

**INCULTURATION AND THE GROWTH OF THE  
BAPTIST MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN THE  
NIGER DELTA, 1950-2005**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the factors responsible for the growth of the Baptist missionary enterprise in the Niger Delta from 1950 to 2005. It also investigated the ways Baptists had responded to the traditional worldviews and culture of the peoples of the Niger Delta with particular reference to burial customs, marriage, polygamy, widowhood and traditional rulership. The study further assessed the impact of inculturation on the doctrinal emphases, practices, and pastoral leadership of the Niger Delta Baptists. This was with a view to understanding the complex interaction between the Baptist faith and the African culture in the Niger Delta.

Primary and archival materials on Baptist and other denominational missionary enterprises such as diaries, correspondences, annual books of reports and minutes of annual conventions in various archives in Ibadan, Enugu, and Ogbomoso, and in private libraries of prominent Baptist and community leaders were consulted to obtain a composite history of Nigerian Baptists with particular reference to the Niger Delta. Additional data were sourced through interviews with past and present General Secretaries and Presidents of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, with the two currently serving Conference Secretaries, two Chairmen, the two serving missionaries, and two moderators of Associations of the Rivers and Delta Baptist Conferences. The participant-observation method was employed to study the twelve largest Baptist churches in the Niger Delta and ascertain how institutional and doctrinal changes had impacted on the growth of Baptist work in the region. Lastly, secondary sources such as books and articles in learned journals were consulted. The data were analysed using the historical and missiological approaches.

The study revealed that Christianity was introduced in the Niger Delta largely

due to the quest of the people themselves because of various political and economic circumstances in which they found themselves in the nineteenth century. Besides, the growth of Baptist missionary work in the early twentieth century was made possible by the contributions of Mojola Agbebi and William Hughes, two visionary Baptist pastors, who promoted inculturation by teaching the Niger Delta Baptists to sing and read the Scriptures in their native languages. Other factors that led to the institutional growth of Baptist work from 1950 to 2005 included the establishment of Baptist mission schools and hospitals in some towns, the training of competent indigenous pastors who subsequently supported more evangelistic activities, and more flexibility in the administrative structures utilized in the work. Furthermore, the Nigerian Baptist Convention's rethinking of its theological position on polygamy and the acceptance of converted polygamists as baptized members in the 1990s further brought the Church to the grassroots. The emerging Pentecostal spirituality since the 1970s stimulated renewal in the Baptist churches in the Niger Delta. Lastly, although the denomination had been engaged in inculturation since 1893, from the 1950s there were greater challenges about traditional cultures and worldviews of the Niger Delta people, as the denomination tried to maintain its conservative evangelical tradition against attempts by the people to revive and maintain old cultural practices.

The study concluded that Baptist pastors and church leaders appreciated inculturation as a missiological strategy for church growth and for negotiating the complexities of African cultures, while still promoting the evangelical faith in the African context.