

PROPHECY, POLITICS and POWER

**in Ancient Israel and
the Nigerian Context**

**A Festschrift in Honour of
The Most Rev. Dr. G. L. Lasebikan**

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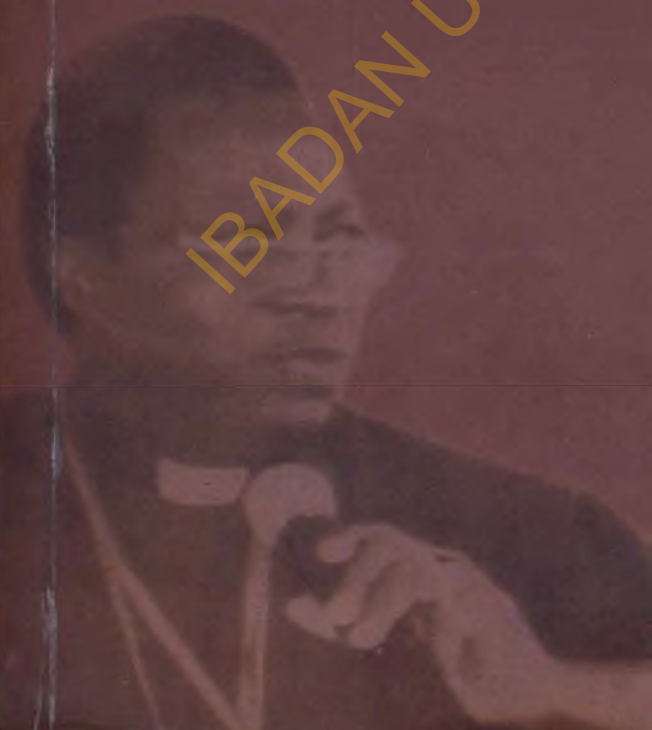
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Prophetic Movements in the Anglican Church in Pre-Independence Nigeria

Mepaiyeda Solomon Makanjuola

Abstract
The main focus of this paper is to debunk the erroneous notion that prophetic ministry first emerged within African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria and establish the fact that there were manifestations of prophetic movements shortly after the inception of Christianity in the Church Missionary Society that later metamorphosed to the Anglican Church. Evidences abound of prophetic figures among who were Garrick Braide, Daddy Alli, a sexton at Our Saviour's Anglican Church Ijebu-Ode, Sophia Odunlami and of course Joseph Ayo Babalola. These people exhibited prophetic gifts but due to certain reasons the Church authority excommunicated them. However the fact remains that the Anglican church served as the incubator of their prophetic activities in later years. The historical and phenomenological approaches are adopted to gather data for the exercise.

Keywords: Prophetic Movements, Anglican Church Nigeria, Garrick Braide, Ayo Babalola

Introduction

At the inception of Christianity in Nigeria, some mission churches with Western orientations such as the Anglican and the Methodist recommend three orders of priesthood i.e. Bishops, Priests, and Deacons which still subsists till date. The norm was that a priest should combine the functions of a prophet, exorcist, teacher and healer among others. But this became unrealisable as their pastoral roles could not cover prophetic function in the recognised manner though few of these priests were endowed with prophetic gifts. Unfortunately, Africans spiritual temperament could not cope with the static and stereotyped way of worship of the Europeans. Hence at the close of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century when freelance prophets such as William Harris of Liberia and Sokari Braide (Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola, 1997: 49 & 58) emerged in Africa, the natives heaved a sigh of relief with the assurance that the oracle of God had arisen to declare the mind of God to them.

doctrines in Igbo that it took a long time, making it burdensome to become a Christian. Aided also by his ability to demonstrate the gift of healing through prayer, he was accepted by his people as a Prophet commissioned by God. The effect of Braide's preaching was evident in the number of mammoth crowds that flooded the Anglican church for enquirers' class. Statistical data showed that the number of people enquiring about Christianity ca. 1909 was 300, but by 1912 (when Braide was already involved in evangelistic activities) the number increased to 2,933 (Ekebuisi, Chinonyerem Chijioke, 2016). Another influence Braide's preaching had on the Ijaw people was to convict them to set on fire their idols and charms. Like the Biblical Gideon he stopped people from offering sacrifices to the great divinity of Kalabari. Visitations to witch doctors also dramatically decreased as the people relied on God for healing. Another change that occurred was the fall in the sales of alcohol and beverages. As a result, the British administration faced a deficit of £576,000 in 1916, a loss which was ascribed to Garrick Braide's movement. Braide, as an itinerant preacher, moved from one village to another preaching the Gospel and telling the people to renounce their fetishes. His ministry spread from Bonny to Urhoboland, Benin and Yorubaland. Some Anglican ministers who supported Braide's ministry noticed that the statistical figures of those becoming Christians had risen steeply. The cross of Christ was erected in the place of idols, revival meetings were held with thousands of people attending and people were healed faster at Braide's meetings than in the care of the traditional or European doctors.

Joseph Ayo Babalola

This great prophet was born in 1904 to the family of Lawan Rotimi and Talabi Babalola (who later adopted biblical names of David and Martha) at Odo Owa (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 138) in the present day Kwara State. From the interview conducted with Pa John Orisaji, the Balogun of St Paul's Anglican Church Odo Owa, Talabi the mother of Joseph Ayodele Babalola who was heavy with pregnancy went to the farm at Ikotun village, a journey of about four kilometres to Odo Owa town. There she felt contractions on the spot where palm oil was being produced and gave birth to Ayodele Babalola (John Orisaji, 2010). Late Pastor Medayese added that a mysterious event occurred on the day Babalola was born. A sharp and mighty object was claimed to have exploded and shook the clouds (J.A. Alokun, 1975:1). Though there is no elaborate explanation on this but the fact that Babalola's birth place has since become a centre for pilgrims all over the world is an indication that he was a unique figure. Babalola's childhood was spent at Odo-Owa but he schooled briefly at Ilofa and Osogbo at All Saints Primary School up to standard five through the help of his uncle, Rotimi, before he decided to learn a trade and eventually became a mechanic apprentice.

Hence, African Christians began to agitate for the creation of prophetic office within the established churches. This agitation was given a boost with the rise of Joseph Ayo Babalola and Sophia Odunlami, members of the Anglican Church in the present day Kwara and Ogun States respectively. Their prophetic and healing ministries could have resulted not only in the expansion and astronomical growth of the Anglican Church but also in making the church more relevant to the natives in their generations. However, the excommunication of Braide and Babalola among others by the authority of the church left them without any choice than starting organised prophetic movements that later metamorphosed into churches today. This echoed the statement made by Jesus Christ that the stone rejected by builders has become the chief corner stone (NIV Bible, Acts 4:11).

The questions that the engagements of this paper seek to tackle are: What beclouded the vision of the authority of the Anglican Church from seeing the relevance of prophetic ministry which is scripturally valid? To what extent is prophetic office a *sine qua non* to Christianity?, What are the possibilities of recognising this important office and incorporate it within the existing orders of the Anglican Church?

Prototype of Indigenous Prophetic Figures in Anglican Church in Nigeria

There was an early manifestation of prophetic figures in the Anglican Church in Nigeria at the close of the 19th and the turn of 20th centuries. Sokari Braide and Ayo Babalola were very outstanding among others. Though their prophetic ministries culminated in the emergence of The Christ Army and Christ Apostolic Church respectively, (Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola, 1997: 63) records show that both figures had their prophetic incubation within the Anglican Church before they were excommunicated from their parent church for obvious reasons. This paper therefore seeks to examine historically their lives and prophetic ministries.

Garrick Sokari Braide

The exact date on which Garrick Sokari Daketima Braide was born is not known. However, there are pointers that he was born between 1882 and 1885 into the family of Bosi Daketima and Abariginia (Israel Olofinjana, 2012). His parents came from the Agu house of Obonoma. According to Tasie, the Agu families of Obonoma town were the custodians of the Ogu divinity cult and, on more than one occasion, a member of these families had served as this divinity's chief priest.

Braide did not have the opportunity of being educated due to the poor financial status of his parents. He later became a Christian and was baptized on January 23rd 1910 at St Andrews Anglican Church in Bakana.

Though he was an Ijaw man by tribe, but he had to learn the Church catechism in Igbo language, as this was the language of instruction in all the Niger-Delta Pastorate at that time. Braide had to learn the Ten Commandments, The Lord's Prayer and the Creeds in Igbo before he was baptised. After his baptism, he was confirmed by Rev. James Johnson (Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola, 1997: 59).

Around 1912 Braide was beginning to be noted for his enthusiasm and religious exercises. He later felt called by the Lord into ministry and was accepted as a lay preacher in the Anglican Church of the Niger-Delta pastorate. Braide's method of teaching and ministry was very different from that of the Mission Churches (Israel Olofinjana, 2012). While the latter introduced Christianity through the teaching of the Creeds, The Lord's Prayer and catechism, Braide adopted a more practical approach and contextualized the Gospel among the Delta people. He taught the people to renounce their gods, destroy their idols and to simply get converted to Christianity. Braide was convinced that the approach of the Mission Churches did not deal with the root problems of the Delta people; namely idol worshipping. He knew that until the Delta people lost faith in their witch doctors and idols, there could be no true conversion. To this end he organized a crusade against charms, idol worshipping and the use of demonic objects.

His Teachings and Influence

- Emphasis on absolute dependence on God for physical and spiritual healing (*cura divina*). He encouraged his hearers not to seek traditional medicine nor seek the help of medical doctors.
- Exhortation that people should abstain from alcoholic beverages and refrain from dealing in magical practices.
- Strict observance of Sunday as the day of rest, therefore no normal activities should take place.
- Advocacy for a liturgy in which the indigenes should praise God in their local songs, prayers and worship. Braide taught Africans how to worship God in an African way. He castigated the missionaries for not taking the world-view of the Africans into consideration in presenting the Gospel. The Mission Churches made Christianity too remote and intellectual to meet the ritualistic needs of the Delta people's traditional religion.

According to D. Ayegboyin and A. Ishola, Braide's prophetic and healing ministry resulted in massive conversion of the Niger Delta people to the Anglican Church (Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola, 1997: 60&61). The use of Ijaw native language made many people to identify with Christianity. He reasoned from his own personal experience of learning the Church

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Babalola's Call to Prophetic Ministry

According to Olayiwola, Babalola's call was a specific and personal one (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 138-139). He was said to have developed insomnia in 1928 as a result of a strange experience that made him restless for a week. The climax came one day when he was, as usual, working on the rehabilitation of Ilesa-Igbara-Oke Road. Suddenly, the engine of the steam roller stopped to his utter amazement (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 139). There was no visible mechanical fault, and Joseph became confused and perplexed. He was in this state of confusion when he heard a great voice that called him three times! The voice was loud and clear. The voice told him that he would die if he refused to heed the divine call to go into the world and preach. To this voice Babalola was recusant. But Babalola later gave in only after he had received assurances of divine guidance. This led to the resignation of his appointment with the PWD despite many attempts by Mr Fergusson, the head of his unit, who tried to dissuade him from making such a decision.

The same voice came to Joseph a second time and ordered him to begin fasting for seven days. He obeyed and at the end of the period he saw a figure of a man who, according to Pastor Alokan, resembled Jesus. The man in dazzling dress spoke at the length about the mission he was to embark upon. The man also told him of the persecutions he would face and at the same time gave him assurance of divine protection and victory. A hand prayer bell was said to have been given to Babalola as a symbol. He was also given a bottle of "life-giving water" to heal all manners of sickness. Consequently, wherever and whenever he prayed into the water for therapeutic purposes, effective healing was procured for the patients who drank the water. Thus, Babalola became a prophet and a man with extraordinary powers. Enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit he could spend several weeks in prayers. Elder Abraham Owoyemi of Odo-Owa, said that the prophet usually saw angels who delivered divine messages to him. An angel appeared in one of his prayers and forbade him to wear caps.

The Itinerary of Prophet Babalola

Olayiwola asserted further that it was during one of his prayer sessions that an angel appeared to him and gave him a big yam which he ordered him to eat. The angel told him that the yam was the tuber with which God fed the whole world (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 140). He further revealed that God had granted unto him the power to deliver those who were possessed of evil spirits in the world. He was directed to go first to Odo-Owa and engage himself in preaching. He was to arrive in the town on a market day, cover his body with Palm fronds and disfigure himself with charcoal paints.

Babalola entered the town in 1928 the manner described and was taken for a mad man. Immediately he started preaching and prophesying. He told the inhabitants of Odo-Owa about an impending danger if they did not repent. He was arrested and taken to the District Officer at Ilorin for allegedly disturbing the peace of the people. The District Officer later released him when the allegation could not be proven. However, it was said that a few days later, there was an outbreak of small-pox in the town. The man whose prophecies and messages were once rejected was quickly sought for. He went round praying for the victims and they were all healed.

Babalola's father was said to have been very instrumental in the establishment of the C.M.S. Church in Odo-Owa. It was in this Church that Babalola organized regular prayer meetings. Many people attended these meetings because of the miracles God performed through him. Among the regulars was one Isaiah Oluyemi who later saw the wrath of Bishop Smith of the Ilorin Diocese. Information had reached the Bishop that almost all members of the C.M.S. Church in Ilofa were seeing visions, speaking in tongues and praying vigorously. Babalola and the visioners, were allegedly ordered by Bishop Smith to quit the Church. But Babalola did not leave the town until June 1930 (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 140).

On invitation from one Daniel Ajibola, Babalola went to Lagos. Elder Daniel Ajibola at that time was working in Ibadan where he was a member of the Faith Tabernacle Congregation. He introduced Prophet Babalola to Pastor D.O. Odubanjo, one of the leaders of the Faith Tabernacle in Lagos. Senior Pastor Esinsinade who was then the President of the Faith Tabernacle was invited to see Babalola. After listening to the details of his call and his ministry, the Faith Tabernacle leaders warmly received the young prophet into their midst. Babalola had not yet received baptism by immersion. The necessity to go through that rite was emphasised to him by Senior Pastor Esinsinade who baptised him in the Lagoon at the back of the Church of the Faith Tabernacle at 51, Moloney Bridge Street, Lagos (S.G. Adegboyega, 1978: 22). He returned to Odo-Owa a few days after that and Elder (later Pastor) J.A. Medayese, paid him a visit.

The news of the conversion of the new prophet reached Pastor K.P. Titus at Araromi in Yagba, present Kogi State. Pastor Titus was a teacher and preacher at the Sudan Interior Mission which was then thriving at Yagba. He invited Prophet Babalola for a revival service. Joseph Ayodele Babalola while in Yagba, performed mighty works of healing. Many Muslims and Christians from other denominations and some traditional religionists were converted to the new faith, during the revival.

The official inauguration of his prophetic ministry happened in 1930 when at the meeting of the leaders of Faith Tabernacle at Oke Oye quarters in

Ilesa, Osun State of Nigeria there was a cry over a dead woman in the adjacent street where the meeting was holding. Babalola was moved in his spirit and prayed for the dead woman. The woman rose and it was the outbreak of the revival of 1930 (See J.N.D. Kelly, N.D:13). Based on this miraculous event millions of people worldwide trooped to Ilesa for the Great Revival. In actual fact, one could imagine what next? It was realised that people with disabilities in one way or the other started looking for spiritual solution. His prominence led the members of the church not only to involve his name and his healing activities in their prayers, but also to use the elements that were believed to have been handed down to him through vision.

The impact of Babalola's prophetic-healing ministry was felt in other parts of Southwestern Nigeria. In Ekiti State, he touched Usi, Efon-Alaaye, Aramoko, Oye, (Evang Caleb Ojuko, 2015) among others. The remarkable event that happened was the conversion of the Kings of Efon and Aramoko and their adoption of biblical names like Solomon and Hezekiah at their baptism (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 144). In addition, Babalola's prophetic campaign was attested to by Archdeacon H. Dallimore of the Anglican church in Ado Ekiti and some Baptist pastors who visited him in Efon-Alaaye for on the spot assessment of Babalola ministry. In Ondo State, Babalola's influence was felt in Owo, Ikare and Oka shortly before he was sentenced to jail for six months in 1932 based on the allegation that he preached against witches.

No sooner that he came out of prison than Babalola's presence was felt at Creek Town in Calabar on the invitation by Mr Cyprian Ufon. From there he moved to Duke Town where he preached at a National Church and many members received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In 1936, his ministry moved to Gold Coast (Ghana). Accompanied by Timothy Bababusuyi, he arrived Accra where he was given a warm reception by some people who had earlier attended the Great Revival in Ilesha.

One significant feature of the healing ministry of Ayodele Babalola was the consecrated water designated *Omi Iye*, 'water of life' which still remains a well trusted means of solving problems for members and clients of the C.A.C. Many streams at Ilesa and some other towns in South-western Nigeria are believed to have received blessings from Ayodele Babalola. Hence people travelled from far to bath and fetch from these streams. Related to this, it was discovered that the Africans too believe in the spiritual bath in a running stream or river. The belief linked up with this is that the problems will be carried away by the flowing water and will never be seen in life since the flowing river never flows backward. The others are the powerful bell that he jingled to wade off evil forces and the practice of visiting mountains for solitary prayers. Through the latter we have

proliferation of mountains all over the South-western Nigeria even though the establishment of few was credited to him.

Reactions to Prophetic Ministry in the Anglican Church

In the case of Sokari Braide, initial reaction seemed to be positive. The Anglican clergy whose church membership increased astronomically declared their approval of Braide's prophetic ministry. Likewise the Suffragan Bishop, James Johnson was said to have openly affirmed his support for Braide's ministry (Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola, 1997: 61). But the situation changed when oppositions rose against him on the grounds of failure to apply Anglican discipline, toleration of polygyny and calling himself the second Elijah. To worsen the situation was the clamour by Braide's followers that the authority of the Anglican Church in Niger Delta area should incorporate the office of a prophet within the Anglican Order which only recognise the offices of Bishop, Priest and Deacon.

Braide's problem with the church dovetailed to political dimensions. The Colonial government charged him for inciting the native people against them through his prophetic utterances that colonial rule would soon end and his preaching against alcoholic beverages which the Europeans largely depended on but had brought reduction from the excise duty of the brand. These and other anti-white attitudes led to his arrest in 1916 and he was in prison till 1918. Shortly after his release same year, Braide died and his prophetic movement "The Christ Army" was led by one of his lieutenants, Brother Coker.

Looking at what transpired between the Anglican Church at Odo-Owa and Ayo Babalola, one could read disaffection to the reaction by the authority of the church. Bishop Smith from Ilorin whose jurisdiction extended to Odo-Owa considered it a great offence the teachings of Babalola on seeing visions, speaking in tongues and praying vigorously; which had already been imbibed by majority of the members of the Anglican Church where Babalola's father was instrumental in its establishment. Smith ordered the excommunication of Babalola and his followers around 1929. Prior to this was his arrest by the District Officer in Ilorin based on the report from some disgruntled people of Odo-Owa that Babalola's prophetic preaching was disturbing the peace of the community (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995 :140). But when the prophecies were fulfilled by the outbreak of small-pox, they sought out for him for prayer and healing. In addition to series of persecutions that those prophetic figures faced was the arrest of Babalola at Ilesha by the colonial authorities on the ground that *cura divina* was unthinkable and the reduction he brought to the patronage of government health establishments. No doubt the arrest by the government officials of Braide and Babalola must have been applauded by the authorities of the mainline churches at that time

with the hope that their prophetic ministry would go into extinction. Unfortunately such persecution only popularised the prophets and prepared more grounds for them to operate.

Challenges of the Prophetic Ministries of Braide and Babalola to Contemporary Church in Nigeria

The prophetic ministries of these two great figures posed a great challenge to church authority at that time and it is still a riddle that is yet to be understood. The concern of this writer is that if the Anglican Church at that time failed in its interpretation of divine move, should the church in contemporary times fall victim of the same spiritual error? The Bible is clear about prophetic ministry as evinced in the two Testaments. Even at the inception of Christian Church in the Roman Empire, prophets were a veritable agency through which the expansion of Christianity was made possible.

The Early Church accommodated and recognised the office but somehow along the line, when Christianity got to Europe, prophetic ministry was discouraged and since then individuals who had the prophetic call decided to launch a separatist movement. The emphasis the paper is making here is that Braide and Babalola should have been accommodated and recognised by the Anglican Church rather than showing apathy and suspicion because both of them did not intend to establish separate churches of their own. While it was stated that Braide had always insisted that his mission was that of a prophet (E. Isichei, 1976: 104) within the established Church, Olayiwola opines that despite the endowment of prophetic and healing powers, Babalola never used the opportunity to establish a separate Christian organisation (D.O. Olayiwola, 1995: 141).

This suggests the fact that if the Anglican Church had managed the situation very well it would have been better for it. But the Anglican Church at that time acted in that manner probably because it was not autonomous of European control. But one wonders why the authorities of mainline churches in some quarters are yet to cultivate the spirit of accommodating priests and members who exhibit spiritual gifts.

In addition, the prophetic ministry of these figures has great implication for the modern self-acclaimed prophets. Christianity today is full of figures who claim to be prophets but whose activities portray them as mouthpieces for political warlords and spiritual or businessmen and women. As soon as they discover their prophetic gift, they see it as an opportunity to establish their churches and begin to see visions that will favour the politicians for economic or financial gains. Braide and Babalola declared the mind of God without minding whose ox was gorged.

Conclusion

The mainline churches especially the Anglican Church should have a rethink about prophetic ministry among them. This could be developed in order to address the felt needs of multitudes of their members who constantly search for spiritual security on mountains established by prophets and by so doing have become prey in the hands of fraudulent ones who are wolves in sheep clothing.

Furthermore, Prophets today should see themselves as religious leaders, messengers of divine mandate, preachers of the gospel, watchmen and intercessors rather than parading themselves as stooges of some political groups in the country. They should stop seeing themselves as supporters of religious and political leaders. Instead they should warn and rebuke them of their misconduct and abuse of power and position.

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