"AFRICA SHALL BE SAVED". AN APPRAISAL OF REINHARD BONNKE'S PAN-AFRICAN CRUSADE

BY

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"Africa shall be saved" is the war-cry of Reinhard Bonnke's Christ for All Nations (CfAN) crusade. Another war-cry is "from the Cape to Cairo". These slogans indicate the intention of the CfAN team to take their revival right across the continent. Bonnke predicts that their big tent will be erected in Cairo by the end of the century, by which time, he claims, Africa will be the most Christian continent on earth.

In 1986 CfAN held a 13 day crusade in Harare, Zimbabwe, on its northward march to Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and beyond. This crusade was timed to coincide with a 7 day Harare "Fire Conference", convened by CfAN, which drew 4000 delegates from all over Africa. This double-event of the Fire Conference and the CfAN crusade is of some importance for African Christianity—the Fire Conference because its 4000 delegates have returned to their 41 countries to put into practice what they learned; the CfAN crusade because it will soon be staged right across Africa. It has been estimated that the number of Africa's Christians increases by 16,000 a day. Even if this figure is wildly inflated there is no denying the rapid increase, and it is clear that CfAN already plays a significant role in this increase. It is of some value, therefore, to establish exactly the kind of Christianity it offers.¹

CfAN is the creation of Pastor Reinhard Bonnke, the son of a West German Pentecostal minister, who in 1959 went to the (non-Pentecostal) conservative evangelical Bible College of Wales in Swansea. After two years at this college, he served for a few years as a pastor in North Germany, but in 1967 he came out to Lesotho as a pastor for the Apostolic Faith Mission. He began his travelling crusade in 1975 with a crusade in Botswana. In the succeeding years he has preached revivals in many African countries—Zaire,
Zambia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria—and outside Africa he has been as far afield as Scandinavia, the United States and New Zealand. CfAN reports crowds of over 100,000 at giant outdoor meetings, and crowds of even half a million in Nigeria. In Southern Africa Bonnke has specialized in tent revivals, and the tent he currently uses has a capacity of 34,000 seated, or 60-70,000 standing. A CfAN brochure boasts that it is “the biggest mobile structure of its kind in the world”. The finance for this tent (US $800,000) came from the evangelist Kenneth Copeland of Texas. The tent requires a fleet of 15 trucks and trailers to transport it. It stands a high as a 6 storey building, and this floodlit structure promises to become quite a dominant if temporary feature of many African cities in coming years.

The headquarters of CfAN have been near Johannesburg, South Africa, but in June 1986 they moved to Frankfurt, West Germany. CfAN’s Crusade Director in Harare assured me that this move has nothing to do with the politics of South Africa, and much to do with easy access to the whole continent of Africa.

The Fire Conference was held in the new Harare Conference Centre, 21-27 April 1986. A planning committee of 30 had prepared for it for three years. It was for African evangelists. To attend, stipulated an advertising brochure, “you need to be a national crusade evangelist or a pastor/leader actively involved in evangelistic work”. It drew over 4000 such people, from 60 countries, most from the 41 African countries represented. Of these African delegates, CfAN paid for about 1000. The conference cost Z$2,000,000 to hold, and air travel cost Z$70,000 (Z$l = US $0.60). Delegates booked out 27 hotels in the city.

The aim of the conference was variously expressed in publicity brochures: “to draw together all of Africa’s leading evangelists”; to devise “a common strategy to evangelize the great continent”; to “broaden our base, enlarge our family of partners and friends, and create an awareness among church leaders in Africa of CfAN’s committed march northwards to Cairo”.

Although the Fire Conference was distinct from the CfAN crusade, the two were not completely separate. Delegates to the conference spent the day in lectures, but in the evenings went to CfAN’s big tent to witness “‘Holy Spirit evangelism in demonstration’” (Bonnke). As one Zambian delegate put it, “We come here to the tent in the evenings for our practical”. Each delegate could