

Prophet-Evangelist Garrick Sokari Idaketima Marian Braide: The First Revivalist in Nigeria, (1882 – 1918)

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Abstract

This brief article is a legacy of the author's twenty-five year teaching experience of Nigerian church history in three Nigerian Universities between May 25, 1987 and August 31, 2013. In studying and teaching Nigerian church history in Universities of Uyo, Calabar and Adekunle Ajasin University for over twenty-five (25) years, I was impressed by the part played in the evangelization of Nigeria by men of Nigerian descent. Impressed too by how little, except for Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1806-1891), they were known. This is an attempt to introduce Garrick Sokari Idaketima Marian Braide (1882-1918)

Introduction

This brief article is a paragon of other studies on Nigerian Church History. In Ajayi teaching of Church History in the Universities between May, 1987 and August, 2012 in the Universities of Uyo, Calabar and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, I was impressed by the part played in the evangelization of Nigeria by men of African descent like King William Dappa Pepple of Bonnyi, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Simon Jonas, Essien Essien Ukpabio, Daniel Ladejo Stone, David Ekong and Garrick Sokari Idaketima Braide; impressed too by how little, except for Ajayi Crowther, they were known. This present work is an attempt to showcase or introduce one of the great sons of Nigeria who about a hundred years ago or more laid the foundations of Pentecostalism in Nigerian Church History. I have attempted to write this article in such a way that it may be of use in schools, Sunday schools as well as to a general reader. I cannot pretend to any depth of original research, and have drawn extensively on the work of men like G. O. M. Tasié, Ogbu U. Kalu, Ferguson, Kenneth Dike, Jacob Ade Ajayi and E. A. Ayandele; but I have been to original sources where possible. Most of the work covers fresh ground. There is very urgent need to catch commitment of these pioneers because the world of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, needs to be turned upside down too (Acts 17:6). Should this article help to achieve such end I shall be grateful.

Birth

The impetus for introducing the new and evidently more successful forms of evangelism was provided by the Prophet-Evangelist Garrick Sokari Idaketima Marian Braide. Born in Obonoma, one of the small villages of the Niger Delta in 1882 (Tasié, 1978: 323 – 332). Obonoma was one of the traditional centres for religious pilgrimage among the kalabari and their neighbours. The village was believed to have a powerful deity called “ogu”. His parents were servants of the “ogu” cult which was a titular deity of Obonoma. Braide had no formal education as his parents were very poor and so could not afford it. It was claimed that Garrick Sokari Idaketima Marian Braide was a fisherman and trader who later travelled widely in the Delta region of Nigeria. He grew up in Bakana of the Niger Delta.

Conversion

Garrick Braide was enrolled in the village church (Anglican Communion) in 1906 and in January 23, 1910, at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Bakana, he became a Christian and was baptized. Two years later (1912) he was confirmed by Bishop James Johnson, the then head of the Anglican Church in the Niger Delta. Braide's conversion made him a full member of the believing community.

For though he was an Ijaw man, he had to learn the Anglican Church Catechism in Igbo language, the then official language in the Niger Delta Pastorate. He was taught how to read and write and how to learn the ten commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' creed in Igbo before he was baptized.

Definition of Terms

The sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist – lay the foundations of every Christian life. The sharing in the divine nature given to humanity through the grace of Christ Jesus, bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity (St. Pauls, 2008:281).

“Sacraments” are sacred signs and have matter and form; they are public means of sanctifying; they produce spiritual effects mainly their celebration is liturgical, hence, they can have rites; they are acts of public worship or cult; they have their effects from the paschal mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Christ and the ministerial activities of the Church. The sacraments in themselves produce effects, that is, grace, *ex opera operato*; they are directly of divine institution and signs of grace. The principal purpose of sacraments is to produce grace, which helps the recipient in the state he or she acquired through them and are necessary for salvation (Nwabude, 2008: 205).

“Baptism” is a sacrament by which we are made Christians, children of God, members of his holy church, and heirs of heaven (Brown, 2000:41). It is the basis of the whole Christian life; the gateway to life in the spirit – *vitae spiritualis aenua* – and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism Christians are freed from sin and reborn as children of God; they become members of Christ, are incorporated into the church and made sharers in the church's mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word (Hume, 1997:204).

“Confirmation” is the sacrament by which Christians receive the Holy Spirit, to make them strong and perfect Christians, and soldiers of Christ (Brown, 41). In the Old Testament, the prophets announced that the spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped – for Messiah for his saving mission (Isaiah 11:2; 61:1; Luke 4:16-22). The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus Christ at his baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the son of God (Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:33-34). He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole mission is carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the father gives him “without measure” (John 3:34). This fullness of the spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah's, but was to be communicated to the whole messianic people (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 3:1-2). On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit (Luke 12:12; John 3:5-8; 7:37-39; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8), a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost (John 20:22; Acts 2:1-4). Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim “the mighty works of God”, and Peter declared this outpouring of the Spirit to be the sign of the Messianic Age (Acts 2:11; cf. 2:17-18). Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn (Acts 2:38). From that time on, the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ's will, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands the gift of the Holy Spirit that completes the grace of baptism (cf. Acts 8:15-17; 19:5-6; Heb. 6:2).

“The Holy Eucharist”, which is really and truly, and substantially the Body and Blood, the Soul Divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine is not only a sacrament in which Christians receive their divine Lord for the food and nourishment of their souls for their heavenly journey, and in which Christ is really present to be adored upon the altar; it is also a sacrifice; the sacrifice of the Holy *Mass*, in which, at the time of consecration, the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – Transubstantiation – and in which Christ is offered up for us his Eternal Father (Brown, 41).

Garrick Braide's Call

Braide made his first public claim in 1912. He was earlier noted for his enthusiasm and religious exercises, which he later felt called by the Lord Jesus Christ into the Christian Ministry and was accepted as a lay preacher in the Anglican Church of the Niger Delta Pastorate. Before 1912, there was rumour making the round or circulating about his prophetic and healing gifts.

For instance, in 1909, M. A. Kemma, his Pastor published an official pronouncement in the Niger Delta Pastorate Chronicle, an official organ of the Niger Delta Anglican Church. In it the Pastor enumerated many instances of Garrick Braide's prayer power.

His Preaching/Teaching

Garrick Braide preached the impending wrath of God upon idolatrous society and thousands responded automatically or spontaneously, almost to a point of regarding Garrick as God's mouthpiece. He used the confidence of the people to extremity. He:

- Condemned alcoholic drinks as a source of religious laxity and moral decadence;
- Lamented the decline of moral values and condemned the belief in charms and magic;
- Engaged in public disputes with medicine men and magicians;
- Mounted wild destruction of cultic objects, charms and shrines.

As a result of his widespread campaign of destruction of cultic objects and traditional shrines, there was a general unrest and consequently two things thwarted his missionary efforts:

First, the difficult circumstances of the First World War (1914 – 1918) time which demanded the colonial administration to check possible unrest; and second, the Niger Delta Pastorate Church was controlled chiefly by Sierra Leoneans though the financial burden was borne by the natives.

Evaluation/Assessment of His Mission

By 1916, his revivalist movement had spread to many parts of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) as it was called or Anglican Communion now – in the Niger Delta Pastorate and also to the Southern Zone of Owerri District (Ewechue, 1991). He made tremendous successes in prophetic healings, accurate revelation and display of social gifts (Tasie, 1978). Braide adopted a more practical approach and contextualized the gospel among the Niger Delta people. While the missionaries were introducing Christianity through the teachings of the creed, the Lord's Prayer and catechism, his way or method of evangelism redefined Christianity as a practical religion for the people of the Niger Delta and he had a large number of conversions. In 1909, there were about three hundred converts to Christianity in the Niger Delta, but when Braide became involved in evangelistic activities the number was said to have risen to two thousand nine hundred and thirty-three (2,933).

His Death

In 1916, the British administration faced a great loss due to the fall in the sales of alcohol and beverages in the Niger Delta, which was ascribed or attributed to Garrick Braide's Movement. The British administration became envious of Braide because he achieved within three months what the CMS had not attained in half-a-century. In March, 1916, Braide was arrested and accused of insurrection, blasphemy and schism. He was later pronounced guilty by the Colonial authorities and sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour. In November, 1916, shortly before his release from prison, eight further charges were brought against him and his followers, so he remained in prison until January, 1918 Garrick Sokari Idaketima Marian Braide died on January 15, 1918 following an illness. After his death, his followers founded the Christ Army Church.

Conclusion

The impetus for introducing the new and evidently more successful forms of evangelism in Nigeria was provided by the Prophet-Evangelist Garrick Sokari Idaketima Marian Braide (1882 – 1918). In Braide's evangelistic methods, the entire Niger Delta witnessed its most successful religious awakening, marking the climax of early Niger Delta Christianity. Although his evangelistic methods or even practices may not all be justified, they nevertheless attracted very many people to embrace the Christian faith. For instance, whereas hitherto Christianity was introduced to the indigenes through teaching the creed, the Lord's prayer, the catechism, and so on, and no one was baptized until he/she had memorized all these and satisfied the Church's conditions of behaviour – some of them very alien to the indigenous culture – Braide adopted a more radical and practical approach. He did not trouble himself or his converts with teaching the creeds, etc. He may have regarded such methods as alien and unpracticable, especially in view of the high illiteracy rate in the Niger Delta then. His chief method was to organize a crusade against charms, fetishes and idols, probably believing that until people lost faith in the powers of these objects they would not find peace in Christianity (Tasie, 1978: 326).

His demands upon his hearers were simple: that they should destroy fetishes, confess their sins and put absolute faith in the sufficiency of Christ. He prescribed for converts strenuous religious exercises which helped them to cultivate a certain Christian discipline. He emphasized prayer-sometimes specifying the number of times a day – he encouraged fasting and promoted the practice of praising God in local songs and shouting. The Braide movement not only challenged the alien-dominated situation, but it also gave rise to the emergence of many self-consecrated evangelists who became significant features of Niger Delta Christianity. Within a few years of the beginning of the Braide movement, Christianity diffused into such nooks and crannies, village and traditional centres like farm settlements and fishing ports as only thorough knowledge of the local places could enhance (Ajayi, 1965). Thus, by the Church assuming a native character, it helped the spread of Christianity (Ayandele, 1966).

Braide's methods, and possibly too, the fact that his movement appeared to pose a threat to the position held by Bishop James Johnson and his Sierra Leone and Yoruba colleagues who had dominated the scene, caused a breach between Braide and the authorities of the Niger Delta Pastorate Anglican Church in the Niger Delta. By 1918, the breach was completed. Braide himself died and that same year his followers founded a new Christian denomination in the Niger Delta – the Christ Army Church.

With the founding of the Christ Army Church, the elder Christian Church in the Niger Delta was forced to re-examine itself in several ways, especially its attitude about indigenization. Equally significant was that both by the challenge of the Christ Army Church and the fact that by the close of the second decade of the twentieth century, Nigeria was beginning to open and people were beginning to move from place to place for various reasons: some in search of jobs or better trading opportunities or search for security (Ndiokwere, 1990), the Niger Delta Pastorate Church began to lose its monopoly of the Christianization of the region.

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