

31. African Prophet & Independent Church Movements

About 1600 the Nkimba and Kimpasi prophet movements arose in the Congo, resulting in syncretistic sects based on Jesuit institutions.

In 1702 the 22 year old “prophetess” Donna Beatrice reacted to Catholicism in the Congo by setting up the Antonian sect. She gained an immense following, but was burned alive in 1706 by King Pedro VI.

An anti-sorcery prophetic movement called “Kiyoka” (Burning) swept across northern Angola in 1872. The same year the first indigenous church movement in southern Africa started with the secession from the Herman congregation of the Paris Mission in Basutoland (now Lesotho).

The first indigenous church was born in Madagascar in 1894 with the splitting of the Malagasy Protestant Church from the LMS. The same year the Soatana Rivival began among Lutheran and LMS churches, lasting for 90 years.

By 1899 there were fifty African indigenous church groups scattered throughout the continent, claiming 42,400 adherents, mostly from 20 African tribes.

In 1908 in Nyasaland, Elliott Kamwana baptized 10,000 Lakeside Tonga, starting another major separatist church known as the Church of the Watchtower. In 1911 the Watchtower movement from the USA entered Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) from Nyasaland, meeting with extraordinary success. In 1970 over 800,000 living Zambians were estimated to have been members at one time or another.

In 1913 the Liberian prophet William Wade Harris preached in the Ivory Coast, resulting in 120,000 converts by 1915 and eventually resulting in the large Harrist denomination.

A mass revival in Uganda in 1914 resulted in the Society of the One Almighty God (KOAB) or Malakite Church. The group seceded from the CMS and won 91,740 adherents by 1921.

The Nomiya Luo Mission was the first of Kenya’s independent indigenous churches, begun in Nyanza in 1914 as a schism from the Anglican Church.

Miraculous healings brought about further independent groups. An influenza epidemic in Nigeria in 1918 (part of a worldwide swine flu epidemic) resulted in the formation of many prayer and healing groups. These later (around 1925) grew into large indigenous churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and Christ Apostolic Church. These churches were largely the result of splits from the Anglican church due to

charismatic revival. There were so many that by 1960 they formed the Nigeria Association of Aladura Churches (NAAC).

By 1910 indigenous churches numbered 300 across Africa and claimed 600,000 adherents.

The Ngunza movement which became Kimbanguism grew out of a revival in 1921 which opposed the old paganism and brought new vitality to mission work, especially in the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden missions, but it became anti-white and separated from the mission churches when it was suppressed by the authorities. Simon Kimbangu (1889-1951) preached in the lower Congo, leading to a revival. Mass conversions resulted, followed by persecution, jailing, deportation. By 1960 a massive indigenous church (EJCSK—The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through his Prophet Simon Kimbangu) resulted.

In 1927 the East African Revival movement called Balokole or Saved Ones emerged in Rwanda, then moved rapidly across Uganda and into Congo, later to Sudan and Malawi, even forming cells in Europe and America. From 1931 to 1985, eighty mass revival conventions were held across East Africa, with attendance up to 50,000 at a time.

In the same year in South Africa, the origins were laid for the Latter Rain revivals and a return to primitive Pentecostalism. This resulted in a group called the blourokkies.

Prophet movements in the French Congo were: 1930 Matswa, 1953 Lassyism (Bougie), and 1964 Croix-Koma.

A charismatic revival in 1932 amongst the American Methodists in Southern Rhodesia was led by Johane Maranke and resulted in a massive indigenous church forming: The African Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke (AACJM). The group now claims followers all across central Africa.

A few times the converse process occurred: African indigenous groups were accepted into the fellowship of mainline groups. One occurrence was the acceptance in 1946 of the African Orthodox Church, an independent Kenyan body, into the communion of the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Alexandria, Egypt.

By 1950 there were 1,700 separate African Independent Churches claiming 3,500,000 adherents. By 1969 they had grown to 5,800 groups with 17 million adherents, growing by 960,000 a year. In 1985 they numbered 7,170 groups and a total of 32,700,000 adherents, increasing by 850,000 new members a year.

Around 1960 African indigenous conciliarism began to mushroom in all but North Africa.

Celestial Churches of West Africa

Amazonia Mission

Saint Esprit

Black Messiahs

Nzambe Malamu

Churches in Ghana

The concept of spiritual churches

Understanding the appeal of indigenous churches