

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN AFRICA (1914–1940): A NIGERIAN NARRATIVE

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Abstract

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionary enterprise in Africa achieved commendable success in Nigeria between 1914 and 1940. The SDA is a protestant Christian faith that grew out of the Protestant conviction of *Sola Scriptura*. Its original outreach to Nigeria comprised only of European missionaries. In this article, I explore the planting of the SDA Church in Nigeria, the challenge of converting Nigerians to Seventh-day Adventism, and particularly the missionary strategies. From all indicators, this has not been adequately researched in existing literature. This missiological study is qualitative in nature and it employed a historical research methodology, focusing on descriptive analysis. This study shows that the European SDA missionaries contributed immensely to the growth of the SDA Church in Africa, particularly in the Nigerian context.

Keywords: Missionary enterprise, Nigeria, converts, and indigenous people

1. Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionary enterprise in Africa attained groundbreaking success particularly in Nigeria between 1914 and 1940

through European missionaries.¹ The concept of “missionary” derives from the word “mission,” which is part of the term *missio De* (“work of God”). This terminology has its root in the New Puritan tradition.² The missionary movement in Nigeria was based on the apocalyptic-eschatological theology found in Rev 14:6–12. This text focuses on the message of the three angels, which had been central to the European SDA missionary movement into Africa, particularly the Blacks in the Sub-Saharan Africa.³ Studying the SDA missionary enterprise in Nigeria involves examining the fascinating origins, missiological strategies, legacies, and weaknesses in the national planting of the Adventist mission and message. Nigeria is located on the western coast of Africa and has a varied geography and people. The people speak over 400 hundred languages. Nigeria is a country that is blessed with abundant natural resources, notable large deposits of petroleum and gas.⁴

The origin of the Seventh-day Adventists is linked to the Millerite Movement in America that was a White Movement founded in mid-19th century. The SDA church was established by a group of Millerites after their great disappointment in October 1844. This breakaway Millerite group comprised the pioneers that consequently formed the SDA church in 1863.⁵ The name “Seventh-day Adventist” was chosen to reflect the belief and practices of the evolving denomination.⁶ The SDA church is known for its biblical Seventh-day of the week (Saturday) Sabbath observance, and the belief in the imminent Second Coming of Jesus Christ, among others.⁷

This study focuses on the planting of the SDA church in Nigeria, their missionary activities, the challenges they found on the ground and how

¹ “Official Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist Church,” <https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/>.

² R. Pierce Beaver, “American Missionary Motivation before the Revolution,” *Church History* 31.2 (1962): 218, doi:10.2307/3162512. Gerard P. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1977), 165.

³ Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 165.

⁴ J. F. Ade Ajayi, “Milestone on Nigerian History,” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria>.

⁵ “Seventh-day Adventist Church Pioneers,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_Church_Pioneers. George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 3rd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2012), 15.

⁶ Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 40.

⁷ Amanda Casanova, “10 Things Everyone Should Know About Seventh-day Adventists and their Beliefs,” <https://www.christianity.com/church/denominations/10-things-everyone-should-know-about-seventh-day-adventists-and-their-beliefs.html>.

they resolved them. The year 1914 marked the origin of the SDA mission in Nigeria while 1940 marked the beginning of the restrictions of the SDA European missionary activities in Nigeria.⁸ This study is divided into five major parts: (1) The review of the major existing literature on the SDA history in Nigeria, (2) Tracing the conversion of the Blacks into the SDA Church in America, (3) SDA missionary activities in West Africa before 1914, (4) Other religious and missionary enterprise in Nigeria before 1914, and (5) European SDA missionary methodologies in Nigeria (1914–1940).

2. Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Enterprise in Nigeria: A Literature Review

The foremost work on the missionary enterprise in Nigeria was written by David A. Agboola, titled *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa (1888–1988): A Mustard Seed*.⁹ This study examined the foreign and indigenous missionary enterprise in West Africa particularly noting their efforts in Nigeria. It also surveyed how the foreign missionaries worked and handed over the work to the indigenous workers strategically through a thematic study.¹⁰ David O. Babalola's book, *Sweet Memories of Our Pioneers*, surveyed selected biographies of a few of the foreign and indigenous missionaries between 1905 and 1992. The study focused more on the sacrifices they made, especially in Western Nigeria.¹¹ In another book, *Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria Since 1914: An Impact Analysis*, Babalola probes the humanitarian and community services of the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries: road construction, water, medical, health care services, and social development in Nigeria in the early 20th century.¹² In *The Compass: The Success Story of Babcock University*, Babalola attempts to map the SDA contributions to Nigeria's educational development through the activities of Babcock University.¹³

⁸ David T. Agboola, *The Seventh-day Adventists in Yoruba Land (1914–1964)* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Day Star, 1987).

⁹ David A. Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa (1888–1988): A Mustard Seed* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Lasob, 2001).

¹⁰ Agboola, *The Seventh-day Adventists in West Africa*.

¹¹ David O. Babalola, *Sweet Memories of Our Pioneers* (Lagos, Nigeria: Emaphine, 2001).

¹² David O. Babalola, *Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria since 1914: An Impact Analysis* (Nigeria: Babcock University, 2010).

¹³ David O. Babalola, *The Compass: Success Nigeria Story of Babcock University: One of the First Private Universities in Nigeria* (Nigeria: Olarotayo, 2002).

Adekunle A. Alalade's book, *Limiting Factors to the Success of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa: The Nigerian Case Study*, explores how the foreign missionaries dealt with the African culture, based on a Western theological framework, thereby condemning Africans and their cherished traditions from 1913 to 2007.¹⁴ Enebiemi Eko discusses how the indigenous missionaries evangelized the indigenous people with the Christian tenets and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus without any compromise. Enebiemi concludes that Christian theology could be adopted in any indigenous cultural milieu.¹⁵ Emmanuel O. Eregare examines the SDA missionary enterprise in the mid-western region of Nigeria between 1948 and 2012. Eregare's research focuses on missionary activities, personal lives, challenges from other religions, and indigenization of Christianity, among others.¹⁶ M. C. Njoku's notable dissertation, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Igboland*, covers the missionary enterprise, prospects, and challenges in the growth of the SDA faith in the Southeastern region, especially among the Igbo of Nigeria.¹⁷ Ayuba Mavalla's book, *Conflict Transformation: Churches in the Face of Structural Violence in Northern Nigeria*, addresses the role of the SDA missionaries, the sacrifices, and the risks they took bringing succor to the displaced persons between 1992 and 2001, especially during the religious conflicts that plagued the Northern region of Nigeria.¹⁸

Based on the studies by David O. Agboola, David O. Babalola, Adekunle A. Alalade, Enebiemi E. Eko, Emmanuel O. Eregare, and M. C. Njoku, the Nigerian missiological enterprise can be described as growing historiography and these studies serve as groundwork. Though the works are thorough, they are rather regional or sectional in nature. Although the studies reflect some missionary activities in the various regions covered, they do not focus purely on the national analysis of the European missionary enterprise. In addition, the studies above hardly examined in any detail the SDA

¹⁴ Adekunle A. Alalade, *Limiting Factors to the Success of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa: The Nigeria Case Study* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Agbo, 2008).

¹⁵ Enebiemi E. Eko, *African Evangelization: Problems and Prospects* (Enugu, Nigeria: Vickson, 2010).

¹⁶ Emmanuel Orihantare Eregare, *An African Christian Church History: Seventh-day Adventist Cosmology in Edo/Delta Field States 1948–2012 and Ecumenical Initiatives* (Lagos, Nigeria: Christ Coming Books, 2013).

¹⁷ Chidi M. Njoku, "A History of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Igbo Land (1923–2010)" (PhD diss., University of Nigeria, 2014).

¹⁸ Mavalla G. Ayuba, *Conflict Transformation: Churches in the Face of Structural Violence in Northern Nigeria* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014).

church's missiological methodologies, landmark sustainable development, and other missionary point of references to the growing missionary enterprise in Africa, particularly in Nigeria.

3. Tracing the conversion of the Blacks into the Seventh-day Adventist Church from America

The centripetal force is necessary to keep an object moving in a circular path pulling it toward the center of rotation, while the centrifugal force pushes an object away from the center of rotation.¹⁹ The Seventh-day Adventist methodology to convert the Blacks in its founding home in America could be described as a centripetal methodology.²⁰ The date when the first Blacks joined the church was not clearly established in the developing SDA record-keeping and a dearth of record management in Africa.²¹

The first notable Black SDA was William Foy who later became a gospel minister and missionary in America.²² The conversion of the Blacks into the SDA church began in North America as far back as 1863 before it spread to other continents. In 1864, the Adventist message moved from North America to Europe through an unofficial missionary, Michael B. Czechowski, who settled in the Waldensian Valleys, Tramelan, in Northern Italy. In 1867, Czechowski moved to Switzerland to continue spreading the SDA message. In 1874, the General Conference of the SDA sent John Nevins Andrews as the first official missionary to Europe and he settled in Switzerland to continue the work of Czechowski. As a result of this later missionary, Switzerland became the cradle of European Adventism. In 1882, the missionary enterprise in Europe was guided by the Council of the SDA mission and it was headed by the Vice President of the General Conference, Ludwig Conradi.²³

The SDA mission from the coast of America to other continents can be understood by its immediate and remote causes. The immediate cause was

¹⁹ "Centripetal Forces and Centrifugal Forces," <https://byjus.com>; "Newton Laws of Motion," Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Newtons-laws-of-motion> on the 24th of June, 2021.

²⁰ Knight, *A Brief History*, 81.

²¹ Angela Nwaomah and Sampson Nwaomah, "Perceptions and Challenges on Church Records Management among Seventh-day Adventist Pastors," *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 23 (2021): 64–82.

²² Knight, *A Brief History*, 81.

²³ Chigemezie Wogu, "Seventh-day Adventist Inter-European Division," <https://eud.adventist.org>.

based on the apocalyptic-eschatological motif in Rev 14:6–12 which depicts the globally-oriented missionary movement.²⁴ The remote cause was revolutionary and focused on the global Christian's missionary movement through the sending of tracts containing the Gospel truth. The period for the Christian global expansion coincided with the SDA desire for expansion into other parts of the globe.²⁵ This initiative to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ through tracts led to the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in West Africa around 1888.

Tracing the conversion of the Blacks, especially in America, offers three major advantages to this study, although no records show that any of those Blacks worked in Africa or particularly in Nigeria. First, it traces the origin of the Black converts from America. Second, it negates the assumption that the SDA mission and message was only for the Whites. Third, it implies that there was no racial barricade to the Seventh-day Adventist mission and message. Last, in the African context, the conversion of the Blacks on the American soil makes null and void the wrong notion that the SDA mission and message should have been passed to Africans by inculturation. Consequently, the study also shows that even the Blacks, especially Nigerians, identified with the SDA mission and message.

4. Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Enterprise in West Africa before 1914

Before the First World War, SDA African missions were under the supervision of the European divisions based on the affiliation of their various colonies. The Seventh-day Adventists in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, were probably under the British as the colonial master. In 1888, the first SDA missionaries arrived in West Africa. The foundation of their work in West Africa was laid through a lay missionary, Hannah More. Ms. More took in 1863 the spreading of the Sabbath message as her duty to the Gold Coast, the present-day Ghana. The record shows that she put her work aside for God's work. She consequently lost her job because she was so passionate about spreading the Seventh-day Sabbath truth in West Africa.²⁶ The method she

²⁴ Knight, *A Brief History*, 81.

²⁵ Christian G. Baëta, "Christianity in Tropical Africa" (paper presented and discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965); David B. Barrett, *Schism & Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²⁶ C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of the Seventh-day Adventist* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1977), 177.

employed was tract sharing; she was supplied with tracts by Stephen Haskell, her spiritual mentor. Hannah worked along the coasts of Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa. She served wholeheartedly as an unofficial worker for the SDA church. It took Hannah about 30 years groundbreaking mission work from 1863 to the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in West Africa, when Hannah's little light lit up the missionary enterprise beyond the shores of Africa to Australia. Hannah's dedicated missionary activities converted Alexander Dickson, who later took the Adventism to Australia.²⁷ Hannah's foundational work also yielded the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Liberia in 1893. During Hannah's missionary enterprise, the use of tracts was trendy, and was led by the International Tract Society. This society's primary duty was to send tracts to prospective or practicing Christians all over the globe.²⁸

Through this tract evangelistic method, Francis I. U. Dolphijn got converted in 1888. Since 1888 there had been various missionaries visiting Africa, especially Ghana, such as Lawrence Chadwick and a few other persons in 1892. History recorded that Dolphijn and a few believers took care of the Seventh-day Adventist believers in Ghana until the official missionaries, K. G. Rudolph and Edward L. Stanford arrived in Ghana in 1894.²⁹ The special appeal for sending missionaries in official capacity was made at the General Conference of the SDA by Chadwick.³⁰ On their arrival, Rudolph carried out his missionary activities through literature evangelism—selling books on health and other Adventist truths. Stanford, on the other hand, died of malaria,³¹ a dreadful African sickness that made the Europeans describe Africa as a Whiteman's grave.³²

²⁷ Agboola, *The Seventh-day Adventists in West Africa*, 9.

²⁸ Agboola, *The Seventh-day Adventists in West Africa*, 9–10.

²⁹ Kofi Owusu-Mensa, *Ghana Seventh-day Adventism: A History* (Accra, Ghana: Advent Press, 2005); *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook for 1894* (Battle Creek, MI: General Conference Association of the Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.), 86, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1894.pdf>.

³⁰ George E. Bryson, "The Beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana, Gold Coast (1888–1905)" (term paper, Andrews University, 1975).

³¹ William H. Dawley, Jr., "Washington, D. C.," *Kansas City Sun* (November 15, 1919): 2; in reports of his extensive travels during 1919 published in the *Review and Herald* (issues dated February 20, 1919; August 14, 1919; September 11, 1919; September 25, 1919; October 23, 1919; November 27, 1919; and January 22, 1920).

³² Toyin Falola et al., *History of Nigeria*, vol. 3 of *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century* (Nigeria: Learn Africa, 1991).

In 1895, an action was taken by the Foreign Mission Board of the General Conference of the SDA church to send Dudley Upton Hale of Texas, G. P. Riggs of Florida, and G. T. Kerr with his wife, a nurse, to join Karl Rudolph. This group of missionaries had health workers in their company too. This added health services to the gospel ministry. The missionaries lived in mud houses and were selfless in carrying out their activities. They never sought comfort as their rooms were opened to all that needed Christ any time of the day and even at night.³³ The records show that G. T. Kerr left his family for a two-year missionary enterprise and returned home in 1897.³⁴

By 1902, however, there was a preparatory shift for the foreign missionaries to be replaced or to work hand in hand with the indigenous missionaries. This was evident in the England Conference where A. G. Daniels, the General Conference president, J. D. Hayford, and other Ghanaian indigenous converts attended the conference. Daniels took four men with him to train them to support the Adventist mission in Ghana. By 1910, the SDA missionary method shifted to education under the guidance of the West African Council meeting that called for training missionaries from the various West African regions.³⁵

The European Division was located in Hamburg, Germany, as an arm of the General Conference of the SDA in 1913. The European leaders decided to spread the SDA mission to other parts of the continent, particularly West Africa.³⁶ By 1914, European SDA missionaries moved the missionary work to Nigeria and at the same time to Sierra Leone through the missionary work of David Caldwell Babcock and H. B. Myers with their families respectively.³⁷

Between 1888 and 1914, the Seventh-day Adventist movement was established in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, and these became the earliest regions with SDA presence in West Africa. There is a dearth of records on the total number of memberships that joined the church within this period. W. H. Green discovered that by 1909 the number of Blacks that joined the church rose to about 900 from the organization of the church.³⁸ Douglas

³³ D. U. Hale, "African West Mission," *Review and Herald* 12 (1895): 762.

³⁴ Francis M. Wilcox, *Review and Herald* 73 (1896): 284.

³⁵ Agboola, *The Seventh-day Adventists in West Africa*, 31–32.

³⁶ Wogu, "Seventh-day Adventist Inter-European Division," 1.

³⁷ Hale, "African West Mission," 762.

³⁸ W. H. Green, "Negro Department Survey," Fall Council, October 20–31, 1920; W. H. Green, *North American Negro Department Circular Letter to Fellow Laborers*, April 19, 1921; Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-*

Morgan noted that around 1914 there was a notable increase in the number of Blacks in the SDA church worldwide. Morgan further added that during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the growth of the SDA Blacks took place through the planting of Black churches in the major cities of the United States of America which raised the number of the Black Adventists to about 5,000.³⁹ These statistics showed that the Black race were receptive to the SDA mission and that the SDA mission was not only for the Americans but for all races on earth, particularly Blacks in Sub-Saharan Africa. These statistics could be decoded that this reception was one of the forces for the advancement of the SDA mission, particularly in West Africa.

5. The Missionary Enterprise in Nigeria Before 1914

There were three major religions in Nigeria before the coming of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They were the African Traditional Religions, Christianity (other denominations), and Islam.⁴⁰ By the time D. C. Babcock arrived in Nigeria in 1914, the predominant religion of the indigenous people was the African Traditional Religions, which existed before the coming of other religious groups organizations. The traditional religions in Nigeria were not universal. Each religion was restricted to tribal groups or groups of communities. They neither underwent any renewal or reforms nor converted others or engaged in any missionary enterprise. They were usually found around the group(s) of people where it existed across Nigeria.⁴¹

The Islamic religion came to the shores of Africa in the eighth century but arrived in Hausaland in the twelfth century, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria. The success could be attributed to the Islamic missionaries, based on their work as African trading agents, the establishment of various trading centers in Africa, and to Muslim scholars. These scholars established Islamic schools to educate the indigenes which led to Arabic being the first international language in West Africa and Nigeria.⁴²

day Adventist Church, rev. ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 322–23.

³⁹ Green, "Negro Department Survey." See also Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Emmanuel G. K. George, "Influence of Foreign Religion on Nigerian Culture," in *Nigerian People and Global Culture*, ed. Babatunde Adeyemi (Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria: Babcock University Press, 2001), 119–27.

⁴¹ Emmanuel A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966).

⁴² George, "Influence of Foreign Religion," 120.

Christian missionaries came to Sub-Saharan Africa in 1482, with the Portuguese as pioneers. However, this first attempt at planting Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa was a failure because of many reasons, including language barrier. The missionaries tried to speak limited English to pass across their messages to the indigenous people or made it simpler for their interpreters to understand and pass the message in their local languages to the people.⁴³ Another factor that contributed to the failure of the first missionary enterprise in Nigeria was the indigenous resistant movements against the foreign missionaries which they suspected had come to take advantage of the territories and cart away their natural resources.⁴⁴ Christianity resurfaced in 1842 and survived through the establishment of European technology, schools, and health facilities, to mention just a few.⁴⁵ John Mbiti stated that the European missionaries assumed that the African Traditional Religions were evil. Based on these convictions, they advanced their missionary activities alongside their political, economic, and, particularly, religious agendas.⁴⁶

6. European Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Methodologies in Nigeria (1914–1940)

Before the First World War, the African fields of the SDA mission were under the European SDA Division, a division of the General Conference of the SDA church.⁴⁷ Therefore, the early part of the missionary activities of the SDA in Nigeria also was pioneered by the European missionaries. After concentrating for a two-decade and half on the Gold Coast (Ghana), the SDA message arrived in Nigeria on March 7, 1914.⁴⁸

T. Falola et al. suggest that at the time D. C. Babcock came to Nigeria in 1914, the colonial masters were driven by empire-building, economic ex-

⁴³ Ifeyinwa Obiegbo, "Language and Culture: Nigerian Perspectives," *African Research Review* 10 (2016): 1.

⁴⁴ Jacob. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1842–1891* (London: Longman, 1965).

⁴⁵ Michael Popoola, "British Conquest: Colonialism and Its Impacts," in *Nigerian People and Global Culture*, ed. Babatunde Adeyemi (Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria: Babcock University Press, 2011), 62. See also Falola et al., *History of Nigeria*, 6.

⁴⁶ John. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Botswana: Heinemann, 1969), 7.

⁴⁷ W. McClement, *Review and Herald*, November 4, 1948, 12; See also, Authur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1962), 4:7–11.

⁴⁸ Agboola, *The Seventh-day Adventists in West Africa*, 7.

ploitation, particularly cultural imposition, and their love to share the western religion with the indigenous people through missionaries.⁴⁹ Christianity (including the Seventh-day Adventist Church) was viewed as a western religion since it came from the western world, as westerners explored and expanded into Africa, and particularly in Nigeria.⁵⁰

Shortly before the arrival of the Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Nigeria, the British had assumed authority over the independent territories in the Niger area through diplomatic and military methods.⁵¹ The British authority then focalized its goals by January 1, 1914 on total control over the Niger area and the economic activities through the policy of unification of the two halves of Nigeria—the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, which was described as amalgamation.⁵²

On the international scene, the year 1914, when the Adventist missionaries arrived in Nigeria, also marked the beginning of the First World War.⁵³ Amidst the political instability on the international arena and the stabilization of British colonialism in 1914, D. C. Babcock, the first official missionary to Nigeria and his team, arrived in Lagos. They moved to a nearby village, Erunmu, Oyo State, located in the defunct Protectorate of the Southern Nigeria (present-day Western Nigeria).⁵⁴ Babcock and his team left Sierra Leone for Nigeria in February and arrived on the Nigerian shores with a boat on Saturday, March 7, 1914. In 1915, Babcock and his team moved through evangelizing rural settlements to another rural mission station which was about seven miles northward of Ilorin, in the present day Kwara State, then called Shao (Sao).⁵⁵ The reason why Babcock decided to start his missionary activities in a rural setting is not clear.

Five possibilities could be gleaned as reasons why Babcock started his missionary movements in rural settings. First, there was the possibility that the indigenous people could be better reached in their homelands, which was the most conducive setting for mission. Second, the cities with their hustling and bustling might pose some challenges reaching the indigenous

⁴⁹ Falola et al., *History of Nigeria*, 51.

⁵⁰ *SDA Encyclopedia*, 867.

⁵¹ Popoola, "British Conquest," 62.

⁵² Emmanuel O. Ojo, "Nigeria, 1914-2014: From Creation to Cremation," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 23 (2014): 67–91. See also, Falola et al., *History of Nigeria*, 6.

⁵³ Falola et al., *History of Nigeria*, 6; Popoola, "British Conquest," 65.

⁵⁴ Babalola, "Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria," 2–40.

⁵⁵ Babalola, "Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria." See also E. A. Ayandele, *Holy Johnson: Pioneer of the African Nationalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), 33.

people. Third, rural evangelism might be key to urban mission due to the rural-urban migration, searching for better living and civilization, that characterized the colonial urban settings.⁵⁶ Fourth, according to Eregare, taking mission to the natives in their rural settings, that were the laboratories and depositories of the African Traditional beliefs and practices, would make evangelizing the urban settlement easier. Henry Venn, as cited in F. Ade Ajayi's work, added that mission to the rural settings could be likened to creating local congregation that would be self-governing, self-supportive and self-evangelizing. Last, Babcock could have been directed by the Lord through an invitation from a tribal chief.⁵⁷

7. A Western Region of Nigeria Perspective to SDA Missionary Enterprise

The SDA foreign-based mission in Nigeria had its headquarters in Ibadan. The first SDA missionaries encountered language challenges when they came to Africa. Based on this major challenge, Babcock and his team, on their arrival in Erunmu, employed local interpreters as it was customary to missionary practice during this age. The first set of indigenous missionaries they employed were from the natives that were literate who could serve as interpreters and teachers. They were Samuel Oyeniyi and Jacob Alao. Oyeniyi was one of the children of Baale of Erunmu. He was a gifted personality who spoke many indigenous languages of Nigeria.

Babcock and his team acquired and provided basic amenities. They bought some land and also received some properties as donations. They erected buildings, provided well water, and constructed paths, roads, and bridges within the developmental stage in Western Nigeria of the early twentieth century. The record further shows that in 1914 the missionaries had baptized seven members into the church. Within a reasonable period, the missionaries constructed a bridge which was opened for the use both by common people and government officers. As a result of building this first bridge, the missionaries won a contract to build another bridge for the colonial government. The bridge they built for the government was called "Amilegbe Bridge."

⁵⁶ Derek Byerlee, "Rural-Urban Migration in Africa: Theory, Policy and Research Implication," *The International Migration Review* 88 (1974), 543–66. See also F. Ade Ajayi, "Christian Mission in Africa, 1841–1891," *Journal of the Historical Research of Nigeria* 3 (1966): 577.

⁵⁷ J. F. Ade Ajayi, "Milestone on Nigerian History," n.p.

In 1915, Babcock and his team traveled to another village being invited by some members of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Ipoti-Ekiti to establish the SDA mission station which was then about 120 kilometers southeast of Ilorin and 352 kilometers northeast of Lagos. This call to serve must have been made possible by their services and the uniqueness of the Gospel that they preached.

While planting a mission station in Ipoti Ekiti, there were certain cultural practices that the SDA European missionaries encountered that they needed to understand better before making converts of the natives. In a personal interview with Michael Omolewa, whose father (Daniel Omolewa) was one of Babcock's converts in Ipoti-Ekiti, he enumerated five major challenges they faced. M. Omolewa narrated that polygamy was one of the issues the European SDA missionaries had to face. Second, while some natives were on the verge of deciding to become members of the SDA faith, the Sabbath message was a challenge, especially because of opposition from the existing Christian churches. Third, the idea that no polygamists could hold a leadership position or be a missionary especially to the converts was another challenge. Fourth, the idea that polygamists would not be baptized was another subject of controversy. Evidence of the above scenarios were gleaned from the experiences of Daniel Omolewa, among others, who was a polygamist and the first Sabbath School Secretary at Ipoti church. He had been a Christian polygamist for nineteen years before the coming of the SDA missionaries into Ipoti-Ekiti.

After Daniel Omolewa's conversion in 1915, he was intimidated to renounce the Sabbath and return to the CMS Sunday worship. He refused to abandon the Sabbath message and worship. Nonetheless, Omolewa was disqualified from being an ordained minister, as did a few of his friends, because he had married more than one wife. He was accepted into the SDA church with three wives by 1915 and married up to five wives by 1940. After a while, the SDA church gradually responded to the issue of polygamy. The SDA missionaries then ensured that the indigenous missionaries and church workers were never to marry more than one wife.⁵⁸

Further, Babcock and his team embarked on the establishment of a primary school to educate the people, and as a medium to properly reach the indigenous people with the Gospel and to mentor indigenous missionaries. Babcock and his team did not only teach the converts or indigenous people Bible lessons, but they also empowered them through entrepreneurial skills,

⁵⁸ Interview with Michael Omolewa, an Emeritus professor of History at Babcock University in Nigeria, on July 1 and 5, 2021.

so that they could improve their standard of living, and to raise a congregation which would be able to support mission financially. Babcock made use of all the available means of transportation, such as railways and pathways to reach the people in Erunmu, Sao, and Ipoti-Ekiti.⁵⁹

By 1926, another strategy was employed by the European missionaries of the SDA Church. This involved the establishment of women's ministry called "Dorcas," particularly pioneered by Mary McClement, the wife of William McClement. She collaborated with some indigenous women with the goal to reach out to the poor. This went a long way in removing the prejudice of the indigenous people for the message, who otherwise might not be interested.

In 1939, the publishing ministry was inaugurated through the missionary activity of W. T. B. Hyde, who purchased a small printing press machine for the production of tracts in Nigeria. The manual press machine was to produce tracts in the indigenous language. The press was built in Ibadan, where tracts were produced in collaboration with Stanborough Press in England. The European missionaries did not wait till they had everything, but started the press in a garage. Their goals were achieved. Through the publishing ministry, tracts were produced to reach out to indigenous people of Nigeria which generated great results.⁶⁰

Reports show that McClement continued the work of Babcock. Although there is a scarcity of literature on the strategies McClement employed, it is recorded that the church during his tenure grew speedily. McClement used a rural setting approach to establish churches within the adjoining villages around the major stations (Erunmu, Sao, and Ipoti-Ekiti), which were established by Babcock and his team members. Through McClement, the responsibility of the work was shared between a few foreign ordained ministers and evangelists who worked in the new stations, opened during this second phase of the work in the western region of Nigeria. Two indigenous missionaries were trained by McClement during his missionary enterprise: pastors A. Balogun and J. B. Oriola.⁶¹

8. SDA Missionary Enterprise in Eastern Nigeria

Historical records show that the eastern region of Nigeria was characterized by Christian denominational rivalries which lasted for decades before the

⁵⁹ Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa*, 25.

⁶⁰ Byerlee, "Rural-Urban Migration in Africa," 25.

⁶¹ Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa*, 25–26.

arrival of the SDA missionaries in 1923.⁶² In Eastern Nigeria, Adventist missionaries registered their presence through Jesse Clifford and his wife at a time of relative peace. The duo arrived from England to Aba in 1923.⁶³ They trained two indigenous missionaries who assisted Jesse Clifford and his wife. These were Philip Onwere and Robert Nwosu who eventually became the first ordained Gospel ministers in eastern Nigeria.⁶⁴

The second notable evangelistic strategy employed by the European missionaries in the eastern region was in the form of camp meetings. Through camp meetings prospective converts would be invited and baptized into the membership of the SDA mission.⁶⁵ In 1936, the European missionaries and a few Africans combined efforts to grow the mission in the eastern region. They carried out their mission by opening an educational institution for girls in Aba. In 1927, W. J. Newman was sent to assist the missionaries in the Union Territory, including Aba, and he specialized in Sabbath School and Missionary Volunteers (Youth Ministry). The record shows that the SDA mission grew faster and stronger in this region. The membership was about 8500 in 1936. Eva Raitt and D. Fraser were among the foreign missionaries that assisted in taking care of the girls' school in Aba. After about fifteen years of training through Bible studies, the first camp meeting was held in 1938 and yielded a high number of converts.⁶⁶

During the Second World War the coming of Europeans to Africa was restricted for many reasons. First, the period was characterized by the Africans' desire for self-rule and independence from colonial powers. Second, it was also a period when the British became aware they could no longer rule Africa forever. This was followed by the Africans' declarations of self-determination and self-rule. Last, there was also an economic depression in Europe which led the British to collaborate with Africans, especially the chiefs, to control African territories.⁶⁷ The emigration of the Europeans to their homelands because of the Second World War led to the recruitment of indigenous missionaries for the mission stations in Africa on September 3,

⁶² Felix. K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857–1914* (London: Frank Cass), 1.

⁶³ Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa*, 24–29.

⁶⁴ W. McClements, "The Outlook in Nigeria," *The Advent Survey* 8 (1936): 4; J. T. Robison, *The Advent Survey* 10 (1939): 2.

⁶⁵ L. Edmonds, "The Rising Tide in South-East Nigeria," *The Advent Survey* 9 (1937): 4–5; W. McClements, "Progress in Nigeria," *The Advent Survey* 9 (1937): 1–2.

⁶⁶ Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa*, 46.

⁶⁷ South African History Online. "The Effects of World War 2 in Africa," SAHO, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/effects-ww2-africa>.

1939. This change required the use of the indigenous missionaries to communicate the Advent Message to the peoples of Africa. The restriction to the British missionaries opened up opportunities for the North American SDA missionaries to come to Africa in the 1940s.⁶⁸

9. A Northern Region of Nigeria Perspective to SDA Missionary Enterprise

The SDA missionaries, in the early days of their work in both the Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria, were restricted because of the influence of Islam. This restriction was a result of the agreement signed between the British and the emirates that Christianity would not be given a free rein in the region. By the 1930s and 1940s, the leprosy epidemic stormed the indigenous peoples of the northern Nigeria. In trying to curb the epidemic, the government and the emirates invited the Christian missionaries to help and were given the possibility to preach to the lepers. The Christian missionaries entered the Northern region through the health ministry.⁶⁹

In this context, the first set of the official SDA missionaries to the northern region of Nigeria were J. J. Hyde and his team. They took the Adventist faith to the northern region through health ministries. In December 1931 they settled in Jengre which was their first mission station. Records further show that Hyde first built a dispensary station where the indigenous people who had jigger infection were being cared for by dressing their wounds. Hyde's wife, who was a nurse, pioneered the work to aid her husband. Thereafter, Hyde focused on the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the indigenous people. In their missionary enterprise they had two converts, Lamba Kakwi and Kaji Dariya, who were baptized by W. McClement in 1936. The two converts eventually became missionaries and assisted Hyde and his wife in their mission to people of various ethnicities within the Plateau region and a few parts of Zaria.⁷⁰

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article examined the European missionary enterprise in Africa, particularly of the European SDA mission in Nigeria, from 1914 to 1940. This missionary movement was foundational and yielded sustainable developments

⁶⁸ Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa*, 26.

⁶⁹ J. J. Hyde, "Doors Opening in Nigeria," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 114 (1937): 13–14.

⁷⁰ Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa*, 26.

through the establishment of educational institutions and basic amenities like water, roads, and bridges, to mention a few, to alleviate the standard of living of the indigenous people. The European SDA missionaries arrived in Nigeria to encounter a complex society undergoing political subjugation of their territories. There was also the challenge of multiple ethnic groups with the accompanying multiplicity of indigenous languages and religions.

The SDA mission was established in a period of uncertainty at the national and international levels. This involved the Amalgamation and the commencement of the First World War. They were also plagued by health issues (such as malaria). Despite these challenges that the Europeans encountered, they were able to establish the SDA mission, making converts and caring for their well-being. These challenges ended the first phase of the SDA missionary movement in the Nigerian field. While the Americans used a centripetal theory for missionary enterprise in America to get the Blacks into the church, the European SDA missionaries used the centrifugal theory in Nigeria. The Europeans moved with their best devotion to Africa from their homeland, particularly to Nigeria, establishing SDA missions.

This article suggests that the contemporary Nigerian SDA leaders and laities should learn from the SDA European missionaries by starting from a very little beginning without waiting to have everything before going on a mission. Second, contemporary native missionaries should learn to leave their comfort zones for missions in the suburbs or villages or rural areas. Third, the SDA native missionaries should learn to carry on the work of their predecessors without ethnic or personal bias. Fourth, the native missionaries should also learn to take risks, making sacrifices and providing basic amenities that could open unlimited access for mission. Last, the SDA missionaries should stand for the position of the church on the issue of polygamy without wavering and yet meeting individuals in love. Scholars in Church history could pick up any gap created in this study for further study in Nigeria and beyond.