

# Erondu, James Ironi (1924–1996)

OKEZIE ERONDU

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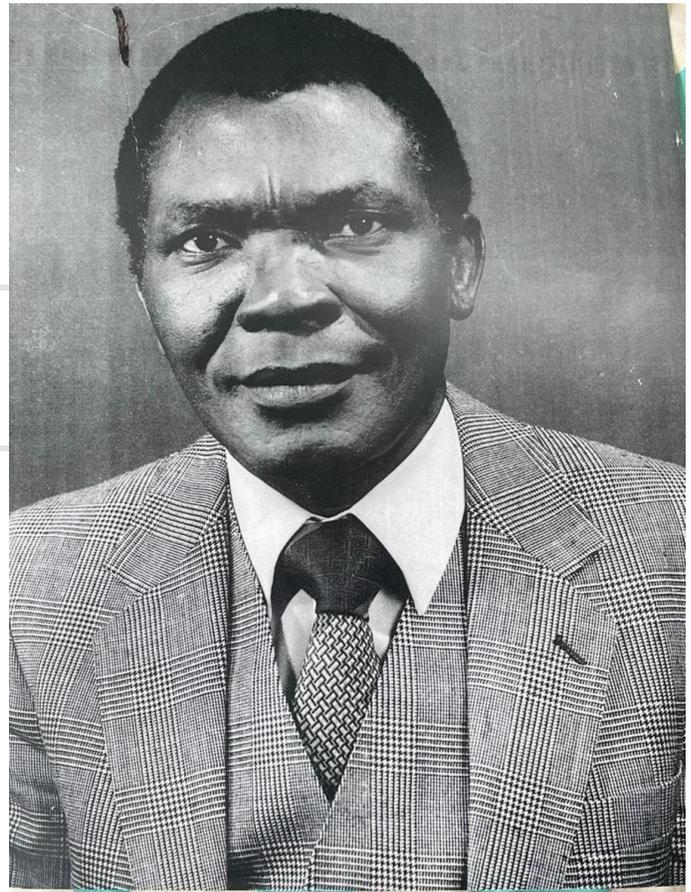
James Ironi Erondu was a pastor and pioneering publishing director of the Nigerian Union Mission.

## Early Life

James Ironi Erondu was born in 1924 to Chief Oribeji and Oyidia Roseanne Erondu of Umuokoro, Amaoji, Ngwaukwu, in Isi-Ala Ngwa North local government, Abia state, Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> His parents named him Jimmy, but later his first-grade teacher officially changed his name to James.<sup>2</sup> However, his friends continued to call him Jimmy until he died. He was born into a polygamous family.<sup>3</sup> He was the third surviving son of his father and was the only surviving child of his mother. His mother had two other children before his birth, but they had died. Thus, when he was born, among the names he was given was *Ironi*, which means *There is enmity all around*.<sup>4</sup>

## Education and Marriage

He attended St Peter's Primary School, Amaoji. From here he proceeded to the Collegiate School, Ihie, in 1936. While he was still there, his father died in 1942. The death of his father and subsequent hardships forced him to leave school;<sup>5</sup> however, it did not deter him from seeking to further his education. With God on his side and his determination to obtain more education, he enrolled in a home study college that provided correspondence courses. Among the courses he took was secretarial studies.<sup>6</sup> Through this he became proficient in secretarial skills and eventually he established his own secretarial institute where people could come to learn typing, shorthand, and office skills. His passion for education and self-improvement caused him to encourage others to improve their educational standard.<sup>7</sup>



James Erondu

Photo courtesy of Okezie Erondu.

James married Emily Oduagu Onuiri on April 6, 1954. He fondly called her *Nwannem* (my sister). This marriage was happy and blessed with seven children: three daughters (Oluchi Ukomadu, Uloma Okezie, Ugboaku Esochaghi) and four sons (Okezie Erondu, Uzooma Erondu, Amaechi Erondu, Chukwuemeka Erondu). It was also blessed with 21 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren.<sup>8</sup>

## Ministry

In 1945 he was introduced to Adventism by a member of his family. As a result of the truth which he discovered in the Sabbath message, he became an Adventist, was baptized that year, and decided to become a literature evangelist. He went to Aba for six months of formal training to qualify him for this ministry.<sup>9</sup>

Upon completion of the literature evangelism course, he was sent to Obioho in Okigwe as a pioneer literature evangelist in the city. His second literature ministry station was Calabar. While at Calabar the church needed literature evangelists in the northern part of Nigeria. Thus, he was sent to Kaduna in 1952. He worked in Kaduna till 1958, when the need arose for him to go to Kano. He labored in Kano until the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in 1967, forcing him to flee with his family back to his home village in Amaorji. The church requested that he go to Enugu to continue the work, though the war was still going on in Nigeria. The Lord was there to shield him and his family. They faithfully went to Enugu, where they remained until they returned home in 1968, as the war had intensified.<sup>10</sup>

In 1970, after the civil war, he was elected the publishing secretary of the Eastern Nigeria Mission. This was an office he occupied until 1973. In 1972 the Nigerian Union Mission was carved out of the West African Union.<sup>11</sup> At the inaugural constituency meeting of the union, James was elected as the publishing director of the union. This was a position he held for 17 years, from 1973 to 1990 when he retired. While holding this office, he simultaneously held other offices, like director of the Voice of Prophecy and Spirit of Prophecy. He won many awards, including the "Outstanding Leadership Award."<sup>12</sup>

James was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1976 at Ibadan, the headquarters of West Nigeria Mission. His ordination to ministry and knowledge of literature evangelism were major assets for him in ministering to people. He was a people person who could meet each person at their own level and minister to their needs.<sup>13</sup>

His ordination to the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a fulfilment of the desire of his father for him to be an ordained minister. His father had wanted him to be an ordained minister of the Anglican Church rather than the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a result of this desire, Chief Oribeji Erondu, assisted in building the Anglican church in his village on condition that the church would train his son to become an Anglican minister. But the Lord turned this plan around, so that Pastor Erondu became an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church instead.<sup>14</sup>

Through the literature ministry he was able to minister in three major areas of Nigeria, the east, north, and western sections. He became fluent in speaking three Nigerian languages: Ibo, Efik, and Hausa.

One example of divine protection came during his first mission appointment in Okigwe. One day he delivered books to a prospect who had ordered them. Because he had to cover a long distance to deliver the books and then return home, he was traveling late in the day. Being new in this community, he was not aware of the customs of the people. While he was on his way home, he met a procession of men coming from the Juju shrine, some carrying torches, others beating drums, singing, and brandishing their cutlasses. It was the custom in this community that no one who was not a member of the Juju cult was to be outside when the procession was moving at night. Everyone must be indoors during the time of the Juju Festival. It was also known that any nonmember of the Juju shrine who got in the way of the Juju would be killed by beheading. James was unaware of this custom when he met the Juju Procession.

The Juju priest immediately swung the cutlass with all his strength with the intention to behead him, but the Lord sent His angels who diverted the cutlass. Instead of the cutlass cutting off his head, it only scratched his mouth a little. That sent fear into these men who saw him as no ordinary man, for no one had ever survived that dreadful act before. They immediately stopped the procession. The Juju priest usually did not speak during the procession, because he had a palm frond in his mouth. But this incident shocked him as no one had ever survived his cut except this man standing before him. The priest screamed, "Who are you?" James explained that he was a literature evangelist for the Lord from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Instead of attempting to harm him, the members of the procession became afraid of him. They decided to protect him and turned around to escort him to his home. Another Juju group was coming behind them and they did not want him to be harmed. Beating their drums and singing their songs, they led him safely to his house.<sup>15</sup>

During the Nigerian civil war, James was not deterred from engaging in literature ministry. He had a firm belief that the Lord would protect him, and the Lord did protect him. He kept canvassing in the city of Enugu, the capital city of Biafra. When the war intensified, he sent his family back to his village of origin. He stayed in Enugu until the city fell into the hands of Nigerian soldiers. Following the fall of Enugu, his whereabouts became a concern to his wife and children; but he was found to be safe, and he returned home to be with his family throughout the rest of the war.<sup>16</sup>

He was appointed to serve as a pastor in the western part of Nigeria where the main language was Yoruba, but he could not speak the language. He oversaw two branch Sabbath Schools. One was in the town of Osu and the other was in Gbongan, both in Osun state of Nigeria. When he attended these churches, he relied on members who could speak English to interpret for him while he preached to the people. One Sabbath he went to the church at Gbongan and none of the interpreters were in church that day. He didn't know how he was going to conduct church without an interpreter. After praying to the Lord, he began to sing in English and the members joined him singing in Yoruba. When the time came for him to preach, he began preaching. He used hand

gestures to explain some of the things that he was saying. At the end of the sermon, he prayed with them. The members later testified that they understood him and appreciated the message of the day.<sup>17</sup>

## Legacy

James Irondu Erundu died October 20, 1996.<sup>18</sup> He left a legacy of fearlessness, faithfulness, and selfless service to God and humanity. During his tenure literature evangelism in Nigeria witnessed exponential growth. Literature evangelists were sent to almost all the major cities of Nigeria, and there was an annual institute which was like in-service training for literature evangelists. This was conducted at every mission and conference headquarters. In 1988 two Literature Ministry Seminaries were established in Nigeria. One was in Lagos with Pastor Onaolapo Ajibade as the director, and the other one was in Aba with Pastor E. Ajuzie as the director. According to Pastor Ajibade, the literature evangelism ministry in Nigeria “witnessed it’s hay days during the tenure of Pastor James I. Erundu.”<sup>19</sup>

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## SOURCES

“Biography of Late Pastor James Irondu Erundu.” Funeral ceremony program, October 1996, in the author’s personal collection.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

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## NOTES

1. “Biography of Late Pastor James Irondu Erundu,” funeral ceremony program, October 1996, in the author’s personal collection.
2. Emily Oduagu Erundu (James Erundu’s widow), interview by author, March 10, 2022.
3. “Biography of Late Pastor James Irondu Erundu,” funeral ceremony program.
4. Interview of his wife, interview by author, March 10, 2022.
5. “Biography of Late Pastor James Irondu Erundu,” funeral ceremony program.
6. Emily Oduagu Erundu (James Erundu’s widow), interview by author, March 10, 2022.
7. Ibid.
8. “Biography of Late Pastor James Irondu Erundu,” funeral ceremony program.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. "Nigeria Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1975), accessed April 4, 2022,  
<https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1975.pdf>.

12. Ibid.

13. Emily Oduagu Erondu (James Erondu's widow), interview by author, March 10, 2022.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Emily Oduagu Erondu (James Erondu's widow), interview by author, March 10, 2022.

19. Onaolapo Ajibade, phone interview by author, March 31, 2022.

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