

Ile-Ife

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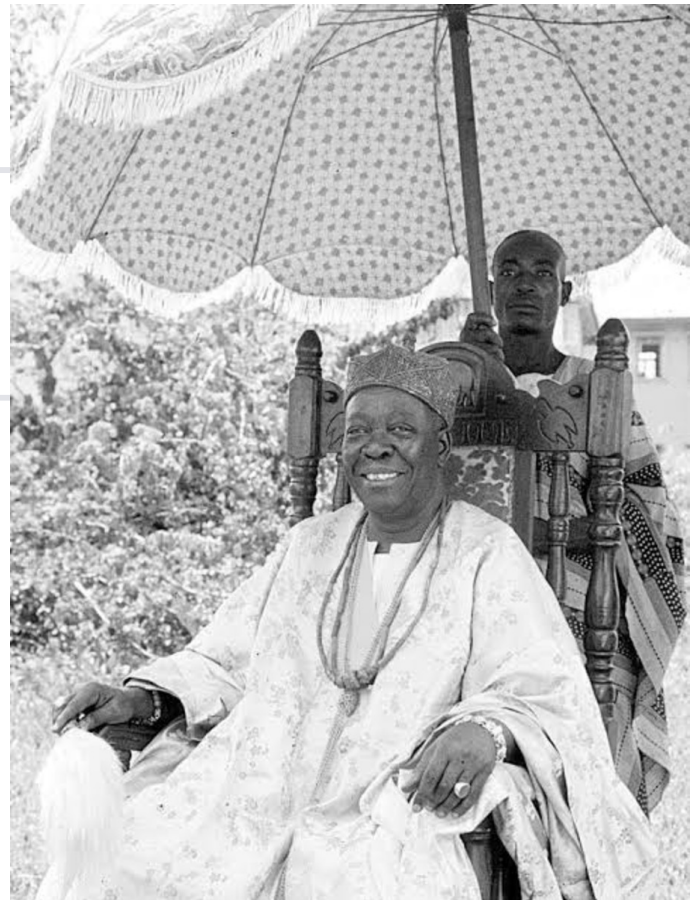
Adventist presence in Ile-Ife started as far back as 1937, when Pastor William McClement from Northern Ireland, who was then the leader of missionary work in Western Nigeria, had an encounter with the Ooni of Ife, His Royal Majesty, Sir Titus Adesoji Aderemi. Since Oba Aderemi came to the throne in 1930, he had been calling for collaboration with anyone who was ready to assist him in the development of Ile-Ife. This is Chief Obafemi Awolowo's eulogy about King Aderemi:

Oba Adesoji Aderemi became the Oni of Ife in 1930, at that time, 50 years ago, the only reputation Ile-Ife had was that it is the cradle of Yoruba people. But within 10 years of his rule, Aderemi had transformed Ile-Ife, by the Nigerian standards, into a modern

town virile business center and a haven for the acquisition of secondary education which was a very rare facility in those days...He advanced the cause of education in all facets, in Ile-Ife.¹

The Seventh-day Adventist Church benefitted from this yearning of the king by coming at the time when the development of Ile-Ife was highly needed.² As a result, the Adventist missionaries led by Pastor Wilfred Till were warmly received. The need for accommodation resulted in an encounter with Pastor Samuel Odunlade Akobi in his Cocoa Storehouse at Idi-Aje, Oja-Ife, Ile-Ife. Pastor Akobi was then the Balogun of St. Philip's Anglican Church, Ayetoro, Ile-Ife. The team leader, Pastor Till, explained to him their mission and predicament concerning a place of worship. He consented to release to them his house at No. 27, Itapa Street, Ajamopo, that was formerly used as a springboard for the establishment of Oduduwa College (the first college in Ile-Ife, initiated by Oba Aderemi).

³ Those of Pastor Odunlade Akobi's household were the first Adventist converts in Ile-Ife.⁴



Oba Sir Titus Adesoji Aderemi, the king of Ile-Ife, who welcomed the Seventh-day Adventist Church to Ile-Ife and gave the land for the Seventh-day Adventist Hospital.

Photo courtesy of Adesoji Aderemi.

The advent of the church witnessed a series of challenges because Sabbath worship was strange to the people in Ile-Ife; hence, the church was called by many names. In response to this ignorance, a series of lectures was organized by Pastor Wilfred Till to enlighten them about the present truth.⁵

In 1929, Pastor William McClement appealed to the General Conference for assistance in establishing a hospital in western Nigeria. The idea was welcomed and, by 1930, US\$8,616 was raised towards the project. In 1939, nine years later, the General Conference delegation led by Dr. G. A. Madgwick, went to Nigeria to search for a location on which the hospital could be established. After they had gone around Yorubaland, the delegates chose Lagere, Idi-Omo, Ile-Ife, as a suitable place to build the hospital. The decision was received with great joy and enthusiasm by the Ooni of Ile-Ife, Oba, Sir Adesoji Aderemi, and he leased 40 acres of land to the Seventh-day Adventist mission. He also donated US\$1,000 to support the project. In 1940, the foundation of the hospital was laid by this very king, His Royal Majesty, Oba Sir, Titus Martins Adesoji Tadeniawo Aderemi, and construction started in earnest under the supervision of Pastor Wilfred Till.⁶

The Second World War found the hospital near completion, and in 1941 the British soldiers took over the hospital and converted it into a military hospital where they treated their casualties. The hospital was returned to the mission in 1944 and the mission bought an extra 50 acres of land for its expansion.⁷

For the speedy completion of the hospital project, church authorities decided to move part of the membership at Ajamopo, which had massively grown in numbers, to Lagere for Sabbath worship and proper supervision of the hospital project. The army authorities offered the worshippers an army tent for their worship. Therefore, after the Second World War, the church was moved to the first out-patient department. When the church building was completed, the church moved to its present place of worship.⁸

The Adventist hospital has been a beehive of activity since 1944 when it was returned to the mission, according to Erwin E. Reinfeldt, one of the visiting men from the General Conference. By 1958 the Adventist Hospital, Ile-Ife, had a bed capacity of 125 and the beds were constantly occupied. He added that between 1944 and 1958, the number of out-patients had increased from 14,600 to 108,566 each year. By 1959, Sister Rose, one of the nursing sisters in the hospital, was able to say that the Ile-Ife Mission Hospital attended to a total of 100,000 people in the city, plus an unknown number in a radius that reaches out many miles from the hospital. It has considerably improved the health of Nigerians. It added longevity and vitality to their lives. "Infant mortality was reduced through that institution. Many people were given free treatment, most especially those who could not afford to pay the bills."⁹

The development that Seventh-day Adventists brought to Ife cannot be over-emphasized, including reduction of mortality rate in infants and adults, providing employment, and putting Ife on the world map.¹⁰ The present king, Ooni, His Imperial Majesty, Oba Enitan Ogunwusi, was born in the hospital.¹¹ These were some of the achievements of Oba Aderemi that Chief Awolowo made reference to in his eulogy.

The Seventh-day Adventist schools established in 1958 had a great influence on the development of Ife because many who graduated from these schools grew up to become people of influence in the society and in Nigeria at large.¹² At present, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ile-Ife owns five primary schools and three secondary schools.

The impact of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Ile-Ife has been great, especially in the areas of healthcare and education. In 2020, there are more than 22 local churches and companies in the city and its surrounding villages.

SOURCES

“A Rare Breed of Monarch,” a funeral speech by Obafemi Awolowo, July 11, 1980. Accessed February 18, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/1405558566329827/posts/this-eulogy-a-rare-breed-of-monarch-which-was-delivered-by-chief-obafemi-awolowo/1957345827817762/>.

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1. “A Rare Breed of Monarch,” a funeral speech by Obafemi Awolowo, July 11, 1980. Accessed February 18, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/1405558566329827/posts/this-eulogy-a-rare-breed-of-monarch-which-was-delivered-by-chief-obafemi-awolowo/1957345827817762/>.
2. Chief Omisakin, the Obalufe of Ile-Ife, interview by the author, Ile-Ife, August 3, 2014.
3. Elder Johnson Akobi, a retired high school principal, interview by the author, June 20, 2018.
4. Babalola, David O. *Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria Since 1914: Impact Analysis 2010* (Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria: Babcock University Press, 2010).
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Elder Johnson Akobi, a retired high school principal, interview by the author, June 20, 2018.

9. Babalola, David O. *Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria Since 1914: Impact Analysis 2010*.

10. Chief Omisakin, the Obalufe of Ile-Ife, interview by the author, Ile-Ife, August 3, 2014.

11. Margaret Omolola Olawuni-Adesiyun, interview by the author, Ile-Ife, December 5, 2018.

12. Chief Omisakin, the Obalufe of Ile-Ife, interview by the author, Ile-Ife, August 3, 2014.

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