

Babalola Joseph Ayo 1904-1959

[Adeboye O.A. "Joseph Ayo Babalola" in Phyllis Jestice (ed.), *Holy People of the World: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia*, Vol. I (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 93-94]

Babalola Joseph Ayo
(1904-1959 C.E)

Christian prophet, church founder

Joseph Ayo Babalola was born in 1904 at Odo Owa in Kwara, Nigeria, into an Anglican family. He had an elementary school education and thereafter was trained as a mechanic. Receiving the call to preach in his mid-twenties, he abandoned his job as a streamroller operator with the Public Works department of the colonial government and became a prophet. In the years that followed, he demonstrated extraordinary spiritual powers. In 1930, he joined Faith Tabernacle, one of the earliest independent churches in Nigeria. As an itinerant evangelist, he travelled far and wide in Yorubaland and also among the Akan people in Ghana. He had converts among kings and the masses, and his message permeated both rural and urban communities.

Babalola preached divine healing and emphasized the power of prayer. The rate at which people flocked to his meeting alarmed both the mainline churches, and the colonial government, especially as mainline churches lost more members to his evangelistic campaigns. He encountered problems with the colonial authorities and was imprisoned for a period of six months in 1932 for launching a campaign against witches in Benin City. He came out of this ordeal even more determined to preach the gospel.

A split in Faith Tabernacle in the mid-1930s led to Babalola's exit, and he founded Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). He led the CAC as its general evangelist, while Isaac Akinyele was made president of the new church. Akinyele became the traditional ruler of Ibadan, the most populous indigenous city in West Africa, in 1955, and this brought additional prestige to the church. Babalola conducted mighty revival meetings that increased his popularity further. After his death in 1959, the CAC spread throughout Nigeria and beyond into other African nations and could also be found in Europe and the United States.

Babalola is remembered today for the great spiritual power he demonstrated through his numerous miracles and the great number of converts that he made. He was a pioneer of the indigenous Pentecostal movement in Nigeria, heralded by the Aladura (prayer-marked) genre, of which the CAC was an epitome. To date, the CAC in Nigeria has been active not only in the provision of valuable social services such as education and health care to complement government efforts.

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