

## EARLY SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN ADVENTIST EVANGELISTS: SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM IN AFRICA AND INDIGENOUS CONTRIBUTIONS (1940S–1990S)

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The rise of early sub-Saharan African Adventist evangelists (hereafter ESAAE) is deep-rooted in several complex historical events.<sup>1</sup> The way local agents in Christian evangelism in Africa rose to prominence necessitates an analysis of both the political and religious dynamics that ushered the post-colonial era.

Between the 1950s and 1980s, African nations regained their independence from European countries. The only countries that were not colonized were Ethiopia and Liberia. The first was due to its strategic resistance to Italian forces and other European empires; the second because it was the place for freed slaves from Europe and America. The fight for independence started as far back immediately as after World War II. For instance, Libya obtained its independence from Italy followed by other countries, culminating with a mass proclamation of freedom from colonial rulers by the 1960s. The year 1960 marked the peak for independence in Africa, with seventeen countries branding their flags of freedom. These countries included Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal, Madagascar, and Somalia, among others.

The end of the colonial period could be attributed mostly to the African rejection of European oppression. The idea that European civilization was immensely superior to African culture received widespread opposition. Western education through its branches such as education and health institutions opened the eyes of Africans to evaluate the limits of colonialism and oppose it. Past histories, such as World War I and World War II also had

<sup>1</sup> The ESAAE are also referred to in the paper as early local evangelists.

shown to Africans the brutality of European nations that inflicted misery and loss of life. These discoveries questioned altogether the right of Europe to dictate any moral code to other continents.

On the other hand, there was an emergence of African leaders who also expressed the need to lead in the administration of the colonies. Africans in British, French, Portuguese, and Belgian colonies had emerged through the opportunities offered by Western education and new economic visibility far better than that of African traditional societies. Christian missions provided education for several Africans that helped in the translation of documents into local languages. And by the 1960s, Africans became zealous about education and invested huge efforts in the transformation of African societies through Western education. School attendance by the 1960s was in increase compared to the 1900s when missionaries had to beg for people to attend the schools they founded. In French colonies as well as British colonies, there was important progress in the inscription of students in schools.<sup>2</sup> For instance, by the mid-1950s, there were more than two million school children in Nigeria, relatively about 6 percent of the entire Nigerian population. In the Gold Coast (Ghana), there were not less than six hundred thousand, about 12 percent, of the entire Ghanaian population. Universities were already established in Nigeria and Ghana by 1948, and by the 1960s, Nigerian University graduated around 4,500 students and Ghana had 5000 university graduates. The first French African university was a federal institution in Dakar, Senegal which began in 1950; and by the 1960s, it had about 1,800 graduates.<sup>3</sup> In former British colonies such as South Africa, several African leaders emerged as successful leaders that opposed the apartheid system. Nelson Mandela and other political leaders benefited from Western education.

By the 1960s, Africans sought to take over the leadership of African nations. Europeans would be forced to leave the continent as local leaders progressively obtained the independence of their countries. The transfer of leadership did not take place only among the governmental forces but also among the Christian denominations that were operating under the aegis of the colonial masters. Seventh-day Adventism followed the pattern of other Christian denominations that handed leadership to local people following the independence of their countries.<sup>4</sup> This paper provides a brief analysis of the postcolonial movement before examining the rise of early Adventist

<sup>2</sup> See James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> See Amy McKenna, ed., *The History of Western Africa* (New York: Britannica Educational, 2011), 76.

<sup>4</sup> David Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History in West Africa: A Mustard Seed* (Ilishan Remo, Nigeria: David Agboola, 2001), 68-77.

local evangelists who took over or collaborated with Western missionaries for the expansion of Adventist mission in Africa.

## 1. Postcolonial Theory and Christian Missions in Africa

Political and cultural developments in Africa and the rejection of colonialism became its defining marks around the 1960s. Christianity in the continent would also be drastically affected as local leaders and indigenous theologians expressed views that were termed as postcolonial.

Postcolonial local/African theologians believed that the teachings of Western missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa were shaped and influenced by European colonialism. This implied and reinforced the idea of Eurocentrism and the notion of the superiority of European culture. Africans in the postcolonial era, therefore, adopted new approaches to theologizing the Bible, with the intention to "make the Bible comprehensible to the colonized cultures on their own terms."<sup>5</sup> In this regard, the field of biblical hermeneutics would be adjusted in light of postcolonial criticism. This approach is inscribed in the idea of African theology, a term which was first coined in 1965 at the All-Africa Conference of Churches. This theology was viewed in the angle of liberation theology with connection to Black theology in North America and was later cherished by South African Black theology as a way to shake off the effect of apartheid.

On the other hand, the missions in Africa felt the winds of postcolonialism. Africans began to condemn Western religious policies that did not acknowledge their voice in mission councils and general assemblies. This gave a plain sign that African clergy did not want links with mission societies that refused to acknowledge his equal prerogatives with White missionaries.<sup>6</sup> Richard Elphick noted that

Missionaries often refused to treat the African clergy as their professional equals and brothers in Christ. Consequently, many Africans, embittered by their treatment as second-class ministers, quarrelled with the missionaries over money, status, and authority. Few of these squabbles

<sup>5</sup> Marèque Steele Ireland, "Postcolonial Theology," *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, 684.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Etherington, "Introduction," in *Missions and Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13.

concerned Christian doctrine or disagreements over principles of church governance.<sup>7</sup>

Following this trend of self-awareness of the identity of African clergy, emotional and psychological pressures were mounted on the missionaries with the clear request to share, if not relinquish, their positions of authority to the indigents.

Such vision of leadership in Christian churches in Africa probably contributed to the appropriation of the fulfillment theology. According to its proponents, "God had granted special insights to Hindus, Africans, and other peoples that would give new dimensions to European worship, just as their acceptance of Christ would fulfil their progress towards salvation."<sup>8</sup> Such electrifying argument and authoritative pronouncement would yield abundant fruit. By the 1980s, Western missionaries had almost entirely left their former colonies and gone back home, even though they still tried to impose towards the mission fields a paternalistic attitude from abroad.<sup>9</sup>

As Western missionaries began to leave the missions in the leadership of local pioneers, the local pioneers came to take upon themselves the responsibility to contextualize Christianity in their own ways. They acted as real agents of conversion to their fellow Africans. Norman Etherington observed that "the greatest difficulty faced by those who have tried to argue that Christian missions were a form of cultural imperialism has been the overwhelming evidence that the agents of conversion were local people, not foreign missionaries."<sup>10</sup> The missionaries bountifully sowed but the local pioneers were the ones who developed strategic plans for harvest. They took the Christian message to remote areas of African bushes and remote deserts. They sat with their people on the ground while they gathered around the trees to hear the good news of Jesus's redeeming grace from their own brethren who taught them in their own languages. None of them was forced to accept the message but they all recognized its significance as their brethren, the pioneers, highlighted that Jesus would end all suffering and hand to each a new mansion in gold and pearl that he went to prepare (John 14:1, Rev 20).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Elphick, "The Benevolent and the Social Gospel: Missionaries and South African Christians in the Age of Segregation," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 350.

<sup>8</sup> Etherington, "Introduction," 16n 27.

<sup>9</sup> David O. Babalola, *Sweet Memories of Our Pioneers* (Ilishan Remo, Nigeria: David O. Babalola, 2001), 68.

<sup>10</sup> Etherington, "Introduction," 7.

In the British colonies, as far back as the 1900s, there "were 882 of these agents—pastors, readers, schoolmasters, etc."<sup>11</sup> who acted in the quality of supporting the work of Christ for the salvation of their brethren. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, hundreds of thousands of these agents, most of them were not paid, travelled hundreds of miles by foot and resisted deadly rainforests, storms, and thunders to share the gospel. Just as Christianity spread through the efforts of the apostles and also unnamed ordinary individuals in the first century around the Mediterranean Sea, so was the case of Christianity in the 1900s in Africa. As Peggy Brock wrote, "Christian beliefs were spread by ordinary people, whose numbers grew as colonial development increased mobility."<sup>12</sup> Just like the case in the Bible with the unnamed missionaries, the experiences of countless local agents of missions in Africa remain immensely undocumented. Thus, "If, as some assert, the missionary movement was part of a larger imperial project of cultural colonialism, it is important to recognize that the foot soldiers of the advance were the indigenous preachers."<sup>13</sup> With just a basic understanding of Christian doctrines,

They communicated their own understandings of Christianity based partly on what missionaries had taught them and partly on their own cultural assumptions. Those who evangelized among distant peoples not only carried messages forged during the development of European Christianity, they often carried technical, social, and political concepts from their own cultures with them such as new forms of housing, village organization, and cuisine.<sup>14</sup>

If they could not know much about European values and culture, the local agents of Christian missions in Africa had a masterly understanding of their own cultures. They knew where cannibalism, witchcraft, sorceries, and other unchristian practices of traditional African religions were located. They confronted these cultural practices with their essential knowledge of the Bible. They made a huge impression on African societies as they came to defy evil practices as the dooms pronounced by the defenders of these practices had no effect on the agents of God's mission. Although what really happened in the early gatherings of ESAAE with their early subjects that became later their converts remains immensely unknown to both historians and the Africans themselves, there could have been serious tensions between the ESAAE and their converts to Christianity. While there could be a variety of approaches between the different ESAAE in the

<sup>11</sup> Peggy Brock, "New Christians as Evangelists," in *Missions and Empires*, 132.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Christian denominations in Africa, their basic strategies remained the same—the communication of Christian truth with clear passion and spirit of martyrdom. Early Seventh-day Adventist local evangelists would follow the patterns of the mainline Christian local evangelists but they did adjust these approaches. Local Seventh-day Adventist evangelists saw the mainline churches also as fields of evangelism.

## 2. The Rise of Early Sub-Saharan Adventist Evangelist

The story of Seventh-day Adventism in Africa would be incomplete if the memory of the local pioneers is not adequately highlighted. Just like in the mainline Christian denominations in Africa, the ESAAE championed the Adventist message as early as the 1900s. They used a variety of strategies to convey the Adventist message to nonbelievers, or better to say to non-Adventists, as they did not exclude their message to other Christian groups. If the French and the British in the nineteenth century spoke of missions as designed enterprises meant to convert non-Christians such as the Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, and the traditionalists, for Seventh-day Adventist new evangelists and their mentors, the converts were to be sought even among the Christian denominations. They highlighted the Sabbath message that the other Christian churches did not preach. As J. A. Hyde, a missionary in northern Nigeria, reported in 1951, "The majority of the teaching in this mission is carried out by the members themselves."<sup>15</sup> What the missionaries did was train them on how to reach souls. "So one of the first things that we do when we take the Gospel to them is to teach them to read the Bible for themselves,"<sup>16</sup> affirmed Hyde. "Then as they learn to read, and write, and so study the Bible for themselves they immediately, while still pupils, join the teaching band, helping others who do not know as much as they do. Thus, from one hundred and fifty members we know of one hundred teachers."<sup>17</sup>

So, ESAAE were at the forefront of the Adventist missions as they brought hundreds of people to Christ even while they were still students themselves. By the time they learned basic knowledge of Adventist faith, they were already able to carry out the mission without further guidance from the White missionaries. However, they were not independent in their work

<sup>15</sup> J. A. Hyde, "North Nigerian Teachers Send Greetings," *West African Advent Messenger* 5.1 (1951): 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

as they reported back to the mission stations. Occasionally, they had visits from the mission station as well.<sup>18</sup>

A major factor in the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa during the 1950s to 2000, added to the enthusiasm of new evangelists, was the work of educational and health institutions. The schools which were founded with the help of missionaries between the 1900s and 1940s became renowned institutions, as several others were added. The educational institutions that were established during the colonial era and which became centers of educational excellence today include Babcock University (previously known as Adventist Seminary of West Africa) in Nigeria; Solusi Adventist University (previously Solusi Training School) in Zimbabwe; Valley View University (Ghana); Adventist University of Eastern Africa at Baraton, Kenya; Adventist University in Rwanda; and Rusangu Adventist University in Zambia. These schools became influential in their countries as several political leaders send their children to these schools. They became centers of evangelism as staff and students accepted the Adventist message through public baptism. The New Evangelists used their God-given talents; being guided by the Spirit of God, they were able to communicate divine truth to those they ministered to.

The ESAAE in general translated the Christian message through a clever apprehension of indigenous concepts. While they could recognize and accept most African core values such as charity, hospitality, and the spirit of *ubuntu*,<sup>19</sup> they also expressed their revulsion against the drinking of alcohol, the eating of unclean meats, and the worship of pagan gods as to follow the Adventist lifestyle standard.<sup>20</sup> Thus, they advocated for the destruction of preexisting rituals and beliefs against the teachings of Christianity.

To concentrate on the works of new evangelists is significant because they were, in some places, the first to convert their fellow brethren before the missionaries came to know them. Two individuals from Cote d'Ivoire who "had been to Ghana to learn how to cultivate cocoa had accepted and brought [the] Seventh-day Adventist message to [the] Dida tribe"<sup>21</sup> to which they belonged. These individuals, Kouame Djouman and Pierre K. Adingrah, shared their new faith in their village. It was only later that the mission, based in Ghana, heard about their stories of success and decided

<sup>18</sup> Babalola, *Sweet Memories*, 94–188.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel A. Paul, *The Ubuntu God: Deconstructing a South African Narrative of Oppression* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 177.

<sup>20</sup> J. Harker, "Resolutions and Expressions from the Foreign Missions Council," *Quarterly Review* 14, no. 2 (1928): 14.

<sup>21</sup> Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History*, 36.

to send J. K. Garbrar to reinforce the mission already in progress. Later, Felix Donkoh and John Zakka, both from Cote d'Ivoire, gave impetus to the mission in their country supporting earlier foundations.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in the eastern part of Nigeria, Seventh-day Adventism was already present before Jessie Clifford settled there. Bankole Loving-Good—who attended an Adventist school at Waterloo, Sierra Leone—preached and converted people to the Adventist message.<sup>23</sup> In Zambia, “there were already native converts to Adventism in Barotseland before the missionaries reached Liumba Hill.”<sup>24</sup>

ESAAE received basic training. Places such as the Union of South Africa in South Africa and Solusi in Zimbabwe served as training centers in Southern Africa. Ghana and Nigeria on the West Coast and Cameroon in Central Africa were also other training centers. Also, Tanganyika in East Africa trained early local pioneers who acted as foreign missionaries in neighboring countries. Solusi specially played a significant role. Arthur W. Spalding noted in 1962 that “Old ‘Solusi’” was able to live “even to this day in the affections of the missionaries in Africa, as the mother and almoner of them all.”<sup>25</sup> This was because “out of and through Solusi came the pioneers of the lands and mission stations beyond and even behind.”<sup>26</sup> It was a well-equipped center of evangelism for “native peoples, staffed with both white and black teachers, and sending forth well-equipped evangelists and teachers of the Bible,”<sup>27</sup> across Africa. With such training, the trained evangelists were able to take the gospel to villagers across Southern Africa and East Africa. Spalding referred to six of the very prominent evangelists: James Malinki, David Kalaka, Richard Moko, Isaac Xiba, James Moyo, and John Ncube.<sup>28</sup> These were not the only ones; there were of course “hundreds of others, many of them notable in service,” who were “pressing the gospel into new areas, teaching outschools, in some cases being directors of

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Babalola, *Sweet Memories*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Ndala Kayongo, “West Zambia Field,” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, para. 7, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=5D26>.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1961), 4:13.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1961), 4:13.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 4:15. See also Mxolisi Michael Sokupa, “Documented Memories of Richard Moko’s Life and Contribution: A Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Reflection,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae* 41.3 (2015): 171–183.



missions and headmasters of schools."<sup>29</sup> Solusi was thus "the hub, the missions rayed out in every direction, the first extensions becoming bases for later extensions, up into the heart of Africa, down toward its southernmost point, out into the territory east and west, to the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic."<sup>30</sup> All of them were "filled with the spirit of the message, burning with zeal to bring the blessings of the gospel into lives of their people, and working with but a fraction of the financial support required by Europeans, they form the great body of the Christian army of workers in Africa."<sup>31</sup> These workers were able to stand as real agents of mission and advanced the message of the Sabbath. Not all of them were trained at Solusi. Some were trained not in the setting of formal schools but by individual missionaries. This group of workers formed even the majority of the ESAAE.

As all the ESAAE, in one way or the other, got their training from Western missionaries, they did not stay silent but shared the burning flame of God's love to their brethren. For instance, Peter Nyambo from Malawi was a missionary to Kenya, along with Arthur G. Carscallen, a Canadian.<sup>32</sup> Ondoua Raymond was a Cameroonian who was a missionary to Gabon, and R. P. Dauphin from Sierra Leone and Duncan Morgue from Ghana supported the work of David C. Babcock in Nigeria.<sup>33</sup> Andrew N. Daitey, Christian T. Quarcco, and Dr. Kofi Owusu-Mensa served in Nigeria in the Adventist Seminary of West Africa in Nigeria. Pastor W. B. Ackar and his wife were missionaries to North Nigerian Mission from 1971–1975. D. Cudjoe and his wife were sent to Gambia as missionaries from 1973–1977.<sup>34</sup> These local agents of missions led the transformation of several African jungles into real centers of Adventism today.

At the time the ESAAE supported the missionaries or pioneered the Adventist message in many places, evangelistic work was difficult as well as life-threatening.<sup>35</sup> The evangelists were victims of unfounded accusations. They could be blamed for various plagues in their communities as they

<sup>29</sup> Spalding, *Origin and History*, 4:15. Compare with the message of Ellen G. White to Missionaries in Africa: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Missionaries in Southern Africa* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 2010), 1–98.

<sup>30</sup> Spalding, *Origin and History*, 4:21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:15.

<sup>32</sup> Gershom N. Amayo, "The Role of the Adventists in the Development of Education in Kenya," in *Seventh-day Adventist Contributions to East Africa: 1903–1983*, ed. Baldur Ed Pfeiffer (Bern: Lang, 1985), 67, 68.

<sup>33</sup> Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>35</sup> Brock, "New Christians as Evangelists," 140.

promoted new religion that angered the gods. Jealous traditional chiefs wanted them killed or judged by the deities.<sup>36</sup> Evangelist James J. Hamilton from Sierra Leone narrated his own deadly experience in March 1937. When thunder hit his house, he was told that the gods were angry with him and his activities in Ilesha, Nigeria. No one ventured to assist him and his family members. He expressed his sadness in these words:

The Yoruba people worship thunder, and if anyone is struck, their desire is that the unfortunate one should die. So, no one would venture near to help us. My daughters were of tender age, the elder girl twelve and the younger one ten. In their predicament they went around the neighbourhood soliciting assistance, but none would come.<sup>37</sup>

In such circumstances, one had to be really determined to accept to be an evangelist.

While all the ESAAE preached with determination, their ultimate goal was to communicate their new faith which they believed was superior to that of their ancestors who did not mention Jesus in their religious gatherings. While they emphasized the love of God in their sermons, the new Christian evangelists used simple sentences which created sharp effects on the mind of those who threatened them to death. The story of Stephen and the apostles of Christ such as Peter, James, John, and Paul developed in them the passion for God's mission that no human threat was able to quench. Sometimes they openly confronted the practice of *juju* and defeated it in the name of Christ. In Ghana, for instance, Daniel Gyasi, a convert in 1950, asked a new evangelist, Appiah Dankwah, to remove from his house his idols and *juju*.<sup>38</sup> Dankwah further reports:

One bright Sabbath morning on the 16th Sept. 1950. Mr. and Mrs. Vetter, Mrs. Gibson, Mrs Appiah, and myself went to the village, after the church services, the man, brought in his various idols and in the presence of the village chief, his elders, and the town folks the man stood in the midst of the people and witnessed for the wonderful message of Christ which has changed his heart to commit to the flames these rubbish idols. I poured kerosene on them and a stick of match raised a towering flame, no mean bonfire and devoured the whole thing without reserve. The flames of the fire must have appealed to the minds of the awestricken populace who were looking to the worthless idols they once served and worshipped.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> James J. Hamilton, "Deliverance from Lightning," *The Advent Survey* 10.3 (1938): 8.

<sup>38</sup> Appiah Dankwah, "A Scene at Kwaaso Village," *Western African Advent Messenger* 5.1 (1951): 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Such courage from early local evangelists brought the villagers and the local chiefs to Christ.

While some of the ESAAE learned a lot from the evangelistic methods of the Western missionaries, they developed their own strategies that suited their working conditions and circumstances. While some Adventist missionaries in East Africa applied "corporal punishment to students who did not attend church,"<sup>40</sup> there has been no record of such a method applied by new evangelists in their areas of command.

The ESAAE constituted a real strength for the Adventist mission in Africa by the 1960s. There were eighty-six of the passionate evangelists in 1968 on the West Coast. By the 1970s, women also joined hands with men to advance the mission of Adventism in Africa. Among the first two known ladies in West Africa were Miss Odias of Benin-City, Nigeria and Miss Ogunseso of Ode Remo, Nigeria.<sup>41</sup> Both graduates from the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, they supported the mission in their own capacities. Bert B. Beech reported in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* that there were a total of 374 students who became evangelists and graduated from the Bible Correspondence School in 1973, and more than 8000 active students who were enrolled to serve later as new evangelists in Africa.<sup>42</sup>

In East Africa, When the German missionaries were expelled from their colony and were taken as prisoners-of-war in September 1916, the mission work continued through the help of new evangelists.<sup>43</sup> Indigenous people at Pare, Tanzania under the leadership of E. Kibwana, D. Teendwa, P. Sebughe, and A. Msangi ensured the continuity of the missionary work. And by 1921, after World War I, there were dozens of newcomers to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and not less than one hundred believers were waiting for baptism.<sup>44</sup>

E. Mafuru and J. Salimu emerged as evangelists and potential leaders in Tanganyika by the 1950s. Most importantly, F. H. Muderpach lived an exemplary life whose testimony transformed his community. He "spent all his time and funds for the sake of his African brothers. At his death even the Muslims held a special service at their mosque, and the Roman

<sup>40</sup> K. B. Elineema, "Development of the Adventist Church in Tanzania," in *The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Church in East Africa*, ed. K. B. Elineema (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: E. Elineema, 1992), 57. See also K. B. Elineema, "The Mission's Contributions to Tanzania," in *Seventh-day Adventist Contributions*, 41-56.

<sup>41</sup> Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Bert B. Beech, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 1974, 21, quoted in Agboola, *Seventh-day Adventist History*, 77.

<sup>43</sup> Elineema, "Development of Adventist Church," 59.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Catholics sent a delegation to his graveside, declaring him to be a true 'saint.'<sup>45</sup> All of these exemplary services contributed immensely to the development of Adventist mission in Africa.

Unfortunately, the works of these early local pioneers have not yet received an intensive study. This is due to some major issues. First, historians are confronted with the problem of sources. Until the coming of Western education in Africa, African societies have depended on oral tradition to preserve and record their past. There were no written stories of their victories, vicissitudes, and earnest struggles in life. When Western Adventist missionaries came, they gave reports of their achievements in church magazines and other denominational outlets such as *The Review and Herald*, *The South African Sentinel*, *The South African Missionary*, *The African Division Outlook* (1921-1931), *The South African Missionary* (1903-1921), *Trans-African Division Outlook* (1964-1974), and *West African Advent Messenger* (1951-1985). These accounts are mostly about the stories of faith, struggles, and successes of Western missionaries. While they could sometimes refer to local pioneers who collaborated with them in their missions, they could not describe the feelings of these local agents. Therefore, we know little of the magnitude of information that existed with regards to the stories of new evangelists and how they were able to change the face of Adventism, from a struggling movement to a prosperous and very competitive religious organization in Africa.

The Western missionaries documented their experiences in part because they were required to do so. The General Conference needed to hear from them. The Department of Foreign Mission worked closely with Adventist missionaries around the world to ensure that the church strives to achieve its goal of penetrating every single corner of the earth. Hence, even when the missionaries may not have wanted to document their stories, they were in some ways forced to do so, something which yielded a massive documentation of their stories compared to the experiences of the ESAAE. However, the hope to retrace the feelings and anxiety of new evangelists is not completely lost. The story of the denomination in Africa is very recent; it is less than 130 years. Therefore, historians still have the opportunity to interview the immediate descendants of these local agents of Adventist mission in Africa. To do this, the church must be more intentional in sponsoring the project. With the recent *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, there is hope for a systematic analysis of the stories of local pioneers in Africa. Although oral history may not compensate for the missing account of this history, it may provide insights with which the denomination can be contented.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Selected Early Sub-Saharan African Adventist Evangelists

A number of Seventh-day Adventist new evangelists, whose contributions have been somehow documented, will be briefly highlighted. In this endeavor, it is impossible to expect a detailed explanation of their achievements because of the reasons sources already referred to.

The first of these early sub-Saharan Adventist evangelists is ichard-Mako from South Africa. His story of success in Adventist mission amidst a society geared in racial segregation needs to be told. Ordained into the gospel ministry in 1915,<sup>46</sup> he could be the first ever ordained Black minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa. He accepted the Adventist message in 1893 and was, therefore, among the first Africans to be converted to the denomination.<sup>47</sup> A talented individual, "Moko had the gift of languages; he could read and write English and Dutch."<sup>48</sup> This was an asset at a time when many Africans could barely communicate with people of foreign languages. Moko was committed to studying and explaining the Bible to people. He brought them to Christ.

Another local pioneer whose story can be traced is Isaiah A. A. Balogun from Ekiti, Nigeria. He was the first to be ordained in the Adventist pastoral work in Nigeria on February 16, 1930, fifteen years after the ordination of Moko from South Africa.<sup>49</sup> An individual highly respected among his peers, Balogun pioneered the Adventist message among the Yorubas at an age when most of them shared common social values patterned after the worship of traditional deities. The Oyo, the Ketu, the Sabe, the Egbado and Egba, the Ekiti, the Ondo, the Akoko, and the Owo formed some of the major Yoruba people, among which the impact of Balogun was felt. By the time the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to Ekiti where Balogun was born, the Anglican Church had several converts already. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was a latecomer in the region.

Balogun was born around 1882 and became a member of the Anglican Church in 1906. Because of his exceptional abilities in "handling spiritual matters, he was made leader in the Anglican church."<sup>50</sup> He had no salary for the work he was doing. He earned his livelihood through his own work; he was a sawyer. But when he came in contact with the Seventh-day

<sup>46</sup> Sokupa, "Documented Memories," 173.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>49</sup> Babalola, "Sweet Memories," 123.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Adventist message and its Sabbath truth, Balogun “zealously embraced the Adventist message and taught others.”<sup>51</sup> R. P. Dauphin, a pioneer evangelist in West Africa who resided in Sierra Leone gave this report about Balogun:

There is a young man whose name is Isaiah Balogun. Balogun is a Yoruba word which means captain. He wanted to know who we are. Someone told him we are the people keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath. Finally, with joy he heard the message; and without any outward demonstration, spread the gospel news among his countrymen many miles away and, as a result a large number of people accepted the message.<sup>52</sup>

Upon his conversion into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1916, his leadership and ministerial skills were recognized. He was appointed the district pastor in charge of churches at Iloro, Odo-Owa, and Oke-Ila. “Under his leadership, many of the Anglicans defected to the Adventist church.”<sup>53</sup> He worked in several other places in Oyo and Kwara states, championing the gospel among the idol worshippers by converting them to the Christian faith. When he died on July 27, 1947, he was 65. Although the adherents of the Anglican Church were not happy with him because he “fished” from their church, Balogun was

able to meet his own people readily on their own ground. He knew some of his members and some of them grew together with him. He was familiar with local terrains and where the missionaries could not go, he led the way. He became a forerunner for the expatriates, though limited in education, he performed excellently well.<sup>54</sup>

On his death, several villages in Nigeria, from the west to east and the south to the north, received the Adventist message; the Sabbath truth was preached. He remained a giant in Adventist collective story in Nigeria and even in West Africa. Other pioneers who were influential in advancing the Adventist message in Nigeria included J. J. Hyde, A. J. Dike, J. A. Adeogun, and C. Chima.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>52</sup> R. P. Dauphin, “Erunmu, Southern Nigeria,” *Adventist Review and Herald* 93.29 (1916): 12.

<sup>53</sup> David A. Babalola, “Balogun, Isaiah Ajibola (1882–1947)” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventist*, para. 3, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=6G6P#fn2>.

<sup>54</sup> Babalola, *Sweet Memories*, 124.

<sup>55</sup> Philemon O. Amanze, Abimbola O. Fagbe, and Oyewale A. Akintunde, *Pioneers: Courageous Stories of God’s People* (Lagos, Nigeria: Jamiro Press, 2011), 31–34, 42–45, 46–49, 55–60, 65–67, 77–79; Babalola, *Sweet Memories*, 61–167.

In Ghana, an influential new evangelist who contributed to the development and growth of Seventh-day Adventism was C. B. Mensah. Born in 1918, he accepted the Adventist message through the work of J. J. Hyde, another pioneer missionary in West Africa.<sup>56</sup> He began his pastoral work in 1933. He was ordained on July 24, 1945. Along with White missionaries who served as his mentors in the preaching of God's word, Mensah had the passion to exalt Christ and present Him to his own brethren. Soon, his exceptional talent was detected by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana. During his presidency, he

encouraged more laymen into evangelism. He strategically used camp meetings as big platforms for soul winning. C. B. Mensah's presidency initiated and promoted the opening of Asokore Teacher Training College and Agona Teacher Training College in 1962 and 1963 respectively.<sup>57</sup>

As a very influential leader, his ideas and encouragements led to synergized efforts for mission among Adventists. In fact, the colleges he founded

became great pathways for Adventist missions. Many students who passed through were impacted positively by Adventist doctrines, and many more converted into the faith.... C. B. Mensah's administration brought many souls into Adventism: membership of 4,933 in 42 churches he inherited to 10,034 in 56 churches, the membership more than doubling.<sup>58</sup>

Mensah's role in advancing the cause of Adventism in Ghana was thus important. Under his leadership, the church grew in membership, schools were added, and members were enlightened to accept Seventh-day Adventism not as part of a foreign religion but as the church of God given to humanity. Mensah could connect the Sabbath message to the Saturday worship which predated the arrival of White missionaries in Africa.

In Cameroon, among the most significant local pioneers who took the Adventist message to the villagers and preached to them in their own native language were B. Thomas, A. Barnabas, M. Ndongo, A. Makong, and B. Abraham. With just rudimentary education, they succeeded in communicating the Bible truth to the people in their communities. They were highly esteemed as they rendered their service to humanity with total

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Hydes was among the Adventist missionaries in West Africa. His contributions to Adventism in Northern Nigeria were significant. John J. Hyde, "An Urgent Plea from Northern Nigeria," *Missionary Worker* 39 (June 1934); John J. Hyde, "A Door Opening," *British Advent Messenger* 42.26 (1937).

<sup>57</sup> Kwame Boakye Kwanin, "Ghana," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, para. 22, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CC1L&highlight=Ghana>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

abnegation. The villagers held them among the saints of the Bible. Philemon Amanze, who documented the work of Ndonggo, reported that

Pastor Ndonggo was very strategic and systematic in evangelism. To win the hearts of many converts, he contributed to their welfare by encouraging periodic community gathering and initiating community projects with the approval of the village rulers. He even went as far as forming community groups to relieve families that had heavy work load and financial challenges. All these avenues were created by pastor Ndonggo to preach the gospel and the Lord blessed his efforts.<sup>59</sup>

When the pioneers passed away, not only did the church mourn but also the people who knew them. Muslims, idols worshippers, and members of other Christian denominations all affirmed that they were indeed God's angels in human form. Through their exemplary lives, hundreds of people accepted Seventh-day Adventism in Cameroon.<sup>60</sup>

In Zimbabwe, the growth of Seventh-day Adventism can be attributed in part to the sacrifices of indigenous leaders. One of them, R. R. Ndhlovu (1927–2000), had administrative, evangelistic, and pastoral skills. He was born in a village known as Essexvale (now Esigodini) on April 27, 1927.<sup>61</sup> He grew up in a religious family. His parents gave him the name Reward to demonstrate their sense of commitment to the coming of Jesus and the eternal reward that He will grant to the faithful. Every child in the Ndhlovu family bore a name that was an expression of the certainty of Christ's promised second coming. These names include Signs, Promise, Reward, Message, Waiting, Grace, Winning, Commeth, and Remnant. The third born in the family, Reward, would choose to become a pastor just like his father. As he saw and watched his father pray for the growth of Adventism in Zimbabwe, Reward decided to be one of the laborers in the field of God's mission. He became a pastor in 1956 at the time when African countries had launched the fight for independence from colonial rulers. This was also a time when new evangelists made sense of Seventh-day Adventism as a religion that can be acculturated in Africa. He had only one year of pastoral training but he was studious and diligent. In 1957, he became the director of personal ministries and Sabbath school, a major branch of evangelism in

<sup>59</sup> Amanze, Fagbe, and Akintunde, *Pioneers*, 81.

<sup>60</sup> Patrice Pahimi, "Mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre missionnaire et dynamique d'intégration sous-régionale en Afrique centrale: Cas des Missions Fraternelle Luthérienne et Adventiste du Septième Jour au nord du Cameroun et au sud du Tchad – XXe siècle-début XXIe siècle," in *Afrika Zamani* 22 & 23 (2014–2015): 131–150; Amanze, Fagbe, and Akintunde, *Pioneers*, 73–79, 80–86, 98–102.

<sup>61</sup> Paminus Machamire, "Ndhlovu, Reward Register (1927–2000)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=6CDG&highlight=Zimbabwe#fn21>.



Southern Rhodesia Mission Field.<sup>62</sup> Through his dedication to the ministry, lay people got the inspiration to get involved in the ministry of bringing more into God's kingdom. In 1961, he became the Zambesi Union director of evangelism. Under his leadership, indigenous people joined Seventh-day Adventism in big numbers.<sup>63</sup> In 1985, just five years after the independence of Zimbabwe, Reward was elected the Zambesi Union president. He served in this capacity for ten years (1985–1995). Through his leadership, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe experienced a membership growth "from 85,857 in 1986 to 206,543 by December 1994," the addition of health and educational institutions, and an increase in "village chapels." In appreciation of his ministry, "Solusi University conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1995,"<sup>64</sup> just five years to his death. By this time, the church in Zimbabwe had already occupied a prominent place in African Adventism. Young African people got the inspiration to further the work as White missionaries retreated from Zimbabwe.

In Zambia, D. C. Lufungulo was among the local evangelists whose contributions had been significant to the development of Seventh-day Adventism in Africa. He was born in Mwamfuli, Samfya on June 6, 1924 in what was then known as Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). He began his pastoral work in 1958.<sup>65</sup> This was a significant time in African Christianity as the leadership of the church was handed to Africans. By the time Zambia got its independence from the British in 1964, Lufungulo became the "first Zambian to serve as the mission station director of Chimpempe, a position he held until 1971."<sup>66</sup> He worked with lay people to inspire them to travel to Zambian villages and win them to Seventh-day Adventism. In December 1978, he became director of the lay activities department at the union in Zambia. Two years later, he was appointed the executive secretary of the union. He died on November 9, 1994. He left behind hundreds of young people who got inspiration from his love of ministry, his passion for winning souls, and his dedication in preaching the word of God.

<sup>62</sup> John M. Dry, "Zambesi Union: Here Am I," *Southern African Division Outlook* 58.3 (March 1960): 7.

<sup>63</sup> F. G. Reid, "Report of the Zambesi Union," *Southern African Division Outlook* 61.2 (February 1963): 15.

<sup>64</sup> Machamire, "Ndhlovu, Reward Register (1927–2000)," para. 30, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=6CDG&highlight=Zimbabwe#fn21>.

<sup>65</sup> Lydia Bwalya Lufungulo Chembo, "Lufungulo, Diamond Chibwe (1924–1994)," <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=5DE2&highlight=Lufungulo,Diamond|Chibwe>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 15, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=5DE2&highlight=Lufungulo,Diamond|Chibwe>.

The evangelists referred to here are only a few of those whose works have been documented. There had been a significant number of new evangelists who worked for the development of Seventh-day Adventism in Liberia, Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Gabon, Lesotho, Kenya, Rwanda, and in all the remaining African countries. The foreign missionaries sowed the seed of the gospel; the ESAAE developed local strategies to nurse it and bring it to prominence.

Finding itself within a non-Western context, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had to make sense of African realities to be able to preach to the adherents of African Traditional Religions as well as to the adherents of African Christian indigenous churches. To do this, new Seventh-day Adventist evangelists had to provide more convincing teachings, surpassing prophetic utterances of prophets from indigenous churches. They preached that Seventh-day Adventists were God's true children. They were protected against the evil eye. Such public perception of Seventh-day Adventists constituted significant assets for preaching the Adventist faith to Africans. From the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, its adherents viewed themselves as special. "In retrospect some of this seems a little paranoid, but the fact remains that because of this perception most Adventists at one time felt that they knew exactly who they were: the 'remnant,' 'the people of God,' 'the true church' with a special message for a special time. They had 'the truth.'"<sup>67</sup>

Energetic apocalyptic preaching to non-Adventists, emphasis on prophetic portions of the Bible, the imminent return of Christ, and special emphasis on the Ten Commandments led to spiritual revivals.<sup>68</sup> Adventist evangelists in Africa preached that people must separate themselves from practices that detract attention from living a righteous life. These constituted additional ingredients that nurtured the commitment of Seventh-day Adventists in Africa to win the heart of non-Adventists.

#### 4. Impact of Early Sub-Saharan African Adventist Evangelists on the Collective Growth of Seventh-day Adventism in Africa

When the leadership of the church in Africa got in the hands of new evangelists, the church grew tremendously. Mission fields, conferences, and

<sup>67</sup> Jack W. Provonsha, *Remnant Crisis* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1993), 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Ayuba Mavalla, *Conflict Transformation: Churches in the Face of Structural Violence in Northern Nigeria* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 46.

unions were added. As more people joined the church, the ESAAE served as mentors. They trained their brethren and sent them first to their families, their immediate communities, their tribes, the neighboring villages, and then people far and near within their reach. They travelled by foot, sometimes in hunger and under the scorching sun, but they were very courageous in fulfilling the gospel commission. As they preached in local languages, villagers were thrilled and had no other option but to heed the message of the "men and women of God" as they were gently referred to.

In the eyes of the villagers, the ESAAE possessed a supernatural power surpassing that of traditional witches. As the doom pronounced by the witches against early local evangelists never took effect, people came to accept the Sabbath message as a sign of peculiarity in the fight against evil spirits, demons, curses, diseases, and sufferings. The villagers called upon early local evangelists for prayer. As early local evangelists prayed, the Lord visited the villagers and blessed their families. Such divine visitation was celebrated in the communities. The new converts were not afraid to tell their stories of how they overcame the fear of evil spirits, the doom of demons, and the invisible plans of witches through the prayer of the people of God. As the converts testified, their stories became legends of conversions as they were retold from one place to another, one village to another, and one tribe to another, each with new added meaning to thrill the hearers with the Christian power found in the Adventist faith. It was to no surprise that from the 1950s to 2000 when the ESAAE took over the leadership of Seventh-day Adventism in Africa, the church experienced a dramatic growth. In 1948 for instance, the church had only 80,395 members. This number increased to 319,170 in 1968; 821,725 in 1981; 1,769,082 in 1988; and 3,176,662 in 1998.<sup>69</sup>

A sophisticated means of evangelism in the hands of new evangelists was the sale of Christian books. Literature evangelism was significant and accounted for most of the increase of membership in the sense that it targeted those who were able to read and write, who in their turn shared their new discovery and new faith with people of their household. Hundreds of

<sup>69</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1950 Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1950); Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1970 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1970); Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1982 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982); Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1970 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1970); Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1989 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1989); Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1999 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1999). The statistics are calculated by extracting the membership of African territories located in European divisions and Southern African Division.

literature evangelists, men and women, pledged their commitment to Christ and service to humanity as they entered every corner of Africa to spread the word of God and its message for the salvation of humanity. One of the literature evangelists, A. N. Daity, wrote on November 1951 in an article titled "Why I Became a Colporteur Evangelist":

I feel it an immense pleasure to express my views of entering this noble work of colporteur evangelism. Being a member of the great Advent Movement, I realized the need of speedily carrying the third angel's message to the people of this sin-sick world of ours, and especially to my own people here in the Gold Coast.... I saw that it would be the right channel through which I could bring many lost souls to the Saviour. The Lord is richly blessing my labour. I enjoy my work. Dear believers, the fields are really ripe for the harvest. It is the augmenting of this colporteur work which will provide an opportunity to let many in this generation know more of the love of God, His plan of redemption, and the imminent coming of our Redeemer Jesus Christ.<sup>70</sup>

New evangelists, through literature evangelism, believed they provided an opportunity to people to know more about God's love and the urgency of His second coming.

Thus, through various means, the ESAAE communicated the Adventist faith to people. Through their labor, they progressively changed the demographics of Adventism. To appreciate these changes, one must recognize that in the early 1910, there were only 768 Seventh-day Adventists in Africa with less than fifty churches.<sup>71</sup> Twenty-nine of these members were based in Egypt. Three decades after 1910, by 1940, the church grew from the south to the east then to the West Coast of Africa. The total membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa in 1940 was 44,358, with more than 170 churches.<sup>72</sup> At this time, the number of new evangelists had increased. They began to take the lead in evangelism as they were mentored by White missionaries. The results of their labors became visible by the 1950s. Thus, following the hard work of new evangelists, in addition to the collapse of imperialism and its paternalistic attitude, a significant growth was registered in the field of Democratic Republic of Congo with nearly 65,000 members.<sup>73</sup> By the 1960s, the total membership in the sub-Sahara was

<sup>70</sup> A. N. Daity, "Why I Became a Colporteur Evangelist," *West African Advent Messenger* 9.8 (1951): 2.

<sup>71</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1910 Year Book*.

<sup>72</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, *1940 Year Book*.

<sup>73</sup> Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 546.

236,000. This figure changed to 700, 000 by 1980 and grew to 2,900,000 in 1996.<sup>74</sup> Steady growth and reorganization continued through the years after the departure of the missionaries to adjust the church structures to African realities.

After the independence of African nations, although the church kept growing and the political map of Africa changed with the rising of the newly independent countries appearing, hard times challenged the growth of the church. Conflict in the then Zaire, famines in most parts of Africa, and Biafra war in Nigeria constituted some of the most difficult events with which the church had to struggle. Added to these hardships were Muslim-Christian tensions over converts; the economic recession in the 1990s; the Rwandan genocide, during which an estimated number of 10,000 Seventh-day Adventists were killed.<sup>75</sup> These among other serious factors affected the new faith on the African continent. But through the work of new evangelists, the church was able to fight social odds to continue growing fast.

## 5. Conclusion

This article examined the role of new Adventist evangelists in the development, expansion, and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa. They were the major players who sought to communicate present truths to their families and nearest and farthest communities with a passion equal to that of their mentors, the Western missionaries. Following general trends of the winds of independence, the ESAAE sought not only to assure the continuity of the teachings of the church but also to develop strategies in conquering the hearts of pagan worshippers, whose customs and traditions gave nearly no hope to Western missionaries, so that one day they could be reached and accept the Adventist faith. From South Africa to Ghana, Nigeria to Zimbabwe, and Kenya to Egypt, new evangelists spared no means to preach the gospel of Christ. They won the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people and led them to accept Adventism. Between the 1960s and 2000s, the growth of the church became very impressive as skills taught by Western missionaries were integrated and redefined intuitively by people who had only rudimentary education. Their labor transformed Adventism in Africa into a major religious movement which is likely to prove its strengths in the near future as thousands keep joining Adventism each year in the continent.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 546.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 548.