved in terms of their religious and social impact during the time under review. Furthermore it examined reasons why there had been progress and corresponding setbacks. The implications in Baptist work in Urhoboland and reasons for this oscillation were also discussed.

The study utilized the historical method. Primary and secondary records were gathered and examined. In addition interviews were conducted with men and women who were eye witnesses of the historical events. Articles in learned journals, newspapers, were examined and discussed.

The study revealed the pragmatic roles of the Baptist Mission of Nigeria and sacrificial efforts of the early missionaries, particularly some notable individuals' positive contributions. The "Go Ye to All Nations" injunction that the Baptist Medical Centre, Eku has been using to save souls for the Lord had a significant impact on the religious and social lives of the people.

The decline in Baptist work in Urhoboland for some time was due principally to lack of effective leadership in many of the Baptist churches and establishments. The study recommends the application of Church Growth principles among others to revive the churches that are plateaued and to extend the frontiers of Christian witness in Urhoboland.

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CONCLUSION

Since there is a dawn and there is a dusk, this study has come to an end after segmental description of the Baptist work in Urhboland that begun in the early twentieth century. One could say that it was a divinely sympathetic response to the Macedonia cry for spiritual aid to a people that have been stretching forth their hands of supplication for the gospel. Today it can be said that the Good News has been proclaimed and the door of a new era of advance in the coming of God's Kingdom among men has been opened. The power of God has replaced the power of darkness in many people's lives, communities and the spirit of the living God has taken the center stage in Urhoboland.

The medical institutions operations have had an excellent reputation and decided impact upon the people of the area. With the hands of medical experts with non-adulterated drugs, marvelous cares have been demonstrated over the years. Lovely treatments and eventual eradication of various diseases invading the people have made them shift faith from traditional allegiance to faith in God. There has been a balance diet in the church programme of evangelism and progressive church growth which has turned out to be healthy for the people and the church. This is so because it express God's action to restore His provisions to those who have been deprived. This made Miles to state,

Evangelism and Christian social concern are two sides of the same coin. If one side of the coin is missing, that coin lost its value. The lack of a social conscience infringes the reputation of the Holy God and lead to societal failure. Evangelism is surely a blood brother to social involvement.¹

In Urhoboland, the culture impacts the reality of burden bearer on the people. The Baptist church in dealing with the disappointments of the people through the schools, medical centres and the church, help to interpret the existential reality of God to repair lives that are broken down. This is so because the church has brought hope to many people.

However in some Baptist set-ups in Urhoboland especially the Baptist Medical Centre, Eku there had been some problems. Tragically the center that has for decades been the pride of the community and the Convention because of its efficient medical, spiritual, social services and promotion of positive values of life, has been engulfed in endless crises. There are counter accusations of selfishness for materialism and other moral pervasions.

The once reputable hospital managed by role models that translated the place has as a result of crisis been given to people with poor managerial skills. Today most wards are with empty beds without patients² making the magnificent hospital to look like a beautiful palace without a king. Where do we go from here?

There is no doubt that the establishment of the hospital in Eku played an active part in the development of the Baptist church in

¹ Delos Milles. Evangelism and Social Involvement (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 16.

² An external personnel sent by the Convention to look at the affairs of the hospital. He decided to remain anonymous.

Urhoboland. The growth of the church was fuelled in large measure by the conversion of many people in the medical centers. The strategies designed by the medical missionaries to win souls for God and the meaningful strides they have accomplished have had an unparalleled impact on the gospel enterprise in Urhoboland. This caused the old fabric of the old society to give way and the people began to flock to the church. Thus the dreams of the founding fathers have been substantially realized.

The founding of schools hand in hand with churches became a catalyst of successfully transplanting of Christianity in Urhoboland. The introduction of Christian scripture in the local language by the gospel maestro, the Reverend J. E. Aganbi turned out to be the fulfillment of a redeemed heritage – thus the people assimilated and adapted biblical teachings and truth. Behold a beacon of new hope was nurtured into a people who have been manipulated in many ways by the traditional religion that has no answer to many of their problems. This study also brought the awareness that if the principles of church growth are applied, with motivation from pastors and the people catching the vision, the church will be able to address both the physical and spiritual problems that will bring about a turn – around of the church.

As earlier stated in this study, the exemplary life and resourcefulness of many of the early Baptist missionaries in Urhoboland, even though they sailed through thick and thin experiences, they experienced unprecedented triumph. As the missionary of today engage in founding of churches, schools and other social institutions to bring lives

