

# HISTORY OF NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Baptist work in Nigeria began with the appointment by the Southern Baptist Convention of America of the first missionary to the country, Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen in 1849. He arrived Badagry, Nigeria on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, 1850.

## 1850

(August 19<sup>th</sup>) Arrival to Abeokuta of Bowen where he spent 18 months, studied the Yoruba language and wrote a book on Yoruba grammar.

## 1853

(August 29) Revd. Bowen who had gone to the USA in 1852 came back with his wife, Laurena; Mr & Mrs Lucy and Mr. & Mrs. Dennard. They arrived through Lagos.

## 1854

January 22) – Mrs Laurena Bowen began the ‘**Sabbath School**’ which later transformed into Sunday School at Ijaye –Orile.

(July) – The First Baptist Church building in Nigeria was erected at Ijaye-Orile.

(September 29) Another Baptist Missionary, William H. Clarke arrived Ijaye

## 1855

(April 4) Bowen left Orile Ijaye to visit Ogbomoso and Ilorin.

(September 30) **The Oke Oshupa** (which transformed into Okelerin Baptist Church was established at Ogbomoso by Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen.

**1856** (April 16) Rev. & Mrs Bowen left ogbomoso for the USA due to ill health.

**1858** (May 24) Willian H. Clarke left Orile Ijaye for the USA and he did not return. He later died in 1871 at the age of 42.

**1862** The Orile Ijaye Baptist Church (**1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church in Nigeria**) was destroyed as the town, Orile-Ijaye itself, during the Yoruba civil wars.

**1861-1874** The Baptist Mission work in Nigeria suffered a severe setback in terms of men and material because the Americans were engaged in an internal war at home while there were civil wars going on in Yorubalan, the only area of Baptist concentration then.

**1875** ( June)- Rev. William J David was sent by the foreign mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of America to revive Baptist work in Nigeria. He baptized and organized the few faithfuls left in the towns of Lagos, Abeokuta, Oyo and Ogbomosho. **On October 14**, Rev. David who had been in Liberia came back with W.W Colley, and Moses Ladejo as leaders.

## **1876**

January 1 – The First Baptist Church in Lagos was organized with 24 members. The following day 20 members of the church who had earlier been baptized by Wesleyan Missionaries, received the believers baptism. Levi Green was ordained as Deacon while members of the Moses Ladejo stone was formally appointed as Mission worker in 1876 and on **January 25, 1877** he began work in Ogbomosho. By 1878, he had been licensed to preach and became the Pastor of the Oshupa Baptist Church in Ogbomosho.

Rev S.G Pinnock resuscitated Baptist work in Oyo after the Alaafin Adeyemi's subtle political and diplomatic maneuvers were unfolded between **1881 and 1884**.

1886 (November 1) – Baptist Academy, the very First Baptist Secondary School in Nigeria, was officially opened on Mission Compound, Lagos, by Rev. William J. David – the missionary pastor of First Baptist Church, Lagos, with Samuel Morohundiya Harden as Principal. (The nucleus of the institution had earlier been established in 1855 by Joseph Harden – son of an American slave and missionary of the SBC in Liberia who transferred his services to Lagos in 1855).

## **1888**

(March) Secession from the original Lagos Baptist Church many bona fide members and the formation of a new congregation, the **Native Baptist Church**, which later became known as the Ebenezer Baptist Church' Lagos.

## **1898**

(May, 8) Founding date of the **Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary**, Ogbomosho

## **1898-1902**

Dr. Mojola Agbebi's extensive evangelistic tour of the Niger Delta region and parts of the interior towns and villages in Western Nigeria.

## **1903**

Secession in the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Lagos culminating in the formation of the Araromi Baptist Church, also in Lagos.

## **1904**

First Baptist Church Lagos, established its “branch” in Ibadan, officially marking the beginning of Idikan Baptist Church, Ibadan, with Denrele A. Obasa, a layman, as leader. (Effective take-off of the out-station was in February, 1905).

## **1907**

Publication of the first set of Yoruba Baptist Hymn Books.

## **1907**

The establishment of the Baptist Medical Centre, Ogbomoso (It was officially opened in 1923).

## **1913**

(April 30 Death of Revd Moses Ladejo Stone, Veteran Baptist Pastor, first ordained indigenous Minister of the Baptist denomination in Nigeria, who served at various times as Pastor of Oke Oshupa (Okelerin Baptist Church Ogbomoso, Ebenezer Baptist Church Lagos and First Baptist Church, Lagos).

By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 50 years after Bowen started the work, 42 white and 6 Negro missionaries had served in the Nigerian field. 13 of these died on active service while many suffered ill health. By the turn of the century only 3 families were left in the country, as the Foreign Mission Board never sent new missionaries during the decade 1891-1901 principally due to shortage of funds and perhaps because of the apparent unimpressive result on ground.

## **OVERVIEW OF BAPTIST WORK EXPANSION FROM 1914**

From 1914, Baptist work entered a new phase with new initiatives and significant progress in growth, geographical expansion, the founding of new institutions and agencies, increase in the work of missions, and the development of a remarkably successful plan of financial support. Mission work during this period was characterized by the numerical growth of members and baptized converts. As soon as a Baptist community was opened up in an area, it began to spread its tentacles by helping to establish sister churches and preaching stations.

Baptist work also extended to Eastern and Northern Nigeria during the period 1914-1950. Areas touched included Buguma in Niger Delta (though since 1893); Sapele, Calabar or other areas. Between 1915 and 1917, most Delta Baptist Churches were organized by Mojola Agbebi and brought under a common administrative unit called the Niger Delta Baptist Mission, with Buguma as the headquarters.



-Baptist Work expanded to the core Eastern Nigeria in about 1917 with the first location affected being Ihiagwa, not far from Owerri, the capital of the present day Imo State. While the foundation of the work in Ihiagwa is credited to J.T Princewell, a member or Buguma B.C and travelling trader to Ihiagwa, the pioneer missionary to the area was Revd Wariboko Animiyeonu George Amakiri, who succeeded Dr. Mojola Agbebi in his work as the first itinerant Baptist missionary in the Niger Delta.

-It was not until 1943 that an American Baptist Missionary, Rev. W.H. Carson visited Owerri while Rev. Russel L. Locke arrived Owerri in 1957 as the first resident Southern Baptist Missionary in the area.

– The Baptist work was massively expanded to Northern Nigeria by traders and Baptist Missionaries, mostly of Ogbomoso origin who massively moved to such towns as Zungeru, Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Jos, Minna and environs after the amalgamation of the North and South in Nigeria in 1914. The Southern civil servants who were transferred to the North during the period also aided in the Baptist enterprise expansion.

The expansion and consolidation of Baptist work in Northern Nigeria would not be complete without a mention of the activities of First Baptist Church in Kaduna especially during the years of Revd. I.A Adejumobi and E.O Akingbala.

– The establishment of Baptist work in Benin City and environs is traceable to a disagreement and concomitant schism that erupted in the CMS Anglican Church in the town in 1921 which led to a splinter group organizing an independent fellowship. Thereafter, the group approached the Nigerian Baptist Convention for the establishment of a Baptist Church in Benin in November 1921. To Revd. Obadiah Emokpae goes the credit of consolidating the work in Benin and helping in accelerating Baptist spread in Edo land.

## **SPECIFIC EVENTS WITH DATES**

### **1914**

March 11: The birth of the Yoruba Baptist Association, with Dr.Mojola Agbebi , Pastor of the Araromi Baptist Church, Lagos, elected first president.

September 2: Baptist Theological Seminary at Shaki Begun.

### **1917**

May 18: Death of Dr. Mojola Agbebi, First President of the Yoruba Baptist Association, who until his death was also the president of the Baptist Union of West Africa.

## **1919**

The Yoruba Baptist Association metamorphosed into a national body, the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

Formation of the Women Missionary Union of Nigeria (originally called Baptist Women's Missionary League and Later Women 's Missionary Society) in Ogbomoso.

## **1922**

Establishment of Baptist Boys' High School, Abeokuta.

## **1923**

**The Nigerian Baptist** Magazine, the official organ of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, was first published.

## **1924**

Mother's Day celebration in all churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention was held for the first time.

## **1925**

The Women's Missionary Union (WMU) of Nigeria was granted an auxiliary status.

## **1936**

August 2: Death of Mrs Adeline Adeotan Agbebi, widow of Dr. Mojola Agbebi (Mrs gbebi was until her death, an outstanding teacher and women's leader especially in the WMU of Nigeria).

## **1938**

Baptist Training College separated from the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary and moved to Iwo.

June 30: Arrival of Dr. Charles E. Maddry, Executive Secretary, Baptist FMB of the SBC USA and party for a visit to see the results of Baptist work and to confer with missionaries and African leaders on matters of importance in Baptist affairs in Nigeria.

## **1939**

January: Baptist Training College for men moved from Ogbomoso to Iwo and united with the Industrial School.

### **1941**

Establishment of Reagan Memorial Girls' School, Yaba, Lagos.

### **1943**

Sept 5: Registration and incorporation of Nigerian Baptist Convention.

### **1944**

April 19: Dr. Ira N. Patternson elected General Superintendent of the Nigerian Baptist Convention to succeed Dr. George Green (then retiring).

### **1947**

Arrival of the first beneficiary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention scholarship scheme, Mr (later Deacon) Aremu M. Laosebikan to Nigeria after his training in Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

### **1949**

The appointment of the First Nigerian Baptist Convention field evangelist, Revd Isaac Adekunle Adejumobi.

### **1950**

The Centenary Year of Baptist Work in Nigeria.

### **1952**

Opening of the Baptist Women's Training College, Idi Aba, Abeokuta

Feb: Setting up of the Royal Ambassadors (RA), metamorphosing out of the Boys' Club which had been established since 1934.

### **1953**

Establishment of a theological institution, Hausa Baptist Pastors' School, (now Baptist Theological Seminary) Kawo, Kaduna. The "official" beginning was actually in 1952.

Division of the two types of Mission areas served by the Nigerian Baptist Convention in its mission programme into the Home and Foreign Missions Board.

## **1954**

February 23: Foundation Laying of the Baptist building, Ibadan, by Revd Dr. George W. Sadler, then Secretary for Africa, Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, USA.

## **1958**

Formation of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) – the precursor of the present-day Baptist Student Fellowship (BSF), an umbrella union of all Nigerian Baptist students, especially those in tertiary institutions.

## **1959**

July 31: First Pan-African Baptist Youth Conference held at Baptist College, Iwo.

## **1960**

Billy Graham, an internationally acclaimed Baptist evangelist, visited Nigeria on a preaching tour.

Establishment of the First Foreign Mission field of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in Sierra Leone.

The Year of Nigeria's independence, which carried in its trail changes in all spheres of life socially, politically etc. In the Nigerian Baptist fold, missionaries moved from their erstwhile supervisory roles to the role of advisers.

## **1961**

Miss Neale Covington Young left Nigeria on retirement, after serving diligently for 41 years in the service of the Baptist Mission as leader of the Women's missionary Union of Nigeria. (NB. Camp Young, Ede, Osun State, is named in her honour).

## **1964**

Election of Dr. J.T. Ayorinde as the first Nigerian to hold the revered office of General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Ayorinde succeeded Revd Dr. Ira Newbern



Patterson who retired from office that year. Golden Jubilee celebration of the formation of the Nigerian Baptist Convention as an organized body.

## **1965**

May 1: Revd Paul Ebhomielen assumed duty as Secretary of the Department of Missions and Evangelism of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

Aremu M. Laosebikan assumed duties as Education Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

## **1969**

The Nigerian Baptist Convention became a member of the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

## **1970**

The Nigerian Baptist Convention joined the World Council of Churches (WCC).

## **1975**

Election of Revd Dr. Emmanuel Ajayi Dahunsi as General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (the second Nigerian to hold that office).

## **1976**

March 15: Government took over all voluntary Agencies' schools, including those of the Baptist Denomination all over the country.

## **1977**

Death of Revd Dr. James Tanimola Ayorinde, the very first indigenous General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

## **1979**

30 January: Death of Revd Dr. Emmanuel Ajayi Dahunsi, then General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in a ghastly motor accident along Oyo-Ogbomoso road.

25 April: Election of Revd Dr. S.T. Ola Akande as the third Nigerian to occupy the exalted office of General Secretary, Nigerian Baptist Convention.



The first African Principal (President) of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Rev. Dr. (later Professor Osadolor Imasogie, took over the headship of the institution upon the retirement of missionary Carl F. Whirly.

Mrs Aduke Akinola was elected Executive Secretary (later Executive Director) of the Women's Missionary Union (WMU) of Nigeria.

## **1991**

Formal retirement of Rev. Dr. S.T. Ola Akande as General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and assumption of office of Revd Dr. S. Ola Fadeji as the fourth Nigerian General Secretary.

## **1998**

Centenary celebration of the establishment of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso.

Change in the name of the Home and Foreign Missions Board of the Nigerian Baptist Convention to Global Missions Board.

## **1999**

Appointment of Revd Professor Yesufu Ameh Obaje, the then President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, as Chaplain of Aso Rock Villa, the seat of Nigerian Government. Obaje still retained his office as president of NBTS until 2003 when he handed over the Seminary headship to Revd Professor Joseph Abiodun Ilori.

## **2000**

One hundred and fifty years of Baptist work in Nigeria and target date for the coverage of the gospel to every nook and cranny of the country through the Operation Reach All' (ORA 2000) programme.

## **2001**

Revd Dr. S. Ademola Ishola assumed office as General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

## **2002**

Retirement of Dr. Mrs Aduke Akinola as Executive Director of the Women's Missionary Union (WMU) of Nigeria and assumption of office of Pastor (later Revd) Mrs. Yemi Ladokun as successor, in May 2003. (Mrs. Ladokun also became President of Baptist

Women's Union of Africa (BWUA) in August, and was as well ordained into the full gospel ministry that same August 2003).

The establishment of Bowen University, a private University of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, named in memory of the pioneer Southern Baptist Missionary to Nigeria, Revd Thomas Jefferson Bowen, with Professor Joseph Taiwo Okedara appointed (in 2001) as pioneer Vice Chancellor.

