

Cosendai, Aimé (1914–1992)

EUDRITCH JEAN

Eudritch Jean: Diploma in Electronic Engineering (Haitian State University), B.A. in Theology (Adventist University of Haiti), and M.T.S. (Friedensau Adventist University [FAU], Germany). Jean worked as an electronic engineer in Haiti for twelve years and shortly served as assistant pastor at the district of Bethanie in the Central Haiti Conference. Currently, he is working as volunteer for the Institute of Adventist Studies of FAU. He plans to pursue doctoral studies in ethics.

Aimé Cosendai was a teacher, pioneer missionary, union president, director of radio work, and hospital administrator in Cameroon and in Switzerland.

Early Life

Aimé Cosendai was a longtime and influential Adventist missionary in French West Africa where he served at different levels. Born in 1914 to Swiss farmers, Henry Cosendai and Marguerite née Gentil, he grew up in the National Protestant Church of Switzerland and attended one of their elementary schools.¹ At fourteen, Cosendai and his family became Seventh-day Adventists after two Adventist colporteurs, who sojourned at their house for four months, shared the Adventist message with them.² Together with his parents, he was baptized at the church in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in 1928.³

Education, Early Career, and Marriage

Following his baptism, Cosendai attended the French Adventist Seminary in Collonges, France, and graduated five years later with a diploma in theology.⁴ While studying at the seminary, he joined the missionary club⁵ and met Madeleine Reimers, who would later become his wife. Soon after his graduation, as requested by the South France Conference,⁶ he began to work as a self-supporting literature evangelist. For two years he canvassed the French cities of Marseille and Toulon.

In 1935, Cosendai began his formal pastoral internship.⁷ The South France Conference first assigned him to Saint-Etienne, and later served at several French churches.⁸ After two years of pastoral services in this conference, he received an urgent call from the Southern European Division to go to French Cameroon to teach at the school in Nanga-Eboko.⁹ Before embarking on this new journey, Cosendai married Madeleine Reimers on August 15, 1937, in Geneva, Switzerland.¹⁰ They had a son, Jean-Paul, and a daughter, Adline, who passed away on African soil at the age of nine.¹¹ Both children were born in Cameroon.

Missionary in Cameroon

In the second week of September 1937, nearly one month after their wedding, the Cosendais set off for Africa where they would serve as missionaries for over half a century.¹² Their first assignment was to teach 300 African students, ranging from six years to adult age, at the primary school in Nanga-Eboko.¹³ With the help of his wife, Cosendai taught them history, mathematics, reading, and writing.¹⁴ In addition to teaching duties, the couple was involved in missionary activities in the surrounding villages. Aimé gave Bible studies and Madeleine provided nursing care to the sick. The couple worked for twelve years at Nanga-Eboko; during that period, they established more than 100 primary schools in the villages and contributed to the growth of the Adventist Church in the area.¹⁵

In 1949, Aimé and Madeleine began a second chapter of their African missionary career. Paul Bénézech, president of the French Equatorial African Mission at that time, asked the Cosendais to pioneer a new mission station at Nanganjango, near Kribi on the coast of French Cameroon.¹⁶ The missionary couple accepted the challenge and worked within the Kribi Mission Field for two years. In the meantime, Aimé was ordained a minister.¹⁷ During this two-year period, the Cosendais were successful in organizing a church with more than twenty-five members and were able to start an elementary school.¹⁸

Administrator and Radio Broadcaster

Due to success in his previous responsibilities, Aimé was asked in 1951 to become the new president of the French West and Equatorial African Union Mission, which would become the French Equatorial African Union Mission three years later.¹⁹ He served in this position for eighteen years.²⁰ Under his leadership, the Union field continued to grow in membership and in 1960 expanded its territory beyond Cameroon to include the countries of the Congo Republic, Gabon, the Central African Republic, and Chad.²¹ However, this territorial expansion created the problem of reaching millions of people living in the cities, as well as the remote regions of these countries.

In order to face this challenge, besides establishing and strengthening mission stations, with the support of Cameroon's commissioner of information, in 1963 Aimé developed a radio outreach program and created the "It is Written" broadcast.²² The radio program was a success, and Aimé resigned as Union president in order to concentrate his energy on the radio ministry. In 1970, as Edwin Ludescher took over as new Union president, Aimé stayed on as director of the radio program.²³

Parallel to his radio work, which he engaged in until 1982, Aimé developed a ministry to reach prison inmates in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital. He visited prisoners on a regular basis, conducted a Bible study class for them, and tried to meet their physical needs.²⁴ Consequently, many prisoners accepted the Adventist message and were baptized. One of them became the principal of the Adventist elementary school in Yaoundé; another later served as an elder in a local church and was employed by the Central African Publishing House.²⁵

Later Years

Aimé and Madeleine worked as missionaries in Africa until 1982. In October of that year they both retired from active service and returned to their home country, Switzerland.²⁶ A year later Aimé accepted a call as administrator of the Cameroon Mission Hospital as an SOS (Sustentation Overseas Service) worker.²⁷ He later served as a Bible teacher at the Nanga-Eboko Adventist Secondary School until health issues forced him to return to Europe in January 1992.²⁸ He died in Lausanne, Switzerland on July 15, 1992 at the age of seventy-eight.²⁹

Contribution

Aimé Cosendai was an important figure for the Adventist Church in French West Africa where he served as teacher, pioneer missionary, Union president, director of radio work, and hospital administrator. Overall, he spent fifty-five years of service in Africa. During this long period, the Cosendais pioneered the Adventist radio outreach and directed the development of Seventh-day Adventism in the area. Particularly in Cameroon, they left a significant contribution in the area of education. In honor of their legacy, the African-Indian Division chose, on September 18, 1995, the name Adventist University Cosendai for their new university in Cameroon.³⁰

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NOTES

1. "Aime Cosendai," African Seventh-day Adventist History, accessed January 7, 2019, .
2. James L. Fly, *Africa Adopted Us: The Story of Aimé and Madeleine Cosendai* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1987), 16. See also, Heinz Hopf, "His Job Isn't a Sacrifice, Says Cameroon Worker," *Adventist Review*, November 17, 1983, 19.
3. See Fly, *Africa Adopted Us*, 16; Hopf, "His Job Isn't a Sacrifice," 19.
4. Hopf, 19. See also Fly, 27.
5. The missionary club of the seminary welcomed students who were interested in the foreign mission field. It often hosted returned missionaries who told of their experiences. See Fly, 25.
6. The South France Conference, through a letter, informed Aimé Cosendai that he must first work as a colporteur before they could consider hiring him as a pastor. See *Ibid*, 27.
7. Hopf, 19.
8. Fly, 28; Hopf, 19.
9. Fly, 29.
10. *Ibid*.
11. *Ibid.*, 60. While she was recovering from pneumonia, Adline caught a whooping cough and died some days later from the effects of the disease.
12. Hopf, 19. See also Salvador Eyezo'o, "L'Actualisation du Message Adventiste en Afrique à Travers la Vie, les Ecrits et les Emissions Religieuses du Missionnaire Aimé Henri Cosendai," in *Spiritualités Missionnaires Contemporaines: Entre Charismes et Institutions*, ed. Marc Spindler and Annie

Lenoble-Bart (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 309.

13. Fly, 34.

14. Ibid., 35.

15. Ibid., 38-39. In the twelve-year period, nearly 4,000 people joined the Adventist Church due to the work of the Cosendais, the Fridlins, and the national evangelists they had trained at the Nanga-Eboko School.

16. Ibid., 52-53.

17. Aimé Cosendai was presumably ordained as a minister between 1949 and 1950. He was listed for the first time as an ordained minister in the 1950 Yearbook of the Adventist Church. See "French Equatorial African Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1949), 225; "Kribi Mission Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 215.

18. Otto Schuberth, "Off the Beaten Track in the French Cameroun," *ARH*, July 12, 1951, 1. Moreover, as a visionary, Cosendai completed, together with his African helpers, the building of a new house to accommodate the missionary family and began to build a church and a school. See Fly, 54.

19. Sylvain Meyer, "Derniers Pas: Aimé Cosendai (1914–1992)," *Revue Adventiste*, October 1992, 16. See also, "French West and Equatorial African Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953), 208-209; "French Equatorial African Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1954), 219.

20. Meyer, 16.

21. Fly, 68. After the territorial expansion, the new Union field became known as the Equatorial African Union Mission. See Ibid; "Equatorial African Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1960), 202.

22. Fly, 68-70.

23. Ibid., 72; "Equatorial African Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), 251. Concurrently, Aimé Cosendai served as departmental secretary for Education and Temperance, a position he kept for three years.

24. Fly, 73.

25. Ibid., 74.

26. "Africa-Indian Ocean: Aime Cosendai," *ARH*, December 30, 1982, 26.

27. Hopf, 20. See also Fly, 75; General Conference Committee, October 6, 1983, General Conference Archives, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1983-10.pdf>.
28. See General Conference Committee, December 10, 1987, General Conference Archives, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1987-12.pdf>; General Conference Committee, July 25, 1991, General Conference Archives, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1991-07.pdf>; Meyer, 16.
29. "Deaths: Cosendai, Aimé," *ARH*, November 26, 1992, 21.
30. "Notre Histoire," Université Adventiste Cosendai, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.uacosendai-edu.net/a-propos/notre-histoire>.
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