

CHIEF EMMANUEL DUROJAIYE SOWEMIMO'S RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, IGBOR AND ST. MICHAEL'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, AGO-ObA, ABEOKUTA

In the early 1930s, when late Chief Emmanuel Durojaiye Sowemimo, a merchant who hailed from Baaje's Compound in Ago-Oba, Abeokuta returned home from Ibadan and found out that there was no church at Ago-Oba, he felt disturbed and determined to correct this spiritual anomaly. He immediately contacted the Ogboni chiefs (the ruling class chiefs) in Oba land to secure a parcel of land for his personal use with the intention of giving it to God for a place of worship. It should be noted however that before this time, he was living in his personal house built in Ogbe, Abeokuta. This excited the Ogboni chiefs and immediately heeded to his request by releasing a parcel of land for him at 'Igbo-Oro' (Oro forest) hilltop at Egunya. Chief Sowemimo performed the same feat at St. Paul's Church, Igbore.

After the release of the land, Chief Emmanuel Durojaiye Sowemimo invited Pa. Samuel Olufade Dosunmu and requested for a meeting with all Oba Christians in his house at Ogbe. Pa. Dosunmu then invited Pa. John Solotan Williams, Pa. Kusimo, Pa. Emmanuel Fadeyi and all notable indigenes of Oba. Late Chief Sowemimo then briefed all the Christian elders in Oba on the need to build a church in Ago-Oba and all efforts made so far to secure a parcel of land. He informed the Christian elders of the land allotted to him at Igbo-Oro hill by the Ogboni chiefs and his intention to relinquish it for the building of a church. He also reiterated on the need to rely on and to hold on to Jesus as the only Saviour to build his Church. Since a parcel of land had been donated for the erection of a church building, all Oba Christians both home and in the villages agreed to support the move. Even those that were worshipping elsewhere agreed to come together under one umbrella. This enthusiasm made the first set of members to start converging under a tent for church service. The seats used then were made of 'Papa-Ako' bought by late Pa. Olokode Obanleowo from Agbamaya village. The prominent foundation members of the church were Samuel Onifade, Moses Olujobi, J.S.W. Solotan, Joseph Obanleowo, Thomas Obanleowo, Mrs. Victoria Obanleowo, Esther Obanleowo, Mrs. Docas Bandele, James Olokode Obanleowo, Emmanuel Odofi, Samuel Obanleowo, Moses Obanleowo, Isaac Obanleowo, Mrs. Comfort Olayemi and Mrs. Esther Obasa.

Justice George Sodeinde Sowemimo, a former Chief Justice of Nigeria and grandson of Chief Durojaiye Sowemimo later became the Baba-Ijo of the Church.

According to Professor Saburi Biobaku "Balogun Durojaiye Sowemimo was not only an eminent Balogun of Christians but also an incomparable Egba statesman".

It is also to the credit of Chief Emmanuel Durojaiye Sowemimo (the Baba-Ijo of St. Paul's Church, Igbore), that he was one of the Christian leaders who courageously participated in the dislodgement of Oro fetish cult men from their base (according to an outline – History of Anglican Churches in Egbaland) in the groove and promptly transformed the darkness of heathenism into light of Christianity charismatic fervor. St. Paul's Church is now a cathedral.

The children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nephews, nieces, cousins of LATE BALOGUN DUROJAIYE SOWEMIMO and entire members of JIBOLU-TAIWO FAMILY OF EGBALAND with glory to God Almighty and with eternal joyous pride remember this day the 61st Anniversary of your death at the age of 85 years on the 23rd of October, 1949 in Abeokuta having lived a most glorious crowded and unblemished career dedicated to the service of your fatherland, Egbaland that in life and death you remain an inspiring legendary forelore among the Egbas to this day.

LATE CHIEF DUROJAIYE SOWEMIMO

Balogun of the Christians of Egbaland; Old Student of C.M.S. Grammar School, Lagos; Tutor C.M.S. Grammar School, Lagos; Asst. Organist, Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos; a Prince Merchant.

In commemoration of this memorable day, we reproduce below the portion of the congratulatory address presented to Late Balogun Durojaiye Sowemimo on the occasion of his 70th Birthday Anniversary on the 5th of August, 1935 by the Igbore Townsfolk.

“There was among others that conspicuous incident of 1898 when the forces of adverse circumstances necessitated your involuntary emigration to Ibadan about the 2nd of March but like Joseph of the Egyptian Exile, God overruled the event for opportunity of making many friends among and becoming the pet of Ibadan Chiefs by your affable deportments, ready accessibility, generous and liberal disposition, and prudence coupled with wise counsels. Who would not covet the great honour done you by the Bale of Ibadan when about the 16th April, 1899, you left that town amidst the delightful jubilation of a long pompous procession of Chiefs and civilians who escorted you to and passed the night with you at Orile-Ilugun the first halting place on your return journey to Abeokuta your homeland. Soon after the arrival, you went back and settled at Ibadan over a large estate and as head of the Egba section of the settlers there. The Beiyerunka Home remains a perpetual monument of the great affection and high regard you won from the chiefs.

The Ibadans wanted you an enlightened adviser among them. The Egbas wanted you back home an able and effectual leader. Preferring to serve your own nation, you though not without a degree of reluctance, acceded to the offer of the Egbas to the regret of the Ibadan, returned finally to Abeokuta and, not unlike the Egyptian butler was installed the Balogun of all Egba Christians by the then Alake. Not very long afterwards, you were elected an Honourable Member of the Egba National Council. Both positions you creditably hold and enjoy to this day to the glory and pride of Igbore Townsfolk.

One's good and beneficial acts cannot all be recanted in one single address. Time will fail us to mention your brilliant career at school as an erudite scholar; your popular success as a favourite tutor; your excellent achievements in the mercantile world. We shall mention only the latest but not the least, to wit: - The clearing, like Gideon of old, of the Oro Groove, a forest of grossest darkness and vilest cruelty in the days of our forebears, so that today “in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up”.

The Late Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kuti, the illustrious Principal of Abeokuta Grammar School and Cousin-in-Law of Late Balogun Durojaiye Sowemimo organized the 80th Birthday Anniversary in 1945.