

AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CHURCHES

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Deji Ayegboyin, Ph.D. & S. Ademola Ishola, Ph.D.

Foreword

When early in 1997 two of my colleagues, Dr. Deji Ayegboyin and Dr. Ademola Ishola approached me to write the foreword to their new book: *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective*, I was taken aback. The former had been my postgraduate student in Ibadan from the time he did his Masters and proved to be one of the our finest students. The latter, an acquaintance, too, is relatively known to me. I was soon to find out some more similarities about them. Both hailed from Ogbomoso, and of comparable ages, outlook, disposition, diction, complexion and height. Both are of the Baptist extraction and had sojourned in Ghana in their early years where they received part of their formal education.

Above all, both had specialised in Church History and are lecturing in institutions of comparable status, one, at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, and the other, at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso. Both have proved to be competent teachers and researchers, as well as prolific and excellent writers.

My surprise began when I realised that the two young Baptist theologians chose to leave the comforts of a more familiar religious heritage, to explore the more unaccustomed and unusual religious terrain — the African Indigenous Churches. Indeed, African Churches fall into two broad spectrums, the Older and the Newer. The two had grown at different times in different places and for different reasons, with many striking similarities, and, or, dissimilarities, and sometimes overlapping and co-operation, and often times existing in complete oblivion of each other, yet, both typically African. They are founded, funded, and led by Africans, in Africa and basically for Africans.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I accepted this obligation and I must confess that I have not been disappointed. These two authors wrote with zest, candour, lucidity and relish and demonstrated a sound and thorough knowledge of the subject matter, and especially in regard to materials on Ghana, gave first-hand accounts. As scholars, both men have been very painstaking, resilient, apt, direct, imaginative, original, articulate, detailed, stimulating, highly versatile and clearly outstanding in their treatment of a very wide, interesting, topical, popular, yet intricate and intriguing subject. The overall presentation is exquisite.

Since the emergence of the older African Churches in the latter part of the 19th Century, and the Newer group which started around the turn of the 20th Century, Christianity in Africa had taken on colour, freshness, potency, vibrancy and originality. While the reasons for the birth of the Older group had political, social, cultural and domestic overtones, the Newer group came into being by divine intervention and as the agencies of God's direct involvement in the spiritual, political and social plights of Africans in the colonial period.

One important difference between the Older and the Newer African Churches was that while the former ended up replicating the liturgy and polity of Mission Churches in Africa in spite of their independence and autonomy, the latter forged a completely new Church identity. This, the latter did by tapping into the supernatural to effect an epochal and unprecedented mass revival movements in Africa which radically changed the socio-spiritual climate of Africa, from South Africa to West Africa. However, both sets of African Churches succeeded in causing sufficient consternation and upheavals in both Church and State, and in receiving acclamations and condemnations from different sectors, at different times and for different reasons.

Following the trail of a belated academic research into African Indigenous Churches, the authors of this book have worked very hard to produce a very readable, harmonious, concise, balanced, objective, thought-provoking, elucidatory, comprehensive, an up-to-date and very instructional material.

I am confident this book will meet the taste and desire of all categories of readers that may handle it. It is easy to comprehend and a thrill to read. It is a treasure to own a copy. African Christianity has come of age and has travelled very far to attain prominence. The future of World Christianity in the next millennium cannot be devoid of these veritable, concrete and salutary African contributions.

Finally, I heartily congratulate the authors for a job well done, and warmly recommend their product to readers as an invaluable possession.

Pastor C. O. Oshun (Snr.)
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Preface

There was a time some people never reckoned with the phenomenon of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs). Today, there is growing awareness of this prodigy. The numerical strength of the adherents and proliferation of the indigenous churches serve as significant pointer to their apparent dominating influence in African Christianity in recent times.

Setting out to study the history, beliefs and practices of these multifarious indigenous churches in Africa can seem a formidable undertaking. However, with this concise text, students should find the study stimulating and enjoyable.

Our interest in the AICs spanned several years as we participated in some of the indigenous churches' meetings and services, particularly in Ghana and Nigeria in the 1970's. What grew out of

curiosity and exploration due to lack of "spiritual zest" in our then mainline Baptist churches turned out to be a rewarding academic exercise.

This introductory work is the first of two volumes on the subject. The two combined do not present an exhaustive coverage of all the indigenous churches in Africa, but they do discuss quite a large number of the major ones. The present volume, which has taken about seven years to write, has grown out of various lectures we have given to undergraduate students and discussions we have had with post-graduate students at Symposia, Seminars and Colloquia in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary and the University of Ibadan.

The topics treated in this volume are however intended to meet the basic needs for beginning theological and religious students who are working on their first degree. Learning should be a fun and so we decided to make this text accessible to the ordinary reader as well. This explains in part why the study is presented in an elementary form. And rather than re-write informal terms, we have preferred to retain the informal tone we employed in our lectures.

The aims and patterns of exercise are the same as those required for External students of the University of Ibadan:

- a little at a time;
- a little but comprehensive;
- with concise notes to recapitulate;
- and post-test exercise to encourage further discussions.

For those who require knowledge of a more specialised nature, the footnotes and selected bibliography are intended to direct your attention to where you may find more information.

We are extremely grateful to Professor C. O. Oshun who took time off his busy schedule to write the Foreword. We also want to thank students and colleagues who spared some time to share their views and experiences on this subject.

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