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**A CRITICAL STUDY OF BAPTIST
WORK IN BENIN CITY:
ITS BEGINNING, DEVELOPMENT AND
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

**A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE NIGERIAN
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ABSTRACT

This study is entitled, "A critical study of Baptist Work in Benin City: Its Beginning, Development, and Contemporary challenges." It has a sole objective of comparing and contrasting the influence of Baptist work in early years of her inception with her state of relevance to the contemporary people of Benin. Part of this overall objective is to consider those elements that necessitated the great respect it commanded at her formative period and probe into this contemporary time to deduce if those elements are still in place or not. Furthermore, the study aims at revealing how Baptist work in Benin City is presently affected due to some challenges the denomination is facing and steps that could be taken to recover her past glory.

In an attempt to achieve the aforestated objectives, the focus of chapter two is to narrate the historical fact of the ancient city of Benin. This column also spread to involve the religio-cultural setting of Benin City. It will be made apparent in this section that, the city was deeply rich in tradition and idolatry prior to the emergence of christianity.

Chapter three traces the dawn of Christianity in Benin City to 14th century when some Portuguese Catholics arrived into Benin kingdom partly for commercial purposes and on the other hand for

religious reason. It will be enacted that Baptist church in Benin City had its formative root in Anglican Church, then called C.M.S. which arrived some two decades before Baptist branch off from her. The reason for the break away and growth the young church experienced will also be elucidated. However, this dynamic growth was shortlived as the church became engrossed in some earth shaking crisis that eventually divided the church into two groups.

The attention of chapter four is on the group that upheld the ideals of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. This section expatiated the diverse growth and expansion the group experienced which spilled from numerical growth to structural growth. It also touches on organizational development of the church as well as their educational involvement in Benin City which consequently led to a sporadic conversion of many individuals who are now presently permanent members to reckon with within the Baptist Community in Benin City.

The last chapter of the study faces the obvious reality of the contemporary challenges Baptist denomination is facing in Benin City and environs. This area will reveal three important needs that demand urgent attention in order to recover her past influence. The first challenge is in the training of indigenous

pastors who will make some peculiar needs, non-Edos will find difficult to meet. The second challenge focuses on the effect, the influx of pentecostal churches is making on Baptist work in Benin City. This call for immediate positive reaction or else in no distant time the influence of Baptist work might become eroded. The third part of the challenges, introduces Home Cell Fellowship as a plausible new strategy for evangelism that has full capacity to achieve for the church what she has lost in the past decades.

The submission of this thesis is that if and when all the aforementioned challenges are given trial in practice, the spread of the Baptist influence will evidently have no limit both in Benin City and its environs.

CONCLUSION

This project aimed at discovering and projecting the authentic reality about everything that pertains to the Baptist work in Benin City. It was discovered that the commencement of the work of Baptist in Benin City was another simple demonstration of God's redemptive plan for His people. The glorious beginning of the work was beyond human imagination. This was evident primarily in the numerical multiplication in membership and number of churches that was recorded, within its short of establishment. Together with the quality of membership in this young denomination, her influence extended rapidly beyond the leaps and bounds of Benin metropolis.

Although, earlier than expected, the church was plunged into a major crisis that led to an eventual schism of the church, but in such and amusing rate the surviving church within a short time was still able to consolidate and expand Baptist influence in Benin City. Educational factor was the most prominent reason for such a landmark as well as the commitment of the church leaders towards evangelism.

However, considering Baptist influence from the spectacle of its present state of recognition, evidences abound to show that the graph of its growth is either static or dwindling down especially from the recent past decades to this period. The reasons for this

diminishing is crystal clear. One is that, those elements that enhanced the influence of Baptist in those early period of Baptist existence in Benin are no longer there presently. More to it, are the challenges posed by the influx of pentecostalism in Benin to the Baptist Church. For example, while there are only fifteen Baptist churches in Benin metropolis, Church of God Mission that arrived some two deades ago at the scene of mission work in Benin City can boast of about 50 churches within the city alone.

The demands of this challenges impressed it on the Baptist Community in Benin City to rise up so as to recover and reassert her past glory. This seems a bit difficult but with determined effort and readiness to raise up more indigenous pastors, learn from the secret of growth among pentecostal churches and establishment of Home Cell Fellowship, Baptist can recover and surpass her glory within a few years to come.