OSHITELU, JOSIAH OLUNOWO (1902–1962)

African church leader. Beginning his career in the Anglican Church, Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu founded the Church of the Lord, one of the major branches of the Aladura religious movement, in Nigeria in 1930. Oshitelu was born in the town of Ogere, in the Ijebu area near the African coast. An Anglican catechist and teacher, Oshitelu was dismissed in 1926 because he claimed to have visions, which were brought on by extensive fasting and devotions. The visions revealed a script with holy words and names that had miraculous power. He was assisted in interpreting his dreams and visions by Shomoye, a Christian elder who later became his apostle to West Africa. Oshitelu emerged in 1929 to begin a healing and preaching ministry in the Aladura tradition. He attacked idolatry, traditional medicine, and fetishes, and healed by using prayer, fasting, and holy water. He condoned polygamy and had seven wives himself (see plural marriage).

In 1930, considering the culture, customs, and manners of the land in which he lived, Oshitelu founded the Church of the Lord. Christianity’s requirements of monogamous marriage, male dominance, and the emphasis on belonging exclusively to one denomination were in contrast with the indigenous practice of multiple cult membership, polygamy, and the acceptance of some women as religious leaders (see women clergy). Further, the local popularity of the tenets of Rosicrucianism, freemasonry, esoteric Islam, qabalah, and traditional Yoruba religion gave rise to a syncretistic atmosphere that influenced Oshitelu’s visions. The use of occult literature remains popular in the Church of the Lord.

The Church of the Lord was successful, and it soon spread into all regions of Nigeria, including the Islamic north, where its use of Islamic dietary rules and prayer forms ensured its acceptance. Subsequently the church found acceptance in both England and the United States. Josiah Oshitelu died in 1962.

See also Africa; African Instituted Churches, Nigeria; African Theology

OSIANDER, ANDREAS (c. 1498–1552)

German Lutheran. Osiannder was born December 19, 1498 (or 1496) at Gunzenhausen, southwest of Nürnberg, and he died October 17, 1552 at Königsberg. After some study in Leipzig, Altenburg, and Ingolstadt, Osiannder was ordained a priest in 1520. Around the time he became a preacher for St. Lorenz in Nürnberg, Osiannder publicly supported Martin Luther, helping bring the Reformation to Nürnberg.

He backed Luther at Marburg in the 1529 exchange with Huldrych Zwinglei over Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper. Osiannder also attended the 1530 presentation of the Augsburg Confession and signed Luther’s 1537 Schmalkaldic Articles with their strong position against Rome.

His broader humanist-influenced interests served religion with his 1537 publication of a harmony of the Gospels, and advanced science with his 1543 publication of Copernicus’s On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres, for which he provided a preface. Opposition to the Augsburg Interim forced him to move to Königsberg where, despite lacking a theological degree, he became head of the university’s theological faculty.

Although most often in the Lutheran camp, Osiannder’s ideas on the indwelling presence of Christ and a growing belief in saving righteousness sparked sharp controversy in later life because most Lutherans saw Osiannder as differing with Luther on the issue of justification. Never one to skirt confrontation and known for an often intemperate tongue and pen, Osiannder became embroiled in controversy over how Luther and his supporters understood justification. To avoid any role for human works, Osiannder taught that salvation was by grace grasped by faith in Christ as Christ dwells within the individual, in a near mystical sense, and the believer becomes righteous. Critics charged that this view destroyed confidence in the objective work of Christ for all humankind. Instead of