

ECUMENICAL EXPANSIONISM AMONG NIGERIAN BAPTIST CHURCHES (1875 – 1918)

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Abstract

Ecumenism as it could be among different denominations of churches or Christian bodies could also be within a denomination with scattered branches and without a joint organizational structure. Therefore, this paper has attempted to place the history of the Advent Baptist denomination from 1875 to 1918 when the convention was formed in this light. Data and information used for this research were collected through archival and bibliographical search methods. This research unveils how mission stations scattered across the nation before the formation of ecumenical body of the Nigerian Baptist Convention were founded. It reflected strong schism and its effects before the formation. It reflects as well how and why ecumenism is better to avoid schism and to give way to beautiful progress.

Word count: 122

Introduction

Ecumenism refers to initiatives aimed at greater religious unity or cooperation. It is the movement for worldwide cooperation and unity among Christian churches the word is predominantly used by and concerning Christian churches and denominations separated by distance, practice, doctrine and history. The word ecumenical is derived from a Greek word *οἰκουμένη* meaning the ‘habitable world’ or ‘inhabited’. An ecumenical council is a universal or general Council. This initially was often restricted to the Roman Empire in practice and as understood by the Roman Catholic theology it is a council to which all diocesan bishops of the church are invited.¹ Cardinals and other superiors of religious orders whether bishop or not are members of an ecumenical council. This is because, in the earlier Latin councils, abbots were numerous, sometimes even outnumbering the bishops. By the middle Ages, it became customary to invite representatives of secular government, though as passive participants with no voice in framing church decrees.

The council held in Jerusalem (Acts 15 1-29) to decide the fate of the Gentiles on the issue of circumcision and salvation may be referred to as the first Ecumenical Council in the history of the church. This is because prominent Apostles were present. Also, there is likely to be a report of the meeting as an official letter was drawn to pass across the decision of the council to churches outside Jerusalem. Henceforward, for about three hundred years a General Council was impossible as

¹ E.I Watkin, N.D *The Church in Council*. New York: Sheed & Ward. 5

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Christianity was for the greater part of time unlawful religion placed under the ban of the state whether or not there was an active persecution.² Thus the first Ecumenical Council of the church outside the Scripture and the Apostolic Age was that of Nicaea in 325. It was so designated because representatives attended from churches throughout the then world. Several others were held after like the one in Constantinople in 381A.D, Ephesus in 430 A.D, Chalcedon in 451 A.D, Constantinople again twice in both 553 and 680 A.D and many others under Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant.

However, the nature of the church as regards misunderstanding between the time of the Council Jerusalem in the Apostolic Age and the Nicaean Council in 325A.D was the replica of what the church was in the Nigerian Baptist Convention before 1914. Baptist churches were founded and scattered in different places in the country especially when the Bowens and other pioneering missionaries left by 1869. Some left as a result of sickness, like the Lacy and the Bowens, some as a result of *Ifole*³, the majority as a result of the American civil war of

² E.I Watkin, N.D *The Church in Council*. New York: Sheed & Ward. 16

³ *Ìfólé* is a Yoruba word which means breaking of houses. This was the act of excited mob robbing and destroying mission houses as a result of the fear and distrust of the Europeans by the Egbas. The built up started in the early 1860s and lasted till 1867 when the actual act of destruction took place. In 1860's the British consul refused to grant the request of the Egbas to support them against Ibadan in the Ibadan-Ijaye war. They got angrier when the British government took over Lagos from Dosumu, the king, and then put Glover as the governor. To worsen the case, in December 1866 Glover raised an aggressive anti-Egba policy in an attempt to establish a regular postal system between Lagos and Egba land. The reaction was a spontaneous and unusual type of persecution. Libraries were destroyed,

1861-1874, while some died in Africa. The work resumed after the civil war in the year 1857 when W.J David and other white missionaries arrived. Many indigenes joined the whites to evangelize and were termed 'Native Workers'. The majority of them were given a salary while some did it voluntarily. They had misunderstandings which gave birth to schisms and factions, despite that Baptist churches increased though without unity. With time, the misunderstandings were resolved and they came together to form Yoruba Baptist Association. This was not favourable enough as churches were just springing up from the eastern side of the country. Eventually, there came up some form of Ecumenical Councils of Baptist churches in Nigeria which gave birth to the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1918. This research work talked about the growth and expansion of the Baptist denomination in Nigeria. It covers the pioneering work in different places across the country from 1875 when the work of the white missionaries resumed till the Yoruba Baptist Association was formed in 1914 and eventually the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1918.⁴ The misunderstanding and the Ecumenical Councils organized for the Baptist churches formed between the years 1875 and 1918 are as well discussed in the paper. Also stated are the effects and consequences of ecumenical councils held towards the formation of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in the history of the church.

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even the *Iwe Irohin* house. It affected Christians a lot as the indigenous converts were abandoned.

⁴ S.A. Ajayi, June 2007. The Ijaye War of 1860 – 1862: A Political Cankerworm in *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. xxxix/1.73.

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The arrival of W.J. David in the year 1875 and others marked the continuation of Baptist missionary labour in Nigeria after an abeyance of six years. He reached Lagos in June 1875, travelled back to Liberia in August and resumed with a man named Colley finally in Nigeria on October 14th same year for full missionary work.⁵ Converts were found in the already established mission places (Lagos, Abeokuta, Ogbomoso) waiting for baptism. Roberson confirmed that 33 bona fide baptized Baptists were seen in these stations altogether. These people erected churches and small houses of worship. For the Western part of the country, the work continued with converts and places of worship at stations already established before 1869. W.J. David moved around these stations to see the state of the believers.

As early as November 8 1875, service began in Lagos at Ebute Metta for displaced people from Abeokuta residing there. This led to the constitution of the Baptist Church, Lagos on the 1st of January 1876.⁶ On the second day, he baptized 18 people in the Lagoon to make up 39 members of the Lagos church. On February 9th of the same year, he ordained a man called Lewis Green Agbelusi as a deacon. The man was the first ordained Baptist Deacon in Nigeria.⁷ Further, a burnt-brick sanctuary

⁵ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria...* An Unpublished work written at Mississippi. Ogbomoso, J.C. Pool Library Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Permanent. Reserve 286.1669. 30

⁶ David Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria* .30-31

⁷ David Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria* .34

was started in March 1876 and dedicated between 10 to 13th May 1877 under the supervision of W.W. Colley⁸. Also, a day school of 38 people started in 1878 and grew up to 225 pupils by March 1885. Solomon Corsby, who arrived in 1877 continued with the work in Lagos when David went on leave and returned in 1880 February. There came up a fight, which led to secession in early 1880. The focal point of the dispute was Moses Ladejo Stone's demand for a salary increase from W.J. David as the assistant and interpreter.⁹

Collins provided another reason for the denial by David of Stone's desire for formal theological education. Stone's view was that only Africans can evangelize Africans properly and that the health problem suffered by the white missionaries was a pointer to that. Stone, therefore, requested that David should arrange for his study abroad, but this was not granted.¹⁰ For these reasons, Stone tendered his resignation letter which was accepted by David. Moreover, Stone did not attend the morning service the next Sunday. The leading members accused David of hurriedly accepting the resignation letter without any persuasion. Consequently, in March same year 68 members seceded leaving behind 19 members. They first named the church 'Native Baptist Church' and later Ebenezer Baptist Church.¹¹

⁸ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. Ibadan: University Press Limited. 6

⁹ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 18

¹⁰ Travis Collins, 1993. *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1850 – 1993: A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary Work in Nigeria*. 22.

¹¹ J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 19.

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The church was seen as the first Baptist Church started and organized by natives in Nigeria. J.C. Vaughan a wealthy merchant loaned the church a large sum of money for building a place of worship which was dedicated in November 1894.¹² David Brown Vincent and Vaughan were made deacons of the church on March 29 and April 9 in the same year of secession respectively.¹³ Not only that, Vaughan was made the first treasurer and chairman of the church committee while J.B. Clay and Brown Vincent (later Mojola Agbebi) were licensed to preach the gospel by the church in April 1891. J.B. Clay led from 1892 July after Stone till 1894 when Mojola Agbebi continued from 1894 to 1903. The Baptist Church Lagos however did not stop growing, by the end of July 1880; the number of members increased from 20 to around 60. In 1883 great revivals happened in Lagos Baptist Church. This was led by David and J.T. Richardson, about 100 people were converted at the revival meetings.¹⁴ In November David left Nigeria finally due to illness. Eubank another missionary took over and part of the seceders applied for re-admission into the Lagos Church.

Ladejo Stone reconciled with the mission in 1892. After spending two years at Ogbomoso, working with the mission he was called back to First Baptist Church Lagos as Pastor in 1894 2on 4th March. He worked in the church for about 20

¹² J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 20.

¹³ David's Diary in Robert Cecil, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 51.

¹⁴ David's Diary in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 40.

years. Many preaching stations were opened by the church during his time. For instance, the Hausa Farm station in 1879 was, very close to Lagos; Ikeja Baptist Church with the men under the leadership of Moses Kuseni of Kuseni Chapel in May 1902. Also was the station at Epetono on June 14, 1902, by E.E. Collins and Tella Adebisi as leaders. The church also supported the church at Oshodi farm between Lagos and Otta on the railroad in 1906¹⁵ Mission work was begun by the church at Agbowa in 1903 though it had earlier been started by a man called John Edward Ricket in 1896. The church building was dedicated in 1908. Stone was later attacked physically in 1909 by the son of the late leader and the judge required him to pay Stone some amount of money for the attack.¹⁶

Lagos Baptist Church purchased her building during the time Stone was the Pastor. Members also purchased pipe organs, installed electric lights and also built the vestry. The church grew dramatically during Stone's time according to Collins because of his gift as a 'Pulpiter'.¹⁷ Rev. Stone's ability to reconcile the two churches, Ebenezer Baptist Church and the Lagos Baptist Church in April 1895 is noteworthy. The churches had the Lord's Supper together at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Pastor Agbebi baptized 24 during the service and in the evening Stone preached to 400 persons on Christian

¹⁵ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 72, 84, 100.

¹⁶ M.L. Stone Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 110-111.

¹⁷ Travis Collins, 1993. *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1850 – 1993: A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary Work in Nigeria*. 25.

forgiveness and fellowship. Atanda considers this as God's way of expanding Baptist ministry to the world.¹⁸ Stone died on the 30th of April 1913 and the church elected J.R. William an Anglican mission-trained minister who led till 1930.

Even within the Lagos Churches, Ebenezer Baptist Church had its schism. This happened in 1903 April, fifteen years after she was founded. There came up a misunderstanding between Dr Agbebi, the pastor and the members. He was invited by Rev. Hughes to train at the African Training Institute, Colwyn Bay free of charge. After living, his stipend was delayed and later given to his wife. This made some members withdraw their financial support for the church. They even sued him for want of account of some financial donations made to the church. Also, some were unhappy because he gave more attention to preaching in the interior at the expense of the church anniversary. So they blackmailed him in the newspaper. With this, he concluded that he was no longer wanted and thus withdrew to start service in his home on the 3rd of May of the same year.

Another one was held on the 10th of the same month, and the two pulled a large crowd from Ebenezer's church. He first named the church 'Native Baptist' at the fields and later 'Araromi Baptist Church'. It was constituted on the 11th of July that year having the following as the officers. Dr M. Agbebi as Pastor, Ayo Agbebi as secretary Levi Green Agbelusi (First Baptist Deacon in Nigeria) as deacon, M.A. Williams, Mrs Stone, Thomas Adams, E. Alao Ofo and E.J.

¹⁸ J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 12.

Ojelabi as licensed preachers.¹⁹ However, between August 20 and 31 1914, Rev. S.G. Pinnock made an effort to settle the quarrel and there was a renewal of fellowship between the two churches.²⁰

W.J. David visited Ogbomoso on August 30 1876. He was received with great joy. David himself reported that his arrival brought happiness to people and that he met a man called Barika who welcomed him with joy and gladness glorifying God for answering their prayers for a missionary.²¹ Without wasting time David preached to the little congregation under the trees planted by former missionaries at Oke-Osupa. Also, a chapel was started in September and completed on October 20 of the same year after which David left for Abeokuta in December. In January 1877, Moses Ladejo Stone was transferred from Lagos as acting pastor of Oke-Osupa. He was ordained on February 22 1880 for the pastoral work at Oke-Osupa. There arose a ranch between him and Barika on the issues surrounding the leadership of the church.²²

The visit of C.E. Smith another white missionary, between the end of 1885 and early 1886 revealed that there were 25 regular members, 50 in Sunday School, 80 in Sunday congregation, 50 in the day school and that people attended the weekly

¹⁹ J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 16-17.

²⁰ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*, 134.

²¹ David's Diary in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 32.

²² David's Diary in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria...* 36-39.

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programmes very well.²³ Nevertheless, at the end of 1888, he arrived fully at Ogbomoso to begin a station. He did not waste time in building a residence for himself as he had also been involved in the construction of houses in other places like Lagos, and Ago-Ijaye Abeokuta.

Also, he built a house of worship there. A schism occurred as well in Ogbomoso among the members before he left for annual leave in the U.S.A. in July 1890, despite the church grew to have 42 regular members by March 30 1892.²⁴ To make the work effective, Rev. Murray and Later, L.O. Fadipe a native worker,²⁵ were transferred there to assist Rev. Smith. Murray laboured there for six years. In the same 1892, another plot of land was given to Smith by the native government for mission work. Further in 1893, Smith began evening service and the church moved from Oke Osupa to Oke Ogede, a section of Oke'lerin and members grew to 70 in May 1894.²⁶ This was after the Oke Osupa building got burnt. Rev. John Agboola was chosen as the first preacher at Oke'lerin from September 1894 to 1897, when he was transferred to Abeokuta after his marriage. During his time as pastor, the church was dedicated on January 19th 1895.

²³ Smith Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria...* 46.

²⁴ Smith Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria.* 58.

²⁵ The term native worker is used for the indigenes working with and helping the white missionaries at planting churches. They are trained and employees for mission workers.

²⁶ Smith Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria,* 62-63.

The people of Oke'lerin built a church at Ijeru market where they had earlier conducted open-air service. The work was supervised by Rev. W.T. Lumbely while Smith was away in America. The first service was held there on May 2nd 1897.²⁷ These two churches grew up to 165 memberships by 1903. Being united, they organized another church which started service in April 1903. The church was named Winn Memorial Chapel Ogbomoso.²⁸ Another church was later formed at Saja in 1905. Students directed by Smith contributed to the building work. Worthy of note was the establishment of the Bible Training School on 25 January 1896 which developed later into the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS). The medical work of the Southern Baptist mission in Nigeria was also associated with Ogbomoso. This connection was with the arrival and the mission activities of Dr. and Mrs. George Green in 1907 March. This helped in expansion. He began a dispensary in the same month of his arrival and was reported to have treated 186 in April, 260 in May, and 132 in June.²⁹

W.J. David got to Abeokuta on the 20th of June 1876. He met no bonafide Baptist member there and so began Baptist mission there afresh. He bought land in July at Ago Ijaye and thus began building a chapel the same month.³⁰ Thus, the first service was held in the chapel on the 14th of December the

²⁷ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 125-126.

²⁸ Winn papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*, 71.

²⁹ Green Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria...*103.

³⁰ David's Diary in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria...*1867.

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same year and by the following year March, there was Sunday school and later in September a day school. The work continued in mid-1886 when C.E. Smith got there. He began a Baptist school in October with seven children and also built the second house of worship which was dedicated on September 22 1887.³¹ However, Collins described the work in Abeokuta as ‘floundering’³² before Rev Lumbley’s work began there. Atanda, buttress this point, explaining that there was not much life in the work until Rev. W.J. Lumbley arrived there in 1888.³³ He was placed in charge of the church at Ago-Ijaye, with a regular visit to the mission site at the Ibadan gate called Alabama. This enabled him to preach to Chief Eruku of Iddo and his household who eventually gave his life to Christ, and also gave Rev. Lumbley a land in which Saje, called Ebenezer Baptist Church was later built.

Some native workers accompanied Lumbley among whom was L.O. Fadipe, who was transferred to Abeokuta in 1889 from Ogbomoso. He was ordained in 1897 on September 26.³⁴ He worked till 1906 in Abeokuta M.L. Stone also worked in Abeokuta towards the end of 1892 after reconciling with the mission till 1894 when he was called to pastor the Lagos Church. In addition, John Agboola who was transferred as a native worker also on 1st January 1897 was later ordained at

³¹ Smith Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*, 48.

³² Travis Collins, 1993, *the Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1850 – 1993 A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary Work in Nigeria*. 35.

³³ J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 28.

³⁴ Lumbley Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A list of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 72.

Ago-Ijaye in October 1904 and was made the pastor of Oke-Saje.³⁵ The third church in Abeokuta was started at Ago-own on August 7 1904. It began as a preaching station in October 1903 by Rev. Lumbley. The house of worship was completed on May 23 1905; all these, before the death of Rev. Lumbley on October 13, 1906, in London.³⁶ After his death, the wife came back to continue with the work. She established a Baptist 'Girls School at Ago-Ijaye on January 1 1910, 1st with four students. In March same year, King Alake gave additional land for the establishment of the school. It grew to have 14 students by December and by February 11 the following year, it was approved.³⁷

B.L. Lockett, the second Baptist medical doctor for Nigeria got to Abeokuta in 1910. He managed a dispensary and also served as the forerunner of the Abeokuta Baptist Association which he called the first quarterly meeting of the representatives on March 29, 1912. The churches comprise of Ago-Ijaye, Oke-Saje, Ago-Owu Elelede, and Lanlate. He was transferred to Oyo station, towards the end of 1912 to occupy the place left by Pinnock after his eviction from Oyo by Alafin on 7 June 1909.³⁸ He handed over to Pinnock in early 1913. By 1912, Abeokuta had grown to have 5 churches, 5-day schools, 1

³⁵ Lumbley Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A list of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*, 72.

³⁶ Mrs Lumbley Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A list of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*, 113-116

³⁷ Abeokuta Journal in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A list of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*... 123.

³⁸ Thomas O'Connor High, 1970. *Outlined Notes on the Expansion of Baptist Work in Nigeria 1850 –1939*. 27.

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girl's school, 1 ordained pastor and 8 teachers.³⁹

The Baptist mission work after a long absence of missionaries since 1864 did not resume in Oyo until 1889. This was unlike other stations which resumed as early as 1875-76. It continued in 1889 with the work of the Eubanks.⁴⁰ The Eubanks did not work for a long time; they left because of their little boy and were unable to return to work. Meanwhile, Mr Eubank had earlier recommended S.G. Pinnock for Baptist Mission work in early 1891. It should be noted that Pinnock got to Nigeria as a Methodist Missionary. Thus he was recommended and later ordained in 1892.⁴¹ Two couples named James Adetayo and Emman Williams joined Pinnock to see to the success of the work at the station the same year. Mr C. Williams was later ordained in the year 1902. October 16, 1892, marked the date when Ishokun Baptist Church was constituted with five members. Further, a day school started in January of the following year at Ishokun.⁴² Missionaries got to Ilora in 1895 and a portion of land was given by Alaafin Adeyemi in 1896. The church building was completed by March 1899. Philips began work there in 1901 with ten people.⁴³ The first Baptism took place on November 26 1903 with seven men and

³⁹ Thomas O'Connor High, 1970. *Outlined Notes on the Expansion of Baptist Work in Nigeria 1850 –1939*. 27.

⁴⁰ Travis Collins, 1993. *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1850 – 1993: A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary Work in Nigeria*. 110.

⁴¹ Thomas O'Connor High, 1970. *Outlined Notes on the Expansion of Baptist Work in Nigeria 1850 –1939*. 31.

⁴² Kinnock Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 6.

⁴³ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*.

members increased to twelve in 1905.

Atan Baptist Church in Oyo was organized around 1898 and Pastor Adebisi was the first pastor. The land used for building the church was given by King Adeyemi near an incinerator meaning *Atan* in Yoruba. Christians were seriously persecuted and Rev. Babalola who became the pastor of the church in 1905 was faced with many difficulties. This affected church attendance. The church at Awe began in 1906 in the home of a man called Emmanuel Adesesan. He and a few others were members of Baptist Church Lagos before they returned 'home'.⁴⁴ When Mr Adesesan's house was burnt, they moved to another member's house called Mr Babalola. The first church was built in 1910, though another one was built later. A man name R.O. Ogunbileje started Baptist School at Awe in 1912. David Adegoke, a man who was converted at Ogbomoso in 1900 started work at Fiditi Oyo in 1910.

A piece of land was given to him at Fiditi by Ogundele and Lajide who were then the rulers at a place called Isle Alade. The Fiditi Chapel was dedicated on 3 August 1913. According to Atanda, the missionaries then had little or no hope of a station getting established due to too much idol worship; but as God would have it, through the courage of Daniel Adegoke, a church was established and was later supported by churches at Awe, Ilora, and Oke Isokun.⁴⁵ The church later established preaching stations at Ijaye, Ojutaye, where the first person to

⁴⁴ Home in Yoruba land could as well mean someone's native land. So going to live in any other place means journeying getting back to one's native land means being at home.

⁴⁵ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 71-75.

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be converted was a man called Emmanuel Adediran and later the 'Baale',⁴⁶. Baptist Girls School began in Oyo in 1902 by Moloto Oshodi. It was later changed to a day school in 1904 for boys and girls. More stations were established apart from the first four stations which exist by 1869 when the first sets of missionaries finally departed.

A man called Olajo a native of Offa who grew up at Isale Agin in Ogbomoso started d Baptist mission in Ejigbo town in 1892.⁴⁷ After working for three years, the man left, without bearing any fruit. Then Rev, C. Smith sent a man called Monday Ephraim Ayoola in 1895. He worked yielded as a church was constituted on the 20th of December 1902 by Smith in the company of L.O. Fadipe and other students from the training school. They got a house of worship in May 1903 with 9 full members,⁴⁸ which grew to 14 by December 1911. Dr Green visited them in 1914. The missionaries sent another worker, J.D. Ladanu to join Ayoola. They both worked together for a while, when people were making trouble, Ayoola left leaving J.D. Ladanu who worked very hard for another ten years.⁴⁹

The church at Saki started in 1901 after Rev. Pinnock with Rev. L.M. Duval visited the place. They preached at the marketplace on December 15 and visited the Okere of Saki the

⁴⁶ Baale means the chief head of a district under a king. The king is not the same as *Baálè* but a *Baálè* carries out a king's activities and orders in the districts under the king.

⁴⁷ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 153.

⁴⁸ Smith Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A list of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 87.

⁴⁹ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 154.

following day to secure his promise to give a plot of land for mission stations which he fulfilled by giving 2 plots, one at Aganmu and the other at Oke Adagba for mission buildings. In August of the following year, Duval moved fully to Saki to open a new mission field. They wasted no time in building a church which started in November of the same year. After several open-air services they had their first service in the house of worship on June 21 1903, and on August 9 constituted the church as the First Baptist Church Saki in Aganmu with six members.⁵⁰ The first native workers with Rev. Duval were Mr W.S. Adeoye and Abel Olasodebikan from Ogbomoso.⁵¹ Later Daniel Togun and Daniel Adetoro joined to make up five. The first baptism by the church took place on August 30 1903 for 8 people, which swelled membership to 14. In the same year, by September, Duval began Sunday school with seventy-five people and later conducted the Lord's Supper on the 24th of the same month.⁵² An Industrial School was opened by Baptist Mission in Saki by E.G. Maclean in 1908. Three students finished by 1912, while 12 and 17 enrolled in 1913 and 1914 respectively.⁵³ Otun and Oke-Oro in Saki had a touch when some members were sent from the constituted church at Aganmu. They preached and converts joined in Aganmu for Sunday service till the eve of 1913 when a church was built for

⁵⁰ Duval's Diary in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria...* 87-90.

⁵¹ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 103.

⁵² Duval's Diary Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 87-90.

⁵³ Duval's Diary Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 87-90.

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them. They were led by Pastor Lasebikan till 1918.⁵⁴ Churches at Saki extended the gospel to their neighbouring places like Iganna, Isemile, Illua, Iwere, Ayetoro, Idiko, Ilaji, Itase, Imia, and Ijio. Work began in Iganna and Okeho on July 26 1905 and 1914 respectively, though Duval and Pinnock had earlier visited the two places to preach on December 12 1901. The church at Iganna started in 1905 and the building was dedicated in 1905 February. Thus the church was established in 1910 under the leadership of Pastor James Odedayo.⁵⁵

Ibadan was visited by M. Ladejo Stone in February 1905 after the decision made in September 1904 from the suggestion of Chief D.A. Obasa and others who were members of Lagos church but resided in Ibadan. The youth society from Baptist church Lagos decided to build a church in July 1906⁵⁶ and thus had a lunch. By August 26th same year, the church was formally opened and dedicated to 26 members with the observation of the Lord's Supper at Idikan Ibadan.⁵⁷ Sunday School and Day School were also organized. The church was pastured temporarily by Pastor L.O. Fadipe from 1907 – 1911 when he became the regular pastor and resigned in 1920 due to ill health. The church grew and in no time began preaching stations in places like; Oja Oba in 1907 where there is Cook Memorial Baptist Church; Oganla, also in 1907, Odo-Oba in 1908, Olupona, Iwo and Ikire in 1909.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 89.

⁵⁵ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 105.

⁵⁶ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 43

⁵⁷ Stone Papers in Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 99.

⁵⁸ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 45.

An evangelistic band visited Ekiti in May 1900 due to Agbebi's effort for his native town to receive the Gospel. The church was founded on April 7 1901 under the leadership of a man named Charles Jemiriye who was a native of Igede Ekiti. By 31st November 1902, candidates were baptized by Dr Agbebi in Lagos. The church grew rapidly and in a short time had between fifty and seventy members. However, by 1903, a strong persecution arose that scared off these members as well as their leader, Jemiriye, who went out of his native land for seven years.⁵⁹ Later he was called back by the members after regaining their founding faith. In addition, a church was started as a preaching station at Ikogosi in 1911 by wild rubber dealers among whom were; Solomon Olagunju Adeosun, Daniel Okebiorun, Salusi, Asalupabi Edo. It was under the supervision of Mr Jemiriye and later by J.A. Atandariin n 1914.⁶⁰

Baptist work at Ede was started by a man called Jacob Oyeboade Akerele in January 1903. He was a native of Ede. He worked so much that even the missionaries were very impressed when they visited later that year. The first set of 11 converts, were taken to Ogbomoso by Akerele for baptism⁶¹ on 28 June 1903. By December 1904, membership had increased to 59⁶². In January 1906, L.O. Fadipe was posted to Ede as pastor. Timi Oyelekan gave a land for building and in the

⁵⁹ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 226.

⁶⁰ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 227.

⁶¹ Smith Paper in Cecil Roberson, 1970, *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*, 88.

⁶² Pinnock Paper in Cecil Roberson, 1970, *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 94.

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course of the supervision of the building g, a great misunderstanding arose. Rev. Fadipe left and Christians turned back to become Muslims. Rev. Benjamin was later sent to continue with the work in 1914.⁶³

Igbajo was touched by the Baptist mission when Rev. Smith got there from Ogbomoso to preach in 1898. This was done with the permission of the Aringbajo of Igbajo. The first tabernacle was built in 1901 by a man called Mr James Awoyale with three converts. The converts were disbanded after Mr Awoyale left the town and the shed fell.⁶⁴ Another shed was built in 1906 at the return of Mr Awoyale. Having new sets of converts, Mr Awoyale was made an acting paid pastor by the missionaries. A man named Solomon Odejai was posted there on 31st December 1907 to start work in 1908 as a pastor. He left in 1910 and on the 18th of July, 1911 Rev. John Adigun Lafihan was posted there. He shuttled between the town and a neighbouring town called Iresi until the town, Iresi, got a pastor. Iresi also had a touch in the same year as Igbajo, 1898. The Gospel under Baptist Mission was brought by a man called Oje and Joseph Ladiran⁶⁵ who were once converts from Ogbomoso. Josiah Adediran became their leader in 1901 and built a tent of worship. Later, an attempt was made at building a church. When it was about to be completed in 1913, persecution began and the people were driven out to the outskirt of the town to have another building.

Baptist mission commenced in Ire in 1905 through a man

⁶³ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 156.

⁶⁴ J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 181

⁶⁵ J.A Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 189

called John Bodun.⁶⁶ His little effort gained strength when the town was visited in 1907 by Dr George Green during the time of King Adehusi, the Are of Ire. That same year, a man named Joseph Odeyinka was made the pastor on February 13th. He left three years after and Pastor J.D. Alamu Ladanu took over in 1910. Owing to the conflict that ensued between The 'Ifá' worshippers and Christians, pastor Ladanu, left within a year while Pastor Akerele of Ede came in 1911. He also stayed for just about three months. Then, Pastor Daniel Okanla got there the same year and stayed till 1914.

Rev. S.G. Pinnock and L.A. Fadipe visited Eruwa in August 1913. They met about 30 to 40 Christians worshipping in a tent.⁶⁷ In 1914, they bought land formerly abandoned by the Methodist Church. Places like Ife and Orangun Ila felt the touch before 1914 upon the visitation of both foreign and native workers. Also, many converts did not just stay where they got converted. They moved out to reach others in their course of trade, and aspiration for higher qualifications. Some parts of the country apart from the Yoruba land were reached before the year 1914 when the Yoruba Association was formed.

Eastern Nigeria

The Eastern part got connected with the Baptist missions after

⁶⁶ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 97.

⁶⁷ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 127.

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James Abbott talked about the ‘unorganised’⁶⁸ churches persecuted in Bunguma to the leaving of William Hughes between 1892 and 1893. James Abbott was a European clerk of the African Association Limited of Buguma, which was later known to be the United African Company (U.A.C). Being an eyewitness of the persecution of Christians there, he got the attention of Hughes. William Hughes was a Baptist missionary from Wales, and he was then the director of the African Training Institute in Colwyn Bay, North Wales in England. Having arrived in May 1893, Hughes established an industrial school and founded a Baptist church called Buguma Baptist Church.⁶⁹ According to Atanda, the church was not properly organized until Dr Mojola Agbebi arrived.

After Hughes left Buguma on February 1894, he sent a man James Kofeli from Cameroon as a native worker. Also, Dr T.S. Scholes, came from Colwyn Bay around this time to see to the affairs of the Alfred Jones Institute, the industrial school at Buguma. When Scholes left, A.B. Wilson became the leader, though he came initially to Buguma as a carpenter in 1867. Despite the presence of all of them, Dr Agbebi’s intervention brought about remarkable change.⁷⁰ He paid his first visit in January 1898 and on the 26th, he baptized about 30 persons at Buguma and Kalabari. In the same year, a chief called Sokari

⁶⁸ Unorganized churches are churches not yet constituted. People just gather to worship without formal recognition. They appear mostly at the initial stage as preaching stations which are expected to later become organized churches.

⁶⁹ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 61. J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 260 – 263.

⁷⁰ J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 260 – 263.

George accepted the Gospel and was baptized on 1st February.⁷¹ This man became a staunch supporter of Christianity in Buguma, and all over Niger Delta. By 1911, Dr Agbebi reported that there were 19 stations, with 900 members and 1,500 enquirers.⁷² These stations were; Buguma, Abalama, Rumuji, Orimodogo, Ibaa, Oduoha, Obogo, Amafon, Okarki, Kunusa, Kolobiam, Joinjrama, Amalem, Oshi, Edegero, Egbeama Aminigboko Obodo, and Iquta. However, there came up a dispute in 1913 during which some members seceded to form Africa St. Saviour's church in January 1914.

Northern Nigeria

The Northerners before 1914 did not feel much impact of the Baptist Mission. A Northern station came up later, through Yoruba traders, miners and government workers. Their activities according to Bamigboye, predated the arrival of American Baptist missionaries.⁷³

Ecumenism in the History of the Advent of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (1914-1918)

The churches formed around this time were either dependent or independent, as some were able to fund themselves while others were depending either on the missions or the financially buoyant churches. With this, they formed associations and operated differently according to their areas. They organized

⁷¹ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 61.

⁷² J.A. Atanda, 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950*. 260 – 263.

⁷³ Ezekiel A. Bamigboye, 2000. *The History of Baptist Work in Northern Nigeria 1901-1907*. Ibadan: Powerhouse Press and Publishers. 59.

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quarterly meetings of representatives from churches and outstations according to areas. Not only that, the schism between Ebenezer Baptist church Lagos and Araromi Baptist church continued till 1913. This brought about a lack of cooperation as these two churches and their outstations operated differently, having the third party as the remaining churches affiliated with the Baptist mission under the leadership of John Agboola and L.O. Fadipe.⁷⁴ It is worthy of note that both Ebenezer and Araromi Baptist church had many outstations, they had a larger part of the preaching station and so the schism and the misunderstanding were obvious and felt generally. Despite this, attempts were made independently by missionaries to hold a joint conference of leaders. C.E. Smith organized what he termed native workers conference on February 14 1898 at Oke-Ogede and also in January 1899, while the third took place in January 1900, through Lumbley before the series stopped to continue in 1907.⁷⁵

Consequently, the meeting yielded a good result in 1907. It led to a proposal and approval of the formation of the Association of Native Workers' which were to meet annually. This was to ensure unity and the educational and spiritual welfare of churches.⁷⁶ They held it in 1908 and 1909, and they requested

⁷⁴ Cecil Roberson, 1974 – 1979. *A History of Baptists in Nigeria, West Africa 1849 – 1935*. An Unpublished work written at Mississippi. Ogbomoso, J.C. Pool Library Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Permanent. Reserve 286.1669

⁷⁵ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 73–76.

⁷⁶ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 100-101.

the permission of the Foreign Mission Board to be formally organized. This was actualized in 1910 when the mission was properly and legally established with the support of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Louis Duval was elected the first chairman.⁷⁷ The group made progress and in 1912, Duval unofficially invited representatives from their independent churches. By 1913 the mission agreed to empower Duval and Dr Green to arrange for a conference of all Yoruba Baptist Churches in Lagos that same year. The arrangement was made and the conference was held in March 11-12 the following year at Idikan Baptist church in Ibadan. The meeting had in attendance 53 delegates including 3 missionaries. At the meeting, they all agreed on the name Yoruba Baptist Association. Dr. Mojola Agbebi was made the President, M. Duval, Vice President, M.A. Williams, Treasurer and S.G. Pinnock the Secretary.⁷⁸

Despite this, the missionaries still realized that the unity of the association would not be possible unless the longstanding quarrel between the two parties is settled. This is because the two churches and their preaching stations were already operating on their own which is out of side Baptist missions. They also realized as stated by Travis Collins that the first

⁷⁷ Travis Collins, 1993. *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria (1850 – 1993); A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary Work in Nigeria.* 28-29.

⁷⁸ Thomas O'Connor High, 1970. *Outlined Notes on the Expansion of Baptist Work in Nigeria 1850 – 1939.* 34, Also Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria,* 131. Ezekiel A. Bamigboye, 2000. *The History of Baptist Work in Northern Nigeria 1901-1907.* Ibadan: Powerhouse Press and Publishers. 36.

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schism in Baptist Church Lagos was not limited to Baptist churches alone as it instigated members of other denominations to go into what is called Ethiopianism or Nationalism.⁷⁹ So S.G Pinnock called the two parties to settle for the 20th -31st of August 1914. He assisted in renewing the Christian fellowship between them. On the 6th of September the same year he organized a united participation in the Lord's Supper of the two churches. This was to ensure forgiveness, fellowship and unity. This marked the end of the rift that had ever existed in the Baptist churches before the date that is the one of First Baptist Church Lagos and Ebenezer Baptist Church and that of Ebenezer Baptist Church and Araromi Baptist Church Lagos. The renewal of fellowship ran down to churches attached to all the parties and so brought about cooperation. The meeting of the Yoruba Baptist Association in the following year was of a greater population compared to the first year. This led to beautiful progress in the history of the formation of The Nigerian Baptist Convention.

The formation of the Nigerian Baptist Convention came as a result of a corporation which led to rapid growth among members of the Yoruba Baptist Association and Baptist groups in other parts of the country. The growth and expansion continued as the missionaries continued their mission work to every Baptist church and individual member without any serious rift or quarrel. Indigenous missionaries were encouraged and new and neglected fields received attention. It

⁷⁹ Ethiopianism was used during the colonial era as the struggle against the European influence on church issues in Africa.

is worthy of note that as of the years before 1916 and 1917 Baptist churches in the eastern and a few in the North are yet to join the association. Going by the name the association was still meant for the Yorubas alone. More stations emerged as the ones already established continued to grow. For instance, Baptist work began very well by Yoruba traders in the north in places like Zungeru, Minna, Kaduna, Lokoja, and Zaria. Also was Igosun in 1915. In 1916, missionary work was extended to Osogbo and Okedagba.⁸⁰ However as explained by Bamigboye, after 1914, the Baptist enterprise began to take a national character and the fruits of unity were stimulating in contrast to the former inhibiting fruits of disunity.⁸¹ More associations were formed from Niger Delta and Sapele Churches. Dr. Agbebi on his death bed joined the Niger Delta Association with the Yoruba Association.⁸² Thus, the two of them, Sapele and Calabar joined the conference in 1916 and 1918 respectively.⁸³

Due to this expansion beyond the Yoruba area, the Association saw the need to change the name from Yoruba Baptist Association to Nigerian Baptist Convention. The suggestion was made by Dr. Green in 1918, to carry along all ethnic

⁸⁰ S.A, Ajayi 1993, *The Origin and Growth of Baptist Mission Work in Yoruba land, 1850 – 1960: A Historical Analysis* An UnPublished Ph.D. Thesis

⁸¹ Ezekiel A. Bamigboye, 2000. *The History of Baptist Work in Northern Nigeria 1901-1907*. 8.

⁸² Ezekiel A. Bamigboye, 2000. *The History of Baptist Work in Northern Nigeria 1901-1907*. 38.

⁸³ Travis Collins, 1993. *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1850 – 1993: A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary work in Nigeria*. 38-39.

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groups effectively having been involved seriously in the missionary work around the country. He realized the need for a generalized body, so he proposed that there should be a national convention instead of an association. The proposal was accepted by the association on the 15th of March 1918 and so a committee named 'Convention Committee' was nominated to see to the affairs. The committee comprises one representative from each station. They were saddled with the responsibility of creating the status of a convention for the association. They were to amend the constitution of the association for the convention. After a series of meetings by the committee the name 'The Nigerian Baptist Convention' was officially accepted and thus took effect in 1919.⁸⁴

The ecumenism brought about expansion, as more people were willing to evangelize. There was also, the publication of the Hymnals in 1916. Added to this, was the publication of a quarterly magazine titled 'The Dawn' the first edition of 1000 copies came out in April 1916.⁸⁵ Moreover, societies were formed to increase efforts in the work of the mission. Women's and Men leagues are examples of these. The women league was constituted in April 1919. Educational-wise, ecumenism helped. The Baptist school at Lagos was opened during this period this time, while the Baptist Boys High School Abeokuta was being worked upon. A vernacular school was also added to the seminary at Abeokuta.

The whole body eventually was divided into sections with a

⁸⁴ High Thomas O'Connor High, 1970. *Outlined Notes on the Expansion of Baptist Work in Nigeria 1850 – 1939*. 35.

⁸⁵ Cecil Roberson, 1970. *A List of Dates and Events Relative to the History of the Baptist of Nigeria*. 140.

form of chain connecting every member without underrating the least of the members at any place. She performs all her tasks through different avenues. These are the Local Churches, Associations and Conferences.⁸⁶ The local churches in the Nigerian Baptist Convention according to Ayegboyin are the body of baptized believers who come together in a local assembly to worship God and bear witness to his name. These set of people share a common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by accepting his Lordship.⁸⁷

A church in his explanation can be organized or unorganized. The organized churches are the churches already established and thus are called home churches while the unorganized churches are preaching stations that get support from other churches. The association is the grouping of local churches. Many local churches usually form an Association. This is done with the geographical factors unless they are for some good and acceptable reasons to be in another association.⁸⁸ The conference is the grouping together of Associations. The Convention relates to each Association through their Conferences; thus, a Conference comprises more local churches than an Association and so, a local church joins a

⁸⁶ Simeon Oladele Ajala, 1999. *The Administrative Structure of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: A Critique from the Historical Perspective*. An Unpublished B.A. Long Essay.18.

⁸⁷ D.I. Ayegboyin, 1990. *Women in Mission: A Case Study of the Baptist Women's Missionary Union in Nigeria*. An unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. 8.

⁸⁸ Simeon Oladele Ajala, 1999. *The Administrative Structure of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: A Critique from the Historical Perspective*. 18-19.

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Conference through an Association.⁸⁹ These in most carcasses done about the political states and local government demarcation of the country. The diagram below shows the organizational hierarchy of the Nigerian Baptist Convention till the present time.

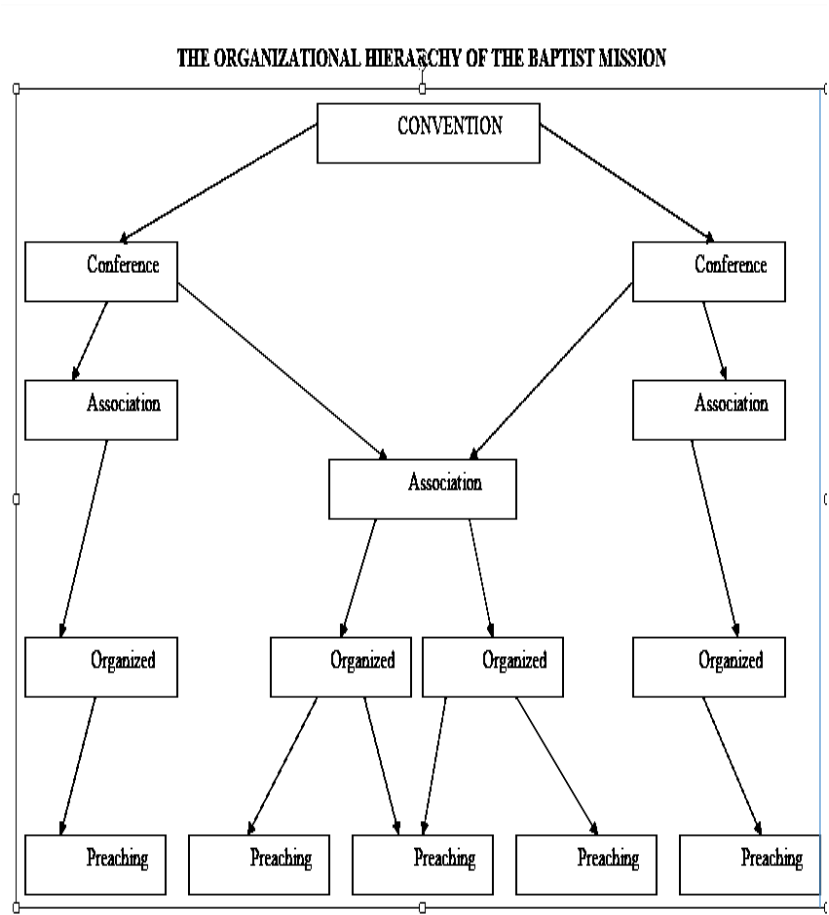
As of 2006, the church has 4,000 pastors, 24 regional Conferences and 8,500 local churches.⁹⁰ This shows a lot of progress because hundred years ago, in 1916, she had just 31 local churches with 2,880 members.⁹¹

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⁸⁹ Simeon Oladele Ajala, 1999. *The Administrative Structure of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: A Critique from the Historical Perspective*. 19.

⁹⁰ N/A, *The Nigerian Baptist Convention*, Retrieved. 16th July 2010 from <http://www.oikumene.org/gr/member-churches/regions/africa/nigeria-baptist-convention.html>.

⁹¹ Travis Collins, 1993. *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1850 – 1993: A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary work in Nigeria*. 38-39.



Source: Adapted from Ajayi, S.A. 1993

Conclusion

Ecumenism is a great and significant thing in the issue of any type of church. The efforts of pioneering white missionaries, Native Workers and Pastors could have been wasted if not for the need for ecumenism realized on time by some of them. They ended rifts and united the churches, bringing back those who broke away to be independent under the mission. Ecumenism from the story above has shown that through it, churches scattered about can promote understanding, which can lead to tolerance, love and mutual respect which if combine could breed progress. On the contrary lack of unity has a higher tendency of bringing waste of resources: Resources in terms of time, finance and energy. This is because efforts are likely to be used unnecessarily. Also through ecumenism, churches can easily fight any heresy or heresies especially when there is a good spiritual guide as regards the formation of doctrine and constitution of the group. However as talents gifts and finances could be combined for church growth through ecumenism so also can there be an increase in liabilities, tensions, and struggles; this notwithstanding, ecumenism is necessary to have stronger combined forces to solve difficulties. It is easier to bend and break a broomstick compare with a bunch.

