

CHAPTER SEVEN

GARRICK SOKARY BRAIDE

1. Introduction

The first prophetic movement in Nigeria which had the characteristics of the twentieth century indigenous Christian movements was the. crusade led by Garrick Braide, a charismatic Ijaw man whose primary calling was healing by prayer. He established a powerful Christian mass movement and made innumerable converts from the Delta Pastorate.⁴²

2. Objective

In this chapter we shall discuss the emergence of a former catechist in the Angelican Church who later became an itinerant prophet.

3. Content

Who is Braide and why is he a historic figure?

(a) *His Early Life*

Garrick Braide was born around 1882/3 in Obonoma, a village in the Niger Delta. Although his parents were traditional worshippers — his father being a cult server, Braide got converted to Christianity and attended Sunday school when he was barely eight years old.

Braide missed the opportunity of having formal education in a primary school. Though he was an Ijaw by tribe he studied the church catechism in Igbo language. He was baptized at the St. Andrews Anglican Church, Calabar, in January 1910, and after a period of two years his confirmation rite was performed by Rev. James Johnson.

(b) *His Call*

In his Church, Braide was well known for his zeal, enthusiasm and flair for strenuous religious exercises. One of his earliest biographers, who was also his blood brother, recollected that:

It was his custom to slip secretly into the Church on weekdays and there prostrate himself in prayer to Almighty God imploring forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Sometimes it was his custom to ask the Pastor's permission to spend the whole night in prayer in the Church with his Bible and Prayer Book.

With this background, it was not beyond expectation when shortly after his confirmation Braide announced that he had seen a vision in which God called him to be His messenger. He took significant steps to put the vision into action. He spent considerable hours in solitary prayers and became more involved in evangelistic work. It was soon discovered that Braide was making tremendous successes in prophetic healing, accurate revelation and displaying of special gifts.

By 1916, his revivalist movement had spread to many parts of the CMS Niger Delta Pastorate and even to the Southern Zone of Owerri District.

⁴² For details on Braide, see G. O. M. Tasié, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); *idem*, "The Prophetic Calling: Garrick Sokari Braide of Bakana" in E. Isichei, (ed.), *Varieties of Christian Experience in Nigeria* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982). See also J. B. Grimley & C. E. Robinson, *Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 301-304.

(c) *Method of Teaching*

As an evangelist and lay-preacher his method of teaching differed markedly from the white missionaries and the African clergy.

- (i) While the missionaries introduced Christianity through the teaching of doctrines: the Creed, Articles of Faith, The Lord's Prayer and Catechism, Braide adopted a nonintellectual and practical approach. He taught the people simply to believe in the Lord Jesus, denounce fetishism and worship God alone.
- (ii) Like the biblical Gideon, he asked his followers not only to abstain from black magic, idols and pollution of idols, but also to destroy idols and all kinds of images.
- (iii) He emphasised absolute dependence on God for physical and spiritual healing. He encouraged his hearers not to take medicine nor seek medical doctors.
- (iv) He preached against the buying and selling of alcoholic beverages. He particularly admonished his hearers to abstain from liquor and all other alcoholic beverages.
- (v) Braide emphasised personal religious exercises which he believed could aid Christian growth. He strongly recommended, among others, spending long hours in solitary prayers and fasting periodically.
- (vi) He demanded very strict observance of the Lord's day. He insisted that since Sunday is a day of rest no normal human activities, which border on work, must be done. He maintained that this day offers an eminently suitable occasion for worship.
- (vii) He recommended a liturgy or system of worship in which Africans would praise God in their own dialects, in songs, prayers and worship. He castigated the missionaries for not taking the worldview of the African into consideration in the presentation of the gospel. They made Christianity to look too foreign to meet the needs and desires of the Africans.

(d) *Response to His Teaching*

- (i) Aided by his ability to demonstrate the gift of healing through prayer and his practical approach at presenting the gospel, Braide was readily accepted by the local people as a man commissioned by God. As a result of his ministry, more and more people joined the Christian churches with the consequence that a religious awakening swept over the land.
- (ii) Initially, several Anglican clergy declared their Approval of Braide's evangelistic crusades because of the obvious increase in Church membership which resulted in mass baptism especially in the Anglican churches. Even the supervisor of the Niger Delta, Assistant-Bishop James Johnson openly affirmed his support for Braide's mass movement.
- (iii) Soon after 1914 the Anglican Church authorities became suspicious and ultimately very critical of Braide's activities because he did not apply the discipline of the Anglican Church. He was accused of tolerating polygamy and calling himself "*Elijah redivivus*" (the Second Elijah).

The Bishop of the Niger Delta Protectorate was also not happy about the confrontation from Braide's followers who insisted that the Bishop should create the office of a prophet in the Anglican Order because of Braide. The Church authorities also regarded as nauseating the proclamation of

Braide's adherents that the prophet's words superseded the creeds, dogma and doctrine of the Church. Some of the followers even believed and taught that the water in which Braide washed himself possessed healing powers.

(iv) The Colonial government and the European traders looked on everything Braide did with a critical eye. They disliked his movement for three reasons:

Firstly, while the Colonial administration had depended upon the sale of alcoholic beverages, one of Braide's incessant activities had been attack on the sale of liquor. Hollenweger hinted that "Braide was arrested, officially for incitement to riot, but in fact as much as anything for the considerable reduction which he brought about in the takings from the excise duty on brand."⁴³ It was recorded that the government incurred huge budget deficits during the highlights of Braide's' activities.

Secondly, Braide was reported to have said during one of his campaigns in 1916 that the days of the white men were over and that it was up to the native people to determine their fate. Braide, ostensibly, was criticising the black clergy from Sierra Leone and Yoruba land, who dressed themselves in the white man's borrowed robes. In the eyes of the Colonial administration, however, Braide was classified as a political agitator.

Thirdly, contemporaneous with Braide's movement was the prophetic movement of William Harris, which the colonial administration in the Ivory Coast had claimed was associated with political matters. In 1915, the French government in the Ivory Coast had thought it expedient to arrest and expel Harris. The British thought they must borrow a leaf from the French's authoritative action.

(e) *His Last Days*

The confrontation between the Niger Delta pastorate Church under the leadership of Bishop James Johnson and the supporters of Braide's movement deteriorated. The situation was reported to the colonial administrators by the Bishop. Consequently, a commission was set up and Braide was arrested because they had been looking for a way of getting him apprehended.

In March 1916, Braide was accused of perpetrating actions that could lead to insurrection by destroying idols. He was also accused of inciting the blacks against the whites; undermining constituted authority; obtaining money by false pretences; and engaging in activities that could endanger the life of the people and their properties, thereby causing a breach of the peace.

Braide was found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour. Shortly before he was to be released in November, 1916, eight further charges were brought against him and his followers. He was incarcerated in prison until 1918. His activities after his release from prison were obscure. He is said to have survived only for about eleven months and died on 15th November, 1918.

(f) *The Aftermath*

Braide had never intended to establish a Church of his own. He had always insisted that his mission was that of a prophet. He is reported to have said that "God has endowed me with prophetic powers and nothing can sway me from that."⁴⁴ In 1918, however, shortly after his death, a new separatist movement, "The Christ Army", was inaugurated under the leadership of one Brother Coker.

⁴³ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 471.

⁴⁴ E. Isichei, *History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p.104.

4. Summary

Next to Harris, Garrick Braide was an outstanding itinerant African prophet who led thousands of idol worshippers towards Christianity. Like Harris, his method of converting people was different from the missionaries and the African clergy. His dismissal from the Anglican Church made thousands of his followers to opt for the new movement, "The Christ Army."

5. Post-Test

Answer the following questions:

1. Give a detailed description of the Christian movement led by Garrick Braide.
2. Assess the achievements of Prophet Garrick Sokary Braide and his prophetic movement.
3. State the doctrinal characteristics and practical features of the Braide prophetic movement.