

CHAPTER NINE

FAITH TABERNACLE & The BIRTH of APOSTOLIC CHURCHES

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we discussed how the Diamond Society became a separate organisation going by the name: Faith Tabernacle (Nigeria).

Unlike its parent church (CMS) from which it seceded, The Faith Tabernacle rejected paedobaptism (infant rite) and adhered to the practice of adult water baptism as a public profession of faith after conversion. It also emphasised divine or faith healing and the outward manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Within a few years the church spread from Yoruba towns to other parts of Nigeria. There were branches of the Faith Tabernacle in the North: Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, Minna, Jos and the Eastern part of Nigeria particularly Umuahia.

The Presiding Pastor of Faith Tabernacle in United States was impressed by the news he heard concerning the growth and development of the Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria. He appointed some of the Nigerian leaders in the Faith Tabernacle as pastors by proxy to be in charge of the Churches in Nigeria.

2. Objectives

- (i) This lecture gives an insight into how the F.T. in Nigeria cut off its links with the F.T. in the U.S.
- (ii) It also traces systematically the transformation of the F.T. into the C.A.C.⁴⁸

3. Content

The transformation of the F.T. into the C.A.C will be discussed under five subheadings:

(a) *Severance of relationship with F.T.C. (U.S.)*

After a period of about four years' association, the Nigerian branch of F.T. began to lose confidence in the American leadership. The Nigerians were disappointed that the American fellowship never bothered to send missionaries to Africa but only related with them by means of correspondence. A more fundamental doctrinal disagreement was soon to drift the two groups apart.⁴⁹

Odubanjo, a leading member of the F.T. wrote to the American congregation to give some guidelines on the subject: "Pentecostalism." The reply revealed that to the American F.T. "religion was unemotional." It played down the doctrine of the Holy Ghost baptism. It denounced glossolalic utterances. (i.e. speaking in tongues). It described Pentecostal "tongue speaking as delusion and Satanic."

The doctrinal stand of the American congregation created untold confusion in the minds of the Nigerians. The final break came as a result of an unpleasant event which rocked the F.T.C.

⁴⁸ Detailed historical accounts of the C.A.C. can be found in C. O. Oshun, *Christ Apostolic Church of Nigeria: A Pentecostal Consideration of its historical, theological and organizational development, 1918-1978*, *Op. cit.*; Sam Babs Mala, "The Christ Apostolic Church: Its History, Beliefs and Organization," *Faith and Order Paper No. 79 The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 28:4 (October 1976), pp. 418-28; and Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba*.

⁴⁹ See C. O. Oshun, "The Pentecostal Perspective of CAC," *Orita* Vol. 15:2 (Dec. 1983): pp. 105-114

headquarters, Philadelphia, in 1925. The issue was over an alleged sin of adultery committed by the presiding Pastor, Clarke. When the Church Council resolved to discipline Pastor Clarke he was defiant. Rather than subject himself to the Church's discipline he broke away from the FTC to establish his own church: "The First Century Gospel Church."

Pastor Clarke hoping to win the support of the Nigerian congregation requested them to join hands with him by changing the F.T. in Nigeria to the First Century Gospel Church (Nigeria). The Nigerian F.T. leaders refused to support him stating categorically that "they would not like to compromise with sin of any kind from any quarters, high or low."⁵⁰

In 1926, the F.T. in Nigeria stated without reservations that some doctrinal differences, moral inconsistency, alleged by the Philadelphia group and their refusal to send missionaries to help the Nigerian congregation have compelled her to take the irreversible decision to pull out of the FTC.

(b) *The Emergence of Babalola*

Soon after the break of the Nigerian F.T., the congregation started praying more earnestly and particularly for an outbreak of revival and an unprecedented manifestation of the outpouring of the power of the Holy Spirit. Their prayers were answered soon afterwards when a young Yoruba, Evangelist Babalola, had a divine call. He was destined to be the main catalyst of the revival that broke out a couple of years later.

Joseph Ayo Babalola was born at Odo Owa, Ilofa, a small town near Ilorin in Kwara State in 1904. His parents were Anglican and he grew up an Anglican and attended the Anglican Primary School at Osogbo. After his elementary education, he took up appointment as a dispensary aid in a private hospital. A couple of years later he took interest in mechanical engineering and became an apprentice in a mechanical workshop. With this background he took up appointment with the Public Works Department in 1928 as a steam roller operator assigned to work on the construction of Igbara-Oke Road.

From September 1928, Babalola started having strange experiences which disturbed his sleep for a couple of months. It was clear to him, however, that these meant God's call to him to become an Evangelist, but he refused to react positively to the voice he heard repeatedly. On October 11, 1928, he heard the voice again and immediately his steamroller refused to function any longer.⁵¹ Babalola interpreted this event as an unmistakable signal to heed the call. He abandoned his work for the missionary assignment

From then on, Babalola was never without divine guidance. He heard, at a time, that prayer and sanctified water (*Omi Iye*) would be just enough to heal all diseases and cure all infirmities. Armed with a Bible and a large school bell, he began his evangelistic campaign. Back in his hometown, Ilofa, Babalola organised a prayer band which was meeting in the local Anglican Church. The prayer meeting did not last long for Babalola was excommunicated for his operation of the gift of prophecy, insistence on prayer to heal and profuse use of water. The excommunication notwithstanding, Babalola's prayer band, which shifted to the house of Elder Olayemi (a lay-reader who was also excommunicated), grew in number while the CMS Church membership dwindled.

⁵⁰ S. G. Adegboyega, *Short History of the Apostolic Church in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Rosprint, 1978), p. 10.

⁵¹ A F. Walls, "African Independent Churches," in Tim Dowley *et al* (eds.) *Eerdmans' Handbook of the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 627.

When he was faced with more serious opposition from the Church, Babalola made his way to Ibadan and thence to Lagos. His meeting here with a F. T. Pastor Odubanjo was epoch making. He was rebaptised by Odubanjo and he became a member of the F. T.

(c) The Great Revival at Ilesa

In July 1930, a great revival that changed the course of the F. T. and catapulted it into the limelight started in Ilesa, and its well known catalyst was Babalola. What occasioned the revival was the executive meeting of the F. T. leaders which was scheduled to "discuss certain crucial matters over which there had been disagreements among members. Babalola attended as a delegate and was introduced by Pastor Odubanjo as a man filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The confirmation came without delay.

The raising of a child, who was being taken to the cemetery by Babalola, served as the signal for the outbreak of a revival. Babalola, wearing white shorts, shirt and a pair of white canvass with a Bible and a hand bell in his hands preached to the people. He particularly asked his hearers to renounce evil practices and witchcraft. Thereafter, there was mass healing. The news of the revival was so widespread that many people from other towns, cities and nations trooped into Ilesa. The heavy throng of people cleared the bushy crusade ground with their feet beyond the areas which church leaders had anticipated.⁵²

As the population on the revival ground increased, the River Oye, a few metres from the revival ground, was consecrated and used to cure the infirm and the sick. Even the sick in the hospital were reported to have been carried to the revival ground. It was gathered that the District Officer had to intervene by calling Babalola and charging him for disrupting hospital services. .

The revival went on all the same, Babalola especially enjoyed the respect of the generality of the people because he was modest, cheerful and very sympathetic.

(d) Persecution of the F.T. Leaders

Soon afterwards Babalola toured some parts of the nation especially Ondo area where he established his base at Efon Alaye. As he was making tremendous strides in his evangelistic campaigns, the government became alarmed because it was alleged that Babalola and his co-workers were accusing people, especially women, of sorcery and witchcraft, which was against the law.

Further allegations were made against the F.T. leaders. They complained that Babalola incited Nigerians against the government by "forcing people not to take medicine and regard hospitals as Satanic institutions." Babalola was also indicted for allegedly compelling his adherents to drink the so-called "sanctified" but unhygienic water from the Oke Oye stream. This practice, the enemies of the F.T. hinted, could cause unprecedented epidemic in the community.

The colonial government was already alarmed by the publications and utterances of the new order of prophets like Oshitelu and Orimolade. The concern bordered on some of their prophetic pronouncements, predicting the imminence of evil days and the actions of a few unauthorised "second" (sons of) prophets calling for taxes to be lowered. The officials concluded that these new prophetic movements must be monitored.

⁵² *Ibid.*

In Ilesa, some of the leaders of the F.T. were detained in police cells and later arraigned before the court for the alleged criminal offences committed by Babalola.⁵³ They were discharged with caution. In Ekiti area where Babalola worked for a considerably long time, the government published a six-point charter: banning (i) "consecration" of water; (ii) witch hunting; (iii) challenging other cults; (iv) condemning other religious faiths; (v) keeping the neighbourhood awake by vigils, and (vi) conducting open or public revival meetings.

Babalola, the man at the centre of the controversy, was picked up and jailed for six months at Otu in Afermai Division while he was conducting revival meetings in Benin. When the F.T. leaders sensed that the persecution was likely to increase, they decided to seek external assistance through affiliation with a British congregation. A member from the Lagos Assembly who had been in constant correspondence with the Apostolic Church in Bradford, Great Britain introduced the official magazine of the Apostolic Church, *Riches of Grace* to the members. A careful study of the magazine as well as their other publications convinced the F.T. leaders that they shared the same beliefs and convictions. An appeal was made to the Apostolic Church in Bradford which sent three missionary delegates: D.P. Williams (Founder and President), Andrew Turnball (Vice President) and W.J. Williams to sign an agreement of co-operation with the F.T. congregation in Nigeria.

(e) *Adoption of a name*

(i) Apostolic Church: Subsequent to the affiliation with the British Apostolic Church (BAC), the F.T. adopted the name Apostolic Church. This affiliation also necessitated the second ordination of F.T. ministers (who had earlier on been ordained by FTC by proxy). To solidify the relationship, two missionaries of the BAC, George Perfect and Idris Vaughan, arrived as resident pastors on 22nd July, 1932. In conformity with the demands of the Nigerian congregation, the missionaries made personal contacts with the British Government authorities. Through these efforts the highhandedness of the government was relaxed. Babalola was released to continue his evangelistic work and the way was paved for the establishment of new assemblies, schools and open-air gospel campaigns of the Apostolic Church.

(ii) Nigerian Apostolic Church (NAC): In less than ten years after this affiliation, tension arose when it was discovered that the missionaries were habituated to taking drugs especially quinine. When Pastor Prefect was questioned over the matter, he explained that there was absolutely nothing wrong in taking preventive or even curative drugs.

Some of the ablest of the African leaders like Babalola, Odubanjo, Akinyele and Esinsinade expressed their disappointment at Pastor Prefect's stand on the issue. They insisted on maintaining their firm stand on their faith in divine healing and gave the "disappointing discovery" wide publicity.⁵⁴ Subsequently, a division ensued. Those who opposed the missionaries stand broke away and adopted the name, NAC, in 1939. Some others who were moved to sympathise with the missionaries' explanation decided to continue to fellowship with the missionaries under the name The Apostolic Church (TAC). It was evident, however, that the majority of the leaders constituted the NAC.

(iii) United Apostolic Church (UAC): With the expansion and establishment of the Nigerian Apostolic Church outside Nigeria, the name NAC could no longer be sustained. The name was especially queried by the members of the congregation in Ghana. It was unanimously agreed by the

⁵³ Adegboyega, *Short History of the Apostolic Church in Nigeria*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ P. B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Arnold, 1986), p. 169.

executive that the word "Nigerian" should be dropped and replaced with the word "United" to show that they all belong to one and the same body. The name United Apostolic Church was adopted in February 1940. It was soon realised that the initials of the new name, UAC, was shared by a famous commercial firm the United African Company. It was feared that some letters and literature meant for the Church might be misdirected to the firm U.A.C. Therefore, the name had to be changed.

(iv) Christ Apostolic Church (C.AC.): The following year, 1941, the name Christ Apostolic Church was adopted, fully convinced that the name was divinely approved, and not likely to be changed. The name CAC was embraced and duly registered as a self governing body in May 1943.⁵⁵

(f) *Some Beliefs and Practices*

(i) Prayer and Fasting: Like the other AICs, the CAC believed in the efficacy of Prayer. Prayer is often started with the expression: *Ni oruko Jesu* (In the name of Jesus) punctuated intermittently with thunderous shouts of Amen! Halleluyah! *Ogo* (Glory). The members hold that prayer accompanied by regular fasting and continuous holy living would lead to greater spiritual output. Virtually all CAC branches have prayer bands — *Afadura-jagun*, literally "prayer warriors" who keep the prayer life of the Churches alive.

(ii) Divine Healing: Members hold firmly to divine healing.⁵⁶ Unlike some Aladura groups, they do not engage in rituals (either with OT or traditional African background). They rely solely on prayer accompanied sometimes with sanctified water. Occasionally, the elders make use of oil for the purposes of anointing and healing as well. Members reject both traditional and modern medicine. Article 12 of the CAC Tenets states:

*Divine healing through obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in His Name and Merit of His Blood for all sickness, diseases and infirmities.*⁵⁷

(iii) Marriage: Monogamy, within the context of holy wedlock celebrated in the Church is recommended to every member. Divorce for married couples is disallowed unless on the ground of adultery and such divorcees forfeit the right to subsequent remarriage.

(iv) Sacred Hills and Mountains: The Church makes use of some hills and mountains as places of worship or saying solitary prayers. These places, which are usually away from the hustle and bustle of life, are observed as sacred places. Churches, permanent buildings or huts have been built on some of these hills with resident pastors, prophets or prophetesses to assist those who come there for spiritual assistance.

(v) Dressing: Excessive adornment is frowned upon. Make-ups, jewelry and gorgeous dresses are rejected. Unlike some *Aladura* churches, CAC members do not wear *Soutanes* - a flowing white praying gown. Officiating ministers usually wear suits, put on collars or 'simple' traditional dresses.

(vi) Administration: Although individual churches in the CAC are autonomous, the various assemblies are under a central administration to which a part of tithes and donations may be sent.

⁵⁵ Sam Babs Mala, "Christ Apostolic Church (CAC): Its Present Pre-Occupations," in *African Independent Churches in the 80's*, op. cit, p. 67. See also Oshun, "The Pentecostal Perspectives of the CAC," p. 107.

⁵⁶ See Oshun, "The Pentecostal Perspectives of the CAC," p. 109. See also Adegboyega, *Short History of the Apostolic Church in Nigeria*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ CHRIST APOSTOLIC: *Official Magazine of CAC*. Vol. 25:1 (May 1992), p. 6.

This is done with a view to centralising the disbursement of the church fund. Pastors are normally posted and can be removed by the overseers. Article IX of the CAC Tenets on Church government list the key leaders as the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers, Elders and Deacons.

4. Summary

From this chapter an attempt was made to trace how the young F.T. in Nigeria ripened into two separate organisations: "The Christ Apostolic Church" and "The Apostolic Church" (T.A.C.). Today there are branches of the CAC in many West African countries as well as in Britain, Italy and the U.S.A., particularly among the African (Yoruba) immigrants. This is made possible by the evangelistic groups or associations, such as the World Soul-Winning Evangelistic Mission headed by a blind evangelist T. O. Obadare; and Go Ye International Group led by Evangelist Timothy Iyanda. These groups stage evangelistic rallies in various towns in Nigeria and overseas. The CAC is also blessed with several choral groups whose main goal is to evangelise through music.

5. Post Test

- (i) "The Apostolic Church (Nigeria) and the CAC stem from the same root and are closely related in their doctrines." Discuss.

- (ii) State systematically how the F.T. metamorphosed into the CAC.

- (iii) Assess the situation that culminated in the schism within the Apostolic Church. Justify the position taken by Apostle Babalola and his colleagues.

- (iv) Describe the characteristic features of the CAC.