

Research Article

Corresponding Author:
Professor Onah Augustine
Odey

Email ID:
onah.odey@yahoo.com

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PASTOR EYO NKUNE OKPO ENE (1895 – 1973): THE FORGOTTEN HERO OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH, NIGERIA

**Professor Onah Augustine Odey (Ph.D), FAR, KSJ¹,
Dr Gregory Ajima Onah²**

¹Department of Religious and Cultural Studies University of Uyo,
P.M.B. 1017, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, West Africa.

²Department of Religious and Cultural Studies University of Calabar,
P.M.B. 1117 Calabar, Cross River State Nigeria, West Africa

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Abstract:

This brief article is a legacy of the authors twenty-five year teaching experience of Nigerian Church History in three Nigerian Universities between May 25, 1987 and May 31, 2012 and his ministerial duties and lecture on Church history in the Lutheran Seminary in Nigeria and the various interaction with other Christian brethren, especially in relationship with Christian students of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria. In this article, the researchers have tried to describe the early history of the Apostolic Church in Cross River State of Nigeria, West Africa, through a brief biographical sketch of Pastor Eyo Nkune Okpo Ene of Ambo Family, Mbaraokom, Creek Town (Obio Oko), who lived between 22nd November, 1895 and 1st February, 1973 (78years). This work is a paragon or model of other similar ones: like those of Garrick Idakatima Sokari Braide, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Essien Ukpabio, Jonathan Udo Ekong and others.

Introduction:

In studying and teaching Nigerian Church History in Universities of Uyo, Calabar, the Jonathan Ekong Memorial Lutheran Seminary, Obot Idim and Adekunle Ajasin University for over twenty-five (25) years, the researcher were 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 Pastor Eyo Nkune Okpo Ene, one of the first fruits of the Apostolic Church, Nigerian Mission, in Calabar, on the arrival of the first The Apostolic

Church Evangelist, Evangelist J. A. Babalola in Creek Town in 1934 (Ryan, 1987), a year after Pastor Idris J. Vaughan was posted to Calabar in June, 1933 to conduct Revival Campaign. While Pastor I. G. Sakpo, was the first ordained Prophet of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria in 1933. Interestingly, both Essien Ukpabio, the First Efik Minister ordained in October, 1853, seven years after Hope Waddell's arrival in Calabar and first baptized Presbyterian convert (Kalu, 1978: 17 – 25) and Pastor Ene hail from Creek Town.

A Brief History of the Apostolic Church, Nigeria:

In 1908, Frank Hodges was inspired to found and name his Church “The Apostolic Church”, while the founder of The Apostolic Church, Great Britain was Pastor D. P. Williams. The Apostolic Church Missionary delegates from Great Britain arrived Nigeria on 23rd September, 1931. The delegates left the shores of Great Britain for Nigeria on 9th September, 1931 and arrived Apapa Wharf, Lagos. Four hundred people were said to be converted during the reception service in honour of the delegates while eight hundred people were said to have been healed and baptized with the help of the Holy Spirit on 23rd September, 1931 (Okon, 2006). The first missionary delegates sent to Nigeria from the Apostolic Church Great Britain were Pastors D. P. Williams, Jones Williams and Andrew Turnbull as response to a letter requesting missionary delegates from The Apostolic Church Great Britain to visit Nigeria by Pastor D. O. Odubanjo.

The first pastoral ordination service of the Apostolic Church, Nigeria was conducted on Sunday, 15th November, 1931 by Pastors D. P. Williams, Andrew Turnbull and W. J. Williams. The first Pastors ordained in the Apostolic Church, Nigeria were Pastors Esinsinade, D. O. Odubanjo, J. A. Babatope, S. A. Mensah, E. G. L. Macaulay, I. B. Akinyele, and S. J. Adegboyega (Bassey, 2005). The pastoral ordination service was conducted at No. 51 Moloney Great Bridge Street, Lagos (Nwabuko, 2004).

Pastor George Perfect and Idris J. Vaughan were the first resident missionaries of The Apostolic Church sent to Nigeria and they arrived Lagos on 2nd June, 1932; while Pastor Idris J. Vaughan was posted to Calabar to conduct Revival Campaign in June, 1933. Evangelist J. A. Babalola was the first The Apostolic Church Evangelist posted to Creek Town (Ferguson, 1978:369).

In 1935, four main conventions were established in the four principal centre’s in Nigeria, namely: Annual Easter Convention, Ilesha; Annual National Convention, Lagos; Annual Christmas Convention, Calabar and Annual Christmas Convention, Zaria.

The first National Convention of The Apostolic Church was held in 1935 in Lagos while Ministers from The Apostolic Church, Calabar centre who attended the first National Convention in 1935 were Pastors Jonah Eteffia, A. O. Henshaw, J. U. Udom, E. O. Ene and Akpabio (Okon:5).

In August, 1936 the word “AREA” was first used to describe the various Administrative divisions of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria, while the first European Superintendent of The Apostolic Church, Calabar Area was Pastor Vivian Wellings who succeeded Pastor C. H. G. Rosser in Nigeria on 4th June, 1936. Pastor S. G. Adegboyega was the first National Witness Leader of the Apostolic Church, Nigeria. Pastor Vivian Wellings assumed duty in Calabar Area in 1937 while the second European Area Superintendent of The Apostolic Church, Calabar Area was Pastor W. E. Rhodes.

The first African Evangelists of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria were Evangelists J. A. Bablola and D. O. Orekoya; while the first African delegates of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria to visit The Apostolic Church, Great Britain were Pastors J. U. Udom (Calabar Area); J. A. Babatope (Ilesha Area) and Eyo Nkune Okpo Ene (Calabar Area). The concern of this article is on the last name; one of the delegates at the first National Convention in 1935 and first African delegate of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria to visit The Apostolic Church, Great Britain – yet forgotten in any circle of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria.

Parentage and Birth:

The Late Pastor (Rev.) Eyo Nkune Okpo Ene was born in Creek Town to the family of Late Elder Okpo Nkune Okpo Ene Okon of Ambo family, Mbaraokom, Creek Town (Obio Oko), Cross River State, Nigeria, on 22nd November, 1895. His mother was Madam Edak Esuk Bassey Ekpenyong of Abasi Ekpenyong house of Okobo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. He was the 7th child in a family of ten (10) children. His father was an Elder of the Presbyterian Church, Creek Town and got his ten children Baptized in infancy. His father was a good Christian disciplinarian and so made sure that all his children

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