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BOOK REVIEW

IHEANETU, BERNARD. *SOLD OUT TO THE GOSPEL: A BIOGRAPHY OF BISHOP OLUMUYIWA AJAYI, PHD AS PIONEER BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF PANKSHIN*. ASA PUBLICATIONS, 2024

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Sold Out to the Gospel is a biography of Bishop Olumuyiwa Ajayi, the pioneer bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Pankshin. It was written by Rev. Canon Bernard Iheanetu and has 14 chapters and 217 pages. The book was written in 2024 and chronicles 30 years of Bishop Ajayi's sojourn in Northern Nigeria as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This review divides the story of Bishop Ajayi's life and ministry, as detailed in the book, into five parts.

The first part covers Bishop Ajayi's childhood, education, call to ministry, ordination and marriage, and is captured in Chapters One to Four. Olumuyiwa Odejide Ajayi was born in Abeokuta on 2nd November, 1961. His family is from Igan-Alade village in the Ketu ethnic group of Yoruba land, which is currently in Yewa North Local

Government Area of Ogun State. His parents were Zachariah Adebawale Ajayi, who worked as an accountant, and Comfort Tejumade Ajayi, who worked as a teacher and later a nurse and midwife. Olumuyiwa is the fourth of their five children, and he also has step-siblings. His parents named him *Olumuyiwa* which means ‘God has brought this’ because they were not expecting another pregnancy soon after the birth of their last child. In other words, Olumuyiwa was considered a child of destiny or a special child. This is buttressed by the account of his mother’s prayer when she was experiencing complications during his pregnancy. “God spoke to her that the child will be a vessel that God will use to manifest His power and reach out to many people” (9). Olumuyiwa was baptized at St. Peter’s Anglican Church, Ake, Abeokuta, which is, historically, the first church in Nigeria.

The author traces Olumuyiwa’s Christian heritage to his grandparents, Elijah and Leah Ajayi, who were among the early converts to Christianity in their area. As a very young child, Olumuyiwa and his immediate elder brother were left in the care of Mama Leah Ajayi when their mother went for nursing training. The author recounts the miraculous intervention of God that saved Olumuyiwa from premature death from malnutrition during this period.

Olumuyiwa attended primary school from 1967 to 1974, after which he proceeded to Egbado (now Yewa) High School, Igbogila for his secondary education. The fun and adventure of those levels of education are captured in Chapters Two and Three. Towards the end of Olumuyiwa’s secondary education, his heart began to be stirred towards God. The day that marked his spiritual turning point was 29th July, 1979. He was on a visit to Lagos, where he responded to an altar call for salvation at the Foursquare Gospel Church, Ketu, and surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that Olumuyiwa was the only person that responded to that altar call that day. His life took a new turn from that point on, as he began to preach the gospel to his friends and those who knew him before then. He continued this evangelistic drive throughout the last bit of his secondary education.

Olumuyiwa attended the Ogun State Polytechnic (now Moshood Abiola Polytechnic), Abeokuta for an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) (1980-1982) and a Higher National Diploma (HND) (1983-1985) in Marketing. He had some work experience in-between the two periods of study, including a brief stint at British Caledonian Airways, Lagos, and the role of Marketing Manager at Teju Foam Industries and at the Ogun State Agricultural Development Corporation, Abeokuta. Before graduation from the HND programme, Olumuyiwa qualified as a professional marketer when he passed the examination of the Chartered Institute of Marketers, London. It was while he was an undergraduate student that he began to sense the call of God into the ministry. On campus, he served as the Prayer Secretary and later the President of the Christian Union, and the Coordinator of the Nigeria Fellowship of Evangelical Students (NIFES), Abeokuta Zone. His zeal for the preaching of the gospel led him to team up with a friend to establish a rural evangelism team known as Volunteers Unlimited. These opportunities for Christian service

enabled him to learn more about God and to develop his capacity as a teacher of the Word of God.

He participated in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in the 1986-1987 service year and was an active member of the rural evangelism and medical outreach team of the National Christian Corpsers' Fellowship (NCCF). He served in Kwara State and it was there that he met Dorcas Tabitha Tsado, who would later become his wife, and other people who shared his zeal and enthusiasm for the work of God and have become influential in his life and ministry.

The author makes clear that the call to the ministry became clearer to Olumuyiwa during the NYSC year. God specifically spoke to him in the words of Isaiah 41: 8-10, thus:

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Convinced of the call of God, Olumuyiwa applied to the then Egba-Egbado Diocese of the Anglican Church and was employed as a church teacher. He later proceeded to Emmanuel College of Theology, Ibadan for theological training. He was ordained a deacon on 26th July, 1991 and a priest the following year, after which he was posted to Christ Church, Iree, in the present Diocese of Osun North-East. His first congregation consisted of 16 worshippers, ten of who were children. However, within two years of Rev. Ajayi's pastoral care, the population of the church increased considerably, and he led the church to plant another church, which today is one of the biggest churches in the Diocese of Osun North-East.

By divine providence, Rev. Ajayi reconnected with Dorcas Tabitha Tsado, and on 13th November, 1993, they got wedded. Their union has been blessed with four children.

The second part of the book covers the coming of Rev. Ajayi to Northern Nigeria and his Ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Jos, as covered in Chapters Five to Seven. In Chapter Five, the author details the turning point in the ministry of Rev. Ajayi, which was when he moved with his young family from the South-West to the North of Nigeria. This was not a decision lightly taken but was based on a repeated revelation from God that his ministry would find better expression in the North. He conveyed his decision to his Bishop, who immediately put through a call to the Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kwashi, then Bishop of Jos. It was arranged that Rev. Ajayi would be transferred to Jos. He informed his parents and siblings, and his mother prayed for him, declaring that his sojourn in the North would be like Abraham leaving the land of his fathers, and that it would be a blessing and not a curse. She prayed that the hand and favour of the Lord would be with Olumuyiwa in the strange land of Northern Nigeria, and that God would grant him the riches and abundance of His grace (38). Rev. Ajayi and his family arrived Jos on 28th December, 1994.

In the Diocese of Jos, Rev. Ajayi's first posting was to the Cathedral Church of St. Luke, to serve as an Assistant Priest to the then Rev. Canon (now Most Rev.) Emmanuel Egbunu. After two years, Rev. Ajayi was transferred to Christ Church, Bukuru, and while there, he enrolled in the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), Bukuru for a Bachelor of Divinity. He would later obtain a Master of Arts (2002) and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (2013) in Ethics and Philosophy, from the University of Jos.

The posting to Christ Church lasted for only 18 months when Rev. Ajayi was posted back to the Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Jos as its administrator with effect from 1st January, 1999. The Bishop of Jos preferred him a canon as he stepped into this role. Canon Ajayi clearly recognised that assuming office as the Administrator of the Cathedral Church of St. Luke at that point in time was going to be a daunting task. The series of crises that rocked that Church in the years preceding his posting are detailed in Chapter Six of the book.

Although Canon Ajayi was unsure of what could befall him and his ministry at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Jos, he submitted the situation to God and asked his friends to pray for him. He eventually identified four challenges that he needed to tackle, namely, occultism, promiscuity, and lack of commitment among the members, and the church's lack of income-generating investments. With time, the occult strongholds were decimated, promiscuity was crushed, the zeal of church members was revived and their spiritual gifts rekindled. By ensuring financial accountability, Canon Ajayi was able to embark on income-generating ventures for the church, namely the establishment of the Mission Guesthouse, the transformation of St. Luke's Nursery and Primary school, and the establishment of St. Luke's College, Kufang, Jos. The Cathedral Church building was also refurbished and extended; the quality of worship in the cathedral greatly improved, leading to an increase in membership. God's provision of wisdom and guidance, and the steps taken to accomplish these make an interesting read in Chapter Six.

In 2006, Canon Ajayi was preferred an archdeacon. In Chapter Seven, the author recounts the storm that arose in his ministry thereafter. It was so intense that he came to the point of considering quitting the ministry. Members of his own congregation rose up against him with accusations of being promiscuous. The divine wisdom he adopted was the confrontational approach. He challenged the congregation from the pulpit to come forward with details or evidence of their allegations. There was no response, and thus the matter was laid to rest. The author notes that the pain, betrayal and isolation of that period were heart-wrenching and took a toll on Canon Ajayi's enthusiasm for ministry as well as his family life. Eventually, God brought healing to his heart and restored peace to his family. The church also benefitted from God's intervention at that time, and a breakthrough in infrastructural development came in the form of the completion of St. Luke's Cathedral Hall, which had lingered for several years.

The third part of the book covers the episcopacy and ministry of Bishop Ajayi in Pankshin Diocese, as detailed in Chapter Eight. The author recounts that towards the end of 2006, Ven. Ajayi and his family contemplated relocating to the Diocese of Oyo to continue their ministry. Unknown to him, however, the divine purpose for his ministry in Northern Nigeria was unfolding in a different direction. In September, 2006, the General Synod of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) approved the creation of Pankshin Missionary Diocese out of Jos Diocese. The Ajayis were at the verge of informing their Bishop of their decision to relocate when, in January, 2007, Ven. Ajayi was elected bishop of the newly created Diocese of Pankshin. His immediate response to the news of his elevation was that of shock and great despair – he had only just recovered from serious challenges in ministry and family life, and now he was being sent to an uncharted territory and to a people unknown to him. He considered not accepting the elevation and returning home to his own people, but the Word of God prevailed on his heart and he yielded in total obedience to the call to higher responsibility.

Rt. Rev. Olumuyiwa Odejide Ajayi was consecrated on 4th March, 2007 as the pioneer bishop of Pankshin Diocese at the Cathedral Church of the Advent, Gwarimpa, Abuja. The inauguration of the Diocese of Pankshin and the enthronement of the pioneer bishop held on 6th March, 2007.

At the onset, the new bishop faced language and cultural barriers arising from the fact that he could not speak Hausa or Nge and had no understanding of the culture of his mission field. The new diocese also faced numerous challenges, difficulties and pressing needs such as shortage of clergymen and lack of infrastructure, including a house and office for the bishop, and lack of a car for the bishop's work. On the part of the churches and members, there was a general lack of understanding of the concept of Pankshin as a diocese, as different from Pankshin as an archdeaconry, and their new roles and higher responsibilities in the new setup. Bishop Ajayi captured his befuddlement about this state of affairs when, on one occasion, he said, "I am looking for the Diocese of Pankshin" (81).

The same type of challenge was experienced in respect to finances. The author notes that as an archdeaconry, Pankshin could not fulfil its financial obligations to the Diocese of Jos and had an indebtedness running into millions of naira by the time it was inaugurated as a diocese. Now the financial responsibilities of the churches and members would be higher. Indeed, finances were a huge challenge for the young diocese. The new bishop dedicated much effort to prayer, teaching and enlightenment, and eventually, the initial nonchalant attitude and lack of understanding gave way to active participation and zeal in the affairs of the Diocese.

Sacrificial giving by friends and supporters of the young diocese helped it to find its feet in the first three years. This was led by the sponsor diocese, namely the Diocese of Awka, which gave the Diocese three million naira in each of the first two years, and other amounts subsequently. By the fourth year, the people of the Diocese of Pankshin had begun

to own their diocese and to support it financially. Up to its fifteenth year, the Diocese did not have to levy individuals, parishes or archdeaconries for the execution of its projects.

The author narrates that administering the diocese was not an easy task for Bishop Ajayi but, by divine enablement, he has adopted six principles which have defined his administrative style, namely: patterning his leadership after Christ, learning from the experiences of older bishops, training and retraining the workforce, maintaining an open-door policy, delegation of duties, and financial accountability with prudent management of funds. Details of how Bishop Ajayi's administrative style has been instrumental in laying a solid foundation for the Diocese of Pankshin are captured vividly in Chapter Eight.

The fourth part of the book focuses on the family life and personality of Bishop Ajayi, as covered in Chapters Nine to Twelve. Chapter Nine of the book focuses on an important pillar of the success of Bishop Ajayi's life and ministry, namely his marital life, although mention had briefly been made of this earlier in the book. The Chapter details the support of his wife, Dr. (Mrs.) Dorcas Ajayi, who served alongside her husband for 12 years and pioneered the women's ministry in Pankshin Diocese until she was called to glory. Her early life in Niger State and her primary, secondary and tertiary education are detailed in the chapter. It was while on the NYSC programme in Kwara State that she met her husband. She later obtained a number of postgraduate qualifications, culminating in a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Science and Technology Education. She worked at the University of Jos at the time of her demise.

Within the sphere of the church, Dr. (Mrs.) Dorcas Ajayi led the Mothers' Union, Women's Guild and Girls' Guild in all the churches where her husband served. She was the pioneer president of these organisations in Pankshin Diocese. Her zeal, vigour and vision for ministry to the girl child, widows, orphans, single parents and other women were outstanding. Worthy of mention is that she established the Gloria Ladi Kwashi Vocational School, Tambes, Pankshin. It was while on a medical trip to India that she transited to glory on 10th October, 2018. Again, God sent His word to Bishop Ajayi to uphold and comfort him.

Chapter Nine also details how, after the passing of Mama Dorcas Ajayi, Bishop Ajayi appointed himself as the President of the women's organisations in the Diocese, to ensure that that aspect of his ministry was not neglected. However, it soon became evident that he needed a helper in that area. That helper came in the person of Mrs. Magdalene O. Ajayi. Their union was solemnized on 16th January, 2020. She had her primary and secondary education in Lagos, and holds a B.Sc. in Economics from the South Eastern University in Washington DC in the United States of America, as well as M.Sc. in Marketing. She had previously worked in Shell Petroleum Development Corporation and the defunct Savannah Bank. She came with previous experience as Assistant Secretary and Secretary of the women's ministry in Jos Diocese, and was helped to adapt to her new role by her husband and some clergy wives.

Chapter Ten is devoted to details of the personality of Bishop Ajayi, who is at once a family man, a voracious reader, a time-conscious, disciplined and courageous leader, a meticulous record keeper, an early planner, a good listener and companion, a deep thinker, and a sincere, sacrificial and dogged servant of God, who is held in high esteem in the church and society. These and other aspects of Bishop Ajayi's personality are further detailed and illustrated in Chapter Twelve, where the author steps aside and allows the voices of others to be heard. The chapter is a catalogue of testimonies by family members, bishops and other clergymen, lay members and friends of Bishop Ajayi. Practical manifestations of his personality as a family man, friend, role model, mentor, confidant, counsellor, leader, teacher, evangelist, pastor, missionary, church planter, innovator, visionary, advocate for social justice, humanitarian, and much more, are given by these witnesses in Chapter 12, which would have been better placed immediately after Chapter Ten.

Chapter Eleven presents the scorecard of Bishop Ajayi after 30 years in ministry in Northern Nigeria. It reveals his achievements in the following areas:

- i. Church planting: 7 churches in Jos Diocese; over 80 churches and chapels in Pankshin Diocese.
- ii. Infrastructural development: A guesthouse, an office and vicarage complex, cathedral building extension, a secondary school in Jos Diocese; establishment of 13 schools and other centres of learning, a retreat centre, Bishop's house and staff accommodation, Diocesan secretariat, guest houses and suites, among others, in Pankshin Diocese.
- iii. Purchase of vast portions of land in five locations for future infrastructural development.
- iv. Missionary vision and expansion, leading to the creation of Langtang Diocese about 14 months after the inauguration of Pankshin Diocese.
- v. Recruitment, training and retraining of the workforce and strategic positioning of clergymen, culminating in the secondment of over 30 priests to other dioceses.
- vi. Spiritual leadership and mentorship in faith, sincerity, fidelity and Christian stewardship, which has created a strong and vibrant spiritual community in the Diocese of Pankshin.

The fifth part of the book is a postscript, rather than an appendix, and it covers Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen. Chapter 13 is an intriguing testimony of how Bishop Ajayi and his wife, Magdalene were kidnapped while on a journey back to Pankshin and their miraculous release without a ransom, even though the kidnappers had demanded a ransom. The final chapter expands on the legacy of Bishop Ajayi in Pankshin Diocese and informs of his decision to bow out of episcopacy, and to voluntarily retire at the age of 65, five years short of the statutory retirement age. The author outlines five reasons for this decision, as well as other details of an interview with the Bishop. He quotes the Bishop as saying that he has no regrets in his ministry in Pankshin Diocese. Bishop Ajayi's prayer for his

successor, the Diocese of Pankshin, its clergy and laity are all detailed in the chapter, as well as his expression of immense gratitude for the love, support and loyalty of the people of Pankshin. Details of the desire of Bishop Ajayi for himself after retirement, which is to contribute in other ways to the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the advancement of the Kingdom of God, provide a fitting portrayal of a man who is indeed sold out to the Gospel.

In all, the book *Sold out to the Gospel* is a well-documented authorised biography, albeit with hagiographic elements. It tells of divine providence in the life of one of God's chosen servants. It draws spiritual lessons and messages from events in the story and refers the reader to supporting Bible passages. Photographs are included on three pages in the middle of the book and as a 24-page appendix; they not only add colour to the book, but also capture significant moments in the life and ministry of the Rt. Rev. Olumuyiwa Ajayi. In addition, the text of the book is interspersed with hymns of the Christian faith, which validate the storyline and inspire the reader. The language and style of the book are simple, making it reader-friendly.

The book *Sold out to the Gospel* is a major contribution to the history of Christianity in Northern Nigeria, and Ngas land in particular. Christians in general, and those who wish to learn about practical aspects of Christian life and character, or those considering a life of ministry in the Gospel, as well as missionaries, Christian leaders and administrators, will find this book an invaluable resource. The few typos and omissions in the text do not reduce the significance of the book as a chronicle of the growth and impact of the church in modern times.