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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOME ELEMENTS IN CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST AND YORUBA RELIGION

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Abstract

The use of religious elements explains an integral aspect of African indigenous churches and Yoruba religion. Religious elements are representative objects or images that express and signify something else, other than that which is perceived in symbolic reality. It is of essence that the use of religious elements aids religious worship in driving home the desired goals as associated with belief. Thus, the abstract faith brought by Christian Missionaries could not solve all of the people's existential challenges especially Yoruba Christians. The intention of this paper is to comparatively evaluate the use of religious elements in Celestial Church of Christ, which is one of the African Indigenous Churches established by S.B.J Oshoffa in 1947 and Yoruba Religion. The study adopts historical and comparative methods leading to the fact that Celestial Church of Christ and Yoruba Religious adherents use some symbolic elements to enhance their beliefs and faith. This study seeks to posit that these religious elements are symbolic and are means to an end. To this end, these religious elements in both religions remain ever important aspect of the people's profession of their faith and experience, despite variations in typology and perception between the two faiths under review.

Keywords: Religious elements, comparative study, Yoruba, Religion and Celestial Church of Christ.

Introduction

It is a known fact that all religions are enmeshed in the use of elements. The idea of religious elements forms an integral aspect of African indigenous churches with special reference to Celestial Church of Christ in particular and Yoruba religion in general. Thus, religious elements are representative objects or images that explain and signify something else, other than that which is perceived in symbolic reality. In essence, the use of elements in religious circles is to aid confession of faith and experience. As a matter of fact, the use of religious elements varies from one religious centre to the others.

In addition, religious elements mean an essential or important principles pertaining to religion upon which the fundamental power of religion is based. That is, consisting an intrinsic part of worship. Hence, the two religions under study, religious elements form part of their basic principles of worship. In other words, the desire to aid religious worship gives rise to the use of religious elements. Celestial Church of Christ, being an indigenous church makes adaptation to some aspects of religious

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elements of Yoruba religion. In this study, it would be argued that in both Celestial Church of Christ and Yoruba religion, abstract faith could not help Yoruba Christians. They therefore make use of concrete elements to aid their religious worship. At the introduction of Christianity in Nigeria, it is obvious that the Europeans that brought Christianity to Yorubaland imposed their culture on the people, which seems foreign to them. This, made Ayegboyin and Ishola, (2013:15) to comment that "... in a bid to correct the foreignness of the church, took into consideration the African culture and religious consciousness." It was this religious consciousness that leads to inculcation of traditional views into Christianity.

It is the thrust of this paper to examine the advent of Christianity in Yoruba with special focus on Celestial Church of Christ, coupled with its elements. Also, the historical background of Yoruba Religion would be explored as well as her elements, while their points of convergence and divergence shall be analyzed.

The Advent of Christianity in Yorubaland

The focus of this section is to examine the evolution of Christianity in Nigeria. Pauline Lere (2001:79) avers that the year 1841 and 1843 marked the `beginning of the movement to re-establish" Christianity in Nigeria after the failure of earlier attempt in 1482 to plant Christianity in Nigeria. Onaiyekan, (2011:5) corroborating this views, expresses that the first effort to preach Christianity in the ancient kingdoms of Benin and Warri did not leave much lasting effect. The evolution of Christianity in Nigeria, in particular, came as a result of liberation of ex-slaves from the new world. Oshitelu (2002:62) observes "out of evil sometimes comes good". This, he said, may aptly be applied to the planting of Christianity in Nigeria as a result of the emancipation of slaves from Cuba, Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad Tobago and United State of America.

The history of Christian mission in Nigeria has received a large volume of space in different literatures. Ayandele (1966:102) and Ade Ajayi (1965:127) have examined the genesis of Christian missionary activities in Nigeria and how these activities were restricted to coastal areas, and eventually, found their in-roads through the "impenetrable jungle" of the forest zone to the interior, and bringing changes to the existing institutions. In a similar vein, Dike (1957:7-8) also notes that the late eighteenth century enlightenment period in Europe, together with the American and French revolutions encouraged the emergence of evangelical movements. These movements gave new life to Christianity and made the emancipation and regeneration of distant people, the duty of the church. These activities resulted in the formation of missionary societies. The Baptist Mission was founded in 1792, London Missionary Society in 1795, and the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) was established in 1799. However, as from the late 19th century, Christian Missionaries started to come, mainly from different European nations, and from USA. They brought to Nigeria different versions of the Christian Message. We had some Anglican Missionaries, Methodists, Catholics and Baptists before the end of 19th

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century. These Christian Missionaries came through the sea both on the Badagary-Lagos – Abeokuta axis, and Niger Delta Calabar axis (Onaiyekan, 2011:5).

The activities of these missions played a major role in Yorubaland particularly in 1842. Christianity made an in-road to Yorubaland in 1842 (Omoyajowo, 1994:1). The Methodist mission took the lead under the leadership of Thomas Birch Freeman. Not long after, the arrival of Church Missionary Society (CMS) headed by Henry Townsend was announced. He landed in Abeokuta in the same year, (Ishola, 2010:218).

Although, Ayegboyin and Ishola, (2013:1) observe that the period from the nineteenth century to the present has been characterized by the establishment and growth of the African strand of Christianity. African Indigenous Churches came to be reckoned with in Nigeria from late 19th century and early 20th century. The establishment of African Indigenous Churches can be categorized as the Ethiopian churches and the founding of the African Independent Churches known as the Aladura churches in an attempt to correct the colonial Christianity with its characteristic, cultural imperialism led to crises of secession by African leaders from mission established churches (Olupona 1991:38). Partly, the reason for this is that this particular verse of Psalm 68:31 which states "Ambassador will come from Egypt, Ethiopia will stretch out her hand to God" is understood to be a prediction of the incursion of the Ethiopian (that is black Africans) into the house hold of God, (Ayegboyin and Ukah, 2002:74).

Thus, African Independent Church broke ties from mission-related churches in quest for enhanced leadership positions for Africans in church management and, in some instances, over issues of polygamy. Consequently, Ethiopian churches reject European leadership even when they still retain most of the doctrines and organizational structure of their parent churches, (Ayegboyin and Ukah, 2002:72). However, Ayegboyin and Ishola (2013:29-32) noticeably assert that "the churches so formed were: the Native Baptist Church which broke away from the Baptist Church Lagos in March 1888; the United African Church jointly founded in 1981 by secessionist from Anglican, Methodist, Baptist churches an soon. The African Church Bethel, seceded from the Anglican Church October, 1901; while the United African Methodist Church (Eleja) secured independence in 1917 (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 2013). However the church did not achieve much by way of indigenization or even independence.

The second category which seceded from the mainline churches formed as a result of doctrinal issue connected with the role of prayers, dreams, prophecies, faith healing as solution to all life's problem such as fertility, mental illness, unemployment, promotion and marriage. The churches in this category are more spiritual and complex. They, unlike, the churches in the first category synthesize certain elements of Christianity and African culture. This is demonstrated in their use of African songs, musical instruments and the toleration of African traditional practices such as polygamy and divination, (Adogame, 2005). These churches were

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Cherubim and Seraphim Church (1925, The Church of the Lord Aladura, (1930); Christ Apostolic Church (1930); and Celestial Church of Christ (1947) which was quite different from other Aladura Churches for its uniqueness. It is on this note that, we shall examine briefly the Celestial Church of Christ which serves as our case study.

Historical Background of CCC

The emergence of Celestial Church of Christ was distinctive because it did not evolve as a "prayer group", "fellowship" or "societies" or from Bible classes or from any parent body like some other Aladura Churches such as Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) society which for several years was an interdenominational society, (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 1999:99).

In fact, the Celestial Church of Christ was founded spontaneously around the life and visionary experience, and charismatic personality of Samuel Bilewu Oshoffa, a carpenter-turned Prophet, in 1947. His divine call was dated back to 23rd May 1947, the day of the eclipse of the sun, when he was lost in the forest for three months. In the forest, he was said to have lived like a hermit depending only on honey and water as he was praying in the forest, he heard voices but could not open his eyes. So many things were revealed to him in this vision, part of which included the form which his church would take. As a matter of fact, the church was believed to have been founded by the Lord Jesus Christ. This was attested to by the founder, when he was recounting his experience and encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ to the members.

It is to be noted that the name of the Church was received through a divine revelation through one Mr. Alexander Yanga who fell into a trance for seven days while going through spiritual healing at the resident of the founder. Therefore, he wrote with chalk: *Eligse du Christianism Celeste"* on the wall meaning *"Holy Assembly from Heaven"*. As the CCC began far and wide in the capital city of Porto-Novo, the founder was said to have come under heavy criticism and persecution which made him leave Benin Republic. Reasons have been expressed to explain why pastor Oshoffa was compelled to "shift" his base. Ayegboyin and Ishola (2013:96) hold that there was a clash between Oshoffa and the new government of President Kerekou, who had advocated a socialist government. They said such a clash might not be unexpected since the socialist leader would have seen a popular religious leader as a threat. The second view expressed which was closely related to the above holds that there was fiction between Oshoffa and Kerekou occasioned by the government order that all religious institutions should make a declaration of their property and the last account submits that as member of the older Christian organizations were defecting to CCC, the ministers in these established churches worked together as a group against Oshoffa and ensured that he left the vicinity.

Before Oshoffa found refuge in Nigeria, some Egun fishermen from Republic of Benin had already introduced Celestial Church of Christ in Lagos. Convinced about the prospect of the church in Nigeria, Oshoffa arrived in Nigeria in

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1951, he formally settled in 1952 in Maroko, a marshy area in Lagos. With his charisma and the powerful gift of performing extra-ordinary miracles, the CCC grew far more rapidly in Nigeria than it had been the case in Port Novo, (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 2013:96-97).

From all indications, one could see the uniqueness of the church on November 24th 1958, the church as formally and duly registered under the land ordinance cap 107. The certificate registration number is 489, and was dully signed by the government General of the federation, Sir James Robertson, Celestial constitution (1980:13). Before the death of Oshoffa on September 10, 1985, he had worked relentlessly to make the CCC one of the fastest growing churches in the world. Members of the church claim that they have close to 1600 branches worldwide. After his death, the succession processes did not go without tussles, acrimony and schism in the church. Olowonibi (2007:138-148) opines that when the baton of leadership changed, the church was shaken to its foundation. There were some mis-understandings and quarreling among members of the board trustees of the church which have led to litigations in the court. However, the constitution of the church stipulated that:

> The successor to the office of the pastor can be from any rank in the hierarchy of the church and shall at a time be chosen by God to reveal this unto erstwhile incumbent of post of pastor, be named and proclaimed by the founder. On succeeding after the transition of his predecessor in office, the new pastor will occupy the pastor's chair in the inner altar, (The Constitution, 1980:31).

To this end, members of the church believed that nobody has the right to occupy the exalted seat, due and spiritual consultation must be made. As a result of this, there arose internal squabbling and disagreement among board of trustees and senior shepherds of the church. The crises in the church got to it climax in 1997 when one of its top leaders went to court to challenge the authority of Supreme Evangelist Abiodun Alexander Bada by superior Evangelist Kayode Owoduni saying that he had no right to lay claim to the highest seat of the power, even though, he is commanded by virtue of filling out of the church. This was part of the reason why he filed a lawsuit in the court. It was in the process of litigation that A.A. Bada died and this had led to the major schism in the church in which Owoduni and his followers got separated from the church, (Olowonibi 2007:141). Apart from this, there are also divisions between the trustee and (diocesan). In the year 2011, an attempt was made to unify the church which met with brick wall.

Further investigation that was conducted obviously indicated that there were confusions in the church as soon as P.H. Ajose another leader, who was the shepherd in-charge of London diocese who was the successor to A.A. Bada in year 2000 died less than one year as an acclaimed leader of the church.

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At this point, there arose a great controversy among the Board of Trustees and other senior leaders of the church. The church got divided into factions. The first was the Board of Trustee called "Trustee" and the other faction was called 'the Diocesan'. The division ensued when the Board of Trustees appointed Mobiniya Emmanuel Oshoffa the son of the late founder as spiritual head of the church while the "Diocesan" appointed G.O. Jesse the Head of Port-Novo Diocese instead of Mobiniya Oshoffa who also died less than a year as a leader, it was in view of this that Paul Maforikan, the Oyo State, Evangelist was appointed as replacement by the Diocesan and the church was in disarray. However, the trustees were using Imeko in Egbado division of Ogun State as the headquarters of the church while "the Diocesan" are using Tejuoso Parish as their headquarters. Due to the polity and organization of the church, different parishes of CCC took sides with factions they believed would be of benefit to them. According to senior Evangelist Akin Averehi, said that 'the Diocesan' had the largest members because they are seen as progressive while the "Trustee" were seen as conservatives. Several efforts have been made to broker peace among the factions.[1]

The Religious Elements in Celestial Church of Christ

No doubt, the Celestial Church of Christ involves itself in religious rituals by making use of religious elements. Babalola (2001:195) posits that, "rituals in the Aladura Christianity have some glaring characteristics which can be broadly categorized into two items viz. Biblical rituals and rituals who have their roots in African indigenous practices". It is on this note that we shall examine the religious elements embarked upon by the Celestial Church of Christ.

Olupona (2000:2) sees rituals as a process and a communication, while Eliade describes rituals as 'a re-enactment of sacred prototypes of the repetition of the action of divine being or mythical ancestors. Again Olupona (1986:31) posits that ritual signifies re-enactment of primordial existence which revitalizes the structure of a community. Alamu (2020:146) in his view opines that "the term ritual is open to different interpretation depending on the perspective authority subjects it to as a result of its relevance virtually in all religions". On this note, Alamu (2020) further gives three types of religious rituals which are piacular, non periodic and calendricals. These types of rituals, he said, can be performed in situation of danger, can be a change in social status, may be connected to marriage; birth, puberty and at death; and the last which is performed as a fixed period known to the believing community.

It is on this note that we shall look at the religious elements in Celestial Church of Christ in the performance of their religious rituals which shall be based on the following stand points, revelation, sacrifice, and liturgy. The use of religious elements in the worship of Celestial Church of Christ as mentioned earlier could be seen in the biblical rituals which are found in the Bible which include candles, incense, water and imprecatory prayers. To this end, candles, incense, holy water and

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chapter from the book of psalms are not only used by the members, Babalola (2001:159) maintains that objects and some materials are used, so that evil spirits and forces may be overcome by them.

In the light of this, the C.C.C uses religious elements in their worship. Ijaola and Adegboyega (2015:132) in their work observe that:

> It is a common place among Yoruba that Celestial Church prophets use elements such as coconut, palm fronds, eggs from local hen or pigeon, stone, dews, sea waters and others in their prayer to make impactful positive changes on issues of interest of their client which include: victory over competitors, success in trades, success in examination, deliverance from delayed pregnancy, healing of primary and secondary infertility, healing of diseases, causing misfortune on enemy and so on.

From the above, we have seen that the C.C.C makes use of certain elements in their worship in order to make positive changes in the life(s) of their members in solving their problems, Olademo (2012:54) corroborates the above by stating that:

> There is the use of natural elements for religious purposes... This may include fruits like coconuts, banana, orange as well as elements such as sugar and salt. These items are believed to carry within them certain connotations that could be appealed to for effective healing of the sick.

From the above statement, it is unequivocally convincing that the use of religious element is paramount in the Celestial Church of Christ, either as solution to mountainous problems such as sickness, deliverance or freedom from evil forces.

Apart from the above, the religious element used by the Celestial Church of Christ in their religious rituals is water or river. Water is an important element in religious worship that cannot be explained away. Olowonibi (2007:79) opines that, river has always been one of the most sacred natural objects used in the church. Africans do not joke with water in their living because of its importance. They involve the use of water in whatever they do in life. Therefore, Sinclair (1997:91) quoted Camille Talker Tonounga to have said:

> Black Africa has traditionally attached a "wealth of symbolic meanings" to rivers, water, from source of all life to purify substance and regenerating element.

In Celestial Church of Christ, it is believed that water could be used to purify and consecrate their members. For instance, in Celestial Church of Christ, there is the spontaneous use of river by the founder, Joseph Bilewu Oshoffa whose method of the location of the church beside river is evidenced and rooted in his practical application of African beliefs and understanding in his evangelistic activities among the Yoruba

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people. Ijaola and Adegboyega, (2018) assert that "the church also practices exorcism and does special spiritual baths in rivers and rocky places where they burn white candles... for special prayers". Supporting this view, Olademo (2012:54), in her assessment notes that "the belief is that the flowing stream has washed away all the sickness and mishaps that could affect the patient. In addition, there is the prevalent use of religious means such as oil, water, fruits, coconut, candles and incense. (Ijaola and Adegboyega, 2018:133).

Also, in Celestial Church of Christ, some rites of passage are performed in the church in the seclusion of women, purification, naming ceremonies and confinement. In the process of carrying out these religious rituals, one must take into cognisance that religious elements used are water, candle, soap and sponges. For example, Ayegboyin and Ishola, (2013:98-99) speculatively observe that menstruating women are not allowed to come into the church premises except they are cleansed. Such a woman must be purified. According to them "on the day of purification, usually the eight day, the woman is expected to go to the church with a bucket of water, candle, sponge and soap. Prayers of purification are then pronounced on these before the woman takes her ceremonial bath. It is only after this she is permitted to re-enter the church.

In line with the above, for a child to receive a name, there are procedures to be followed. Naming ceremonies are usually elaborated and ritual-like. The religious elements used are that parents would be asked to buy seven types of fruits and seven candles which are lit and put in the white bowl into which water is poured.... While the service is in progress, a recorder sits close to the prophet-in-trance to record prophecies about the names given by the heavenly hosts. The names of a child are dictated, not by parents, but rather given under the inspiration by a prophet or prophetess. What the future holds for the child may also be recounted by the prophets, (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 2013:99).

Closely connected to the above is the idea of revelation in the church. The religious element used in this regard is candle. In the process of revealing deep things of the spiritual realm, the prophets often go into trance as the spirit wills and provide prophetic consultation on special days. The prophets also "see" vision for their client on special day, as urgency may require or as they are led by the spirit. One common phenomenon which is paramount in Celestial Church of Christ is "Spirit possession." Ijaola and Adegboyega (2018:131) posit that:

> People are possessed by the Holy Spirit after which they becomes mediums. They prophesy and reveal secret things to their clients... the attribute of spirit possession is that the medium is known speak in tongues before relating his messages, (2001:157).

On a final note, the idea of sacrifice also goes along with the use of religious elements most particularly in the area of healing. It is important to note that Christian

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conception of healing is interwined with the individual's relationship with the supernatural and the physical sign are but part of the story. The Celestial Church of Christ, for instance, is strikingly ritualistic and materialistic in their approach to healing. Oyalana (2002:126) attests to the fact that the Celestial Church of Christ believes in carrying out sacrifice for healing and use material objects like egg, palm fronds, ritual bathing in performing healing for the sick. Corroborating this view, Olademo (20122:58) informs that "the patient may be required to provide a coconut and to take birth in a flowing stream at midnight. The patient might also be required to provide different kind of elements such as different kind of fruits, cooked foods to be given to those that are begging for alms, local eggs that will be used to rub the whole body and smashed on the ground all of these are observed in the Celestial Church of Christ.

From the foregoing, the C.C.C involves itself in liturgical rituals. It is imperative to note that they include procession with burning of incense, sprinkling sanctified waters, and invocation of angels. Ijaola and Adegboyega (2018:134) poignantly note that what is prominent with C.C.C is her ontological understanding of angelic beings who they believed could appear in various forms. According to them:

> They believe in the visitation of angels during worship service with some claims that the angels do reveal themselves to some people at will. In fact, the founder of the church claimed to have had encounters with angels, who appeared to him inform of animals during his call to gospel ministry.

Apart from the above, the burning of incense, sprinkling of sanctified waters and invocation of angels are to drive away evil and territorial spirits that might want to hinder their service. The use of candles for prophecies by prophets and prophetess to lunch into the divine to know what life has for them. This is vigorously pursued by members of C.C.C. As part of their liturgy, the Celestial Church of Christ introduces Yoruba musical instruments such as: Bata, Bembe, Gangan, Omele lyalu, Agogo, Sekere and others to aid the service in the church. The church has much regards for music. The Celestial Church of Christ has special worship songs which were collected from different inspirational sources, but not from missionary hymn books (Ijaola and Adegboyega: 2018).

A Panoramic View of Yoruba Religion

The Yoruba religion has been handed down by our forbears from generation to generation. Ogunade, (2010) observes that Yoruba religion is the indigenous faith of the Yoruba passed down from the genesis of their generation through oral traditions, art, crafts, liturgies, pithy sayings, proverbs, folklores, stories, songs and wise saying to the contemporary age. The Yoruba practiced this traditional religion, before the introduction of Christianity and each community worshipped individual

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deity (or deities) in accordance to its devotional needs. For instance, the veneration of *Ogun, Sango, Orunmila. Oya* and *Osun* among others are prevalent in Yorubaland.

There are various monumental works of Idowu, (1990), Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) and Oso (1979) on Yoruba religion which have continued to be a major reference point. There are five fundamental beliefs or basic themes which Idowu (1979) has described as the structure of African religion. This structure as observed by Awolalu and Dopamu includes belief in God; belief in Divinities; belief in spirits; belief in ancestors and belief in the practice of magic and medicine. Dopamu, (1999) points out that the Yoruba name for Supreme Being is *Olorun* or *Olodumare* in whom they believe and worship. This depicts God as the author of all things, visible and unvisible, the Head or overlord of all in heaven and on earth.

Apart from Doparnu's knowledge of the function, role and the place of God in Yoruba religion, Idowu, (1979:35) has further explained the function of God thus:

> He is supreme over all on earth and in heaven, acknowledged by the divinities as the Head of whom all authority belongs and all allegiance is due and His status of supremacy is absolute. Things happen when He approves, things do not come to pass if he disapproves. In worship, the Yoruba holds him ultimately first and the last in man's daily life. He has the ultimate pre-eminence.

From the above, we have seen the enormous powers wielded by God as being absolute in all things and acknowledged by the divinities who could not do anything outside themselves except what He approves.

Next on the Yoruba cosmos were the divinities created by *Olodumare* and given specific assignments. The divinities are called *Orisa.* It is generally believed that the divinities have the attributes and characteristics of the Supreme Being. They were brought forth by *Olodumare* to serve as ministers and functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe, (Odejobi, 2014:586). Doparnu (1999) observes that the divinities are many and numbers vary between 201, 401, 600, 1,700. They have shrines, temples, devotees, priests and priestesses and they are offered worship and receive day to day sacrifices. He enthuses further that, "technically they are intermediaries between God and man according to Yoruba religion, (1999). Such divinities are *Obatala, Orunmila, Ogun, Esu* and a divinized heroes *Sango, Osun, Oya* etc. Above all, all these divinities or deities are ministers of God which give account of their works to Him.

The third and the fourth Yoruba fundamental beliefs is the Spirits and the Ancestors. The Spirits are believed to be apparitional entities which form a separate categories of being from divinities and ancestors. Dopamu (1999) believes that they are regarded by the Yoruba as powers which are almost abstract entities that take on human shape. They are usually associated with natural phenomena like trees, rocks, rivers, lagoons, forests, bushes hills, earth mountains, winds, dark grooves and unusual places and these become their abode. These spirits may even inhabit animals,

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birds or snake, such objects as they inhabit are regarded as having certain mysterious powers and they become the emblem of the spirit. The ancestors according to Oso (1979:100), "are the dead members of the family. It is believed that they continue existence in the world beyond as spirit. The dead is endowed with limitless potentialities, therefore they can be relied upon for protection or care, a father or mother still performs his or her parental function very effectively now since he/she is in the world of the spirit". Lois Fuller (2001:59) in her understanding of the ancestors asserts that:

> Not every person who dies becomes an "ancestors" to be consulted and given offerings. Usually, the person must have lived a good life and have had children sometimes he must have died in old age and have contributed to the progress of his people. In some groups, there is ceremony after the person's death whereby his relatives install him to ancestors status and make his shrine.

Corroborating the above view of Lois Fuller, Doparnu (1999) points out that there are communal ceremonies in honour of the ancestors. He said certain cults like *Oro, Egungun, Agemo, Gelede* and Adamu *Orisha* are dedications to the worship of ancestral spirits... They are believed to be able to influence living members of the family for good or evil, but their influence does not extend beyond their specific families. Ancestral worship is common in Yoruba and it is a major belief in the Yoruba traditional religion.

Lastly, the belief in magic and medicine in Yoruba religion cannot be overemphasized in which Dopamu acknowledges as *Oògùn, egbògi* or *isègùn* (magic, medicine), *Oso, Oogun Ika* or *Oogun buburu* (Sorcery), (bad magic) and eye, *Osoronga*, (witchcraft). The Yoruba believes in spiritual and unseen power, which could be tapped for the use of man. This mysterious or mystical power include magic, medicine sorcery, and witchcraft. It is important to note that these mysterious powers played and prominent role in lives of the Yoruba people, (Dopamu, 1999).

Religious Elements in Yoruba Religion

In Yoruba traditional religion, every act of worship has distinct elements, which are rituals, liturgy, sacrifice, divination cultic functionaries and sacred places. Liturgy can be seen as an important element of worship in Yoruba religion. It means the prescribes form of public worship among the people. Akinfenwa (2012) in her observation of Yoruba religion notes that:

> The Yoruba people approach their task with awe and seriousness, always conscious of the fact that any omission in the normal order of service, could incur the displeasure of the deity and jeopardize the efficacy of worship. Every act of

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> worship in Yorubaland has an ultimate reference to the Supreme Being who must sanction it.

It is as a result of this, that makes the Yoruba people to make consultations in whatever they do. Alabi (2006:93) observes that in the life of the Yoruba, the oracles are consulted at almost every juncture and on all important occasions. It warnings are heeded in the most scrupulous manner to avoid disaster". Also, Wande Abimbola (1976:10) lends his voice to support the above view when he emphasized that "Ifa is consulted before any important thing is embarked upon in the town." It has been discovered that the Yoruba, in their religious life, have various ways by which they unveil the mystery of the past, present and even the future. Supporting Abimbola's submission, Alabi (2006:94) writes:

> One of such ways is divination in its various forms. To them, divination provides revelation, which is seen as voice of *Olodurnare*.

Divination, according Lois Fuller, means "the art of finding out hidden, spiritual or future by some signs". While Alabi (2006) sees divination as various means by which hidden facts about events are revealed". Furthermore, he said it was not practically limited to the future, rather, it is concerned with the entire temporal range, divining cause (past) as well as relationship between present occurrences (Alabi 2006).

Therefore, it must be emphasized that *Ifa* was, and still an essential element of Yoruba religion. To guide them in resolving very important issues today, adherent of Yoruba religion continue to, consult *Ifa*, whether the occasion is birth of a new baby or the selection of traditional ruler, (Wande, 1976:10). Nevertheless, rather than show hostility towards Christianity, it would appear that *Ifa* diviners adapted *Ifa* corpus to suit the new religion at its introduction in Yorubaland. The adaptation of *Ifa* corpus into Christianity is perhaps consistent with the suggestion of Beck and Blakely (1994:14) that "African religion often adopts extrinsic influenced and essential element into their religious system. In Yoruba religion, natural elements such as coconut, banana, orange as well as salt and sugar are used when it comes to the issue of healing and sacrifices were atimes required to be carried to overcome or prevent sickness through divination." Sacrifice can be seen as an important feature in Yoruba religion. Awolalu and Dopamu, (1979:240) opine that "sacrifice forms an essential part of every religious ceremony and it is fundamental to worship". Also, Oso (1979) says that sacrifice is prayer, this is to say that it is the very essence of religion"

This reveals that sacrifice forms part and parcel of their life. It must be observed also that every act of worship has an element which may be described as a sacrifice. In case of healing, a client might be asked to carryout a sacrifice on the cross-roads either to avert imminent death or to be healed of certain diseases or

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sickness. The diviner might consult *Ifa* to know what measure or prescription that should be taken. Oso further remarks that; "African traditional religion depends on the occasion of sacrifice and the taste of the particular divinity to whom the sacrifice is offered, Oso (1979:100). Olademo (2012:55) elates that healing takes the form of consultation in which the diviner would know what to be done. According to her "the result of the consultation will provide indication on the process of healing and this may include sacrifice, pharmaceutical mixtures or the giving of alm. From the above, it can be established that giving of alms may be required. Such element in the giving alms may include money, salt, palm oil, foods and lots more. This is done to ward off evil.

One last religious element to be observed here in the Yoruba religion is water. According to Yoruba, they always say that *"omi labù wè, omi labù mu, enikan kò ki n bá omi se ota"* which literarily means that "water is used in bathing and drinking, no one makes water an enemy. Water can be seen as an essential element that is vital to all religious activities. Olademo (2010:541) has explicitly enunciated the importance of water and its connection with religion. We will quote her in *extensor*:

> The connection of religion and water dates back to the beginning of human life. Water is first a significant element of the universal order. Wherever they are found, waters are often bound up with divine powers. The Africans not only validate the intrinsic woth of water but also recognize water as a significant part of a whole design... Consequently, healing is an inherent value of water; this is especially true of waters and are attributed to goddesses. Curative and preventive healing is in addition to regeneration are inherent properties of such waters. This essential quality of water informs its use for healing purposes.

From time immemorial, water serves as man's need and its significant worth cannot be ignored. It is imperative to note that in Yoruba traditional conception, they believe that the river is embedded in aquatic spirits which when consulted find solutions to various problems. Olademo, (2010:542) further sustains that "from the religious perspective, therefore, rivers are venues where ritual, myth, migration stories and identity construction converge for individual and communities". Ritual bathing takes place in the river for the purpose of healing in accordance to prescription. Apart from the religious uses of water is essentially significant to human use.

Again, another process of healing is the spirit possession which is still popular means of healing by traditional practitioners. Ijaiya is of the view that among the Yoruba like other African cultures, the act of healing is considered as religious one; this is because it is believed that the traditional practitioners as inspired by the

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Orisa and the ancestors". Johnson Bashua and Adepeju Olufemi (2015:37) broaden our horizon on spirit possessing as a means of healing when they express the view that:

> During the process of spirit possession, the *Babalawo* is possessed by the cultic spirit to which he is attached in this state, the Yoruba will say "*Emi òrisà gùn*". At this stage, the client get first hand opportunity of engaging in conversation with the spirit and discussing the issue, and the problems for which he/she needs spiritual guidance and resolution.

Sequel to the above, it is appraisingly important to note that the diviners known as *Babalawo* lunch their self into the spirit world to know the client problem in order to proffer solution to it. In order to know the appropriate sacrifice and herbal remedies to administer, Bashua and Olufemi, (2015) further maintain that "a traditional healer can go at will in a state of trance bridging the gap between the physical and spiritual world. Usually, healing takes place at this season in form of exorcism when the ritual ceremonies conducted by the traditionalist are arranged for the purpose of driving away notorious spirits which endanger the life of an individual. It is expedient to [illegible]hat with the idea of spirit possession, it allows the diviners, the traditionalist or the Babalawo to know exactly what the problem is, and the course of possession he makes enquiries from the spirits world in order to know the solution to be proffered. Since the Yoruba believe that sickness or diseases or issue, of life could come from metaphysical world.

Comparative Analysis

Alamu (2020: 154) is of the opinion that "it is the responsibility of comparative study to objectively and scientifically undertake an unbiased study of comparing areas of common interest and point of departure so as to appreciate objectively their common themes and object. It is based on this note that this study shall be subjected to comparative analysis by comparing and contrasting religious elements in both religions.

Areas of Common Interest

From all indications, it is revealed that religious elements are important in both religions inspite of the slight modifications done by Celestial Church of Christ. There is a nexus between the Celestial Church of Christ and the Yoruba religion. Both religions engage in the religious elements for the purpose of profession of faith and experience. These religious rituals in both religions involve the use of concrete elements such as fruits, water, brooms, palm fronds, white chalk, efun is used to consecrate people, objects or materials so that evil spirits or forces may not have power over them. Therefore, Olademo (2012) states that there is the use of natural

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element for religious purposes by both groups. This may include fruits like coconut, banana and oranges as well as elements such as sugar and salt.

The similarities between both religions could be seen in the area of revelation. Revelation according to Iwuoha (2005:70) is the disclosure; to reveal some knowledge or give an order or information. Iwuoha (2005:77) further buttresses that:

> Although African religion is polytheistic, while Judaism and Christianity are essentially monotheistic. That does not mean that it is not revealed as others. The fact that African are expressing their religious worldview which believes in a Supreme Being and spirits in control by the supreme being who is perhaps the same in Judeo Christian God.

It is in line with the above that both Yoruba religion and Celestial Church of Christ shared the same world view of revelation.

It is important to assert that both Yoruba religion and Celestial Church of Christ show common interest in the concept of their beliefs. For example, the idea of divination in Yoruba religion is to foretell the future. This usually goes along with the spirit possession. In Yoruba religion, as earlier stated in this study is that, the Yoruba religion uses the symbol of *Ifa* divination to get message from the spiritual realm to their clients/adherent, which involves the phenomenon of spirit possession. This spirit possession is not strange to the adherents of Yoruba religion. The phenomenon of spirit possession has been described by Mbiti (1962) as an important phenomenon that makes the possessed to become medium. Mbiti (1962:172-177) in describing the role of the medium expressly states:

> The main duty of the medium is to line human beings with the living dead and the spirits. Through them messages are received from other world or men are given knowledge of things that would other wise be difficult or impossible to know. For example through a medium one gets in tourch with spirit world....

It is important to note that those possessed with the spirit usually serve as medium through which messages are gotten from the spiritual realm. It is to be observed that the traditional priests do not usually experience possession but they have priests in training who would experience "spirit possession" under the guardian of elderly priest (Babalola, 2001:156). Bashua and Olufemi (2015:37) state that during the process of spirit possession, the *Babalawo* is possessed by the cultic spirit to which he is attached in this state. At this stage, the client gets a first hand opportunity of engaging in conversation with the spirit and discussing the guidance and resolution. It is to be noted that in order to reveal the problem to the individual

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the method of divination is embarked upon and the medium of spirit possession which is the divine reveals the problem and gives spiritual guidance.

Also, in C.C.C, the idea of revelation is done through prophecy. Similarly, the idea of prophecy in Celestial Church of Christ is to receive messages from the spiritual realm where the prophets and prophetess receive message through spirit possession and they are on ground to foretell the future to any of their members and this is done also through spirit possession. From this point of view, Babalola (2001) is of the view that the ritual leader is known as *wolii* or *wolii agba* and those to be possessed by the spirit are known as *elemi* or *elemi mimo* are subjects to the directives of the *woli*. They are possessed by Holy Spirit and when they are on, they relate the message to the clients and a recorder would be there to record what is revealed by prophets or prophetess. This is done to be sure of what solution to be proffered to the problem. From the above, we have seen the similarities between the two that they both serve as mediums of relating messages to their clients. This, therefore, situates the two in the same worldview. Buttressing the above view, Babalola (2001:157) succinctly explains that. The phenomenon of spirit possession like divination plays an important role in the Aladura Churches. This phenomenon though found in the Bible, is not strange to the adherents of the indigenous religion.

Another stand point considered is the use of elements such as palm fronds, ca[illegible]s, cowries, brooms, perforated pots and charms are used as protections [illegible] religions. In Yoruba religion, Alvery (1982:86) notes that, the use of magic or charm to protect families and their entire family against evil, is done through incision, hanging an object through door post or charms hunged on neck, wrist, waist or finger against the attack of those that are not wishing them well. This is done to ward off evils. Similarly, the Celestial Church of Christ also uses elements such as crosses, white tread, candle, and a sword called 'Ida'. These elements are used in the following way as a means of protection. According to Prophetess Adewumi Ologede, our informant, recounted that in view of protecting a pregnant woman, she would be told to make seven small crosses made of silver on a white tread and tie it around her stomach under her cloth. This is against any attack from the spirit world or evil ones or against any 'born to die' child not to enter into the womb of the woman. This is also visible in Yoruba religion where the woman would be told to put a needle upon under her cloth.[2]

Apart from the above, is the protection of their children with seven crosses on a white thread hunged around their neck wrist and ankle according to the instruction of prophets or prophetess and this is done to ward off evil. Also, of note is a white candle tied with a sword called 'Ida.' This is usually hung at the entrance of the door post to protect them from them against any spirit being.[3] Similarly, protection in Yoruba religion there are various charms that are made on red cloth with cowries on it hung at the entrance of the house or a perforated pot with concoction and palm fronds are usually hung at the entrance of the house to ward off evil spirit. At times, a diviner or *babalawo* may divine that a prepared concocted

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beads, arm strings or amulet should be tied around the neck, waist or arms of an individual for protection on against evil occurrences or even against death.

Lastly is the issue of offering. In Yoruba religion, there are various kinds of offering that are embarked upon. These offerings range from 'good will' offering used to celebrate the death of an individual or enlist the support of an ancestors for some particular ventures; 'thanks offering' to the ancestors for their support for successes or recovery from a severe illness by member of a family, 'propitiatory offering' is used to propitiate the gods or the ancestors at the time of national or personal disasters, Oso (1979:89). This offering is also evident in Celestial Church of Christ. The offering takes different dimensions ranging from redemptive offering, purificatory offering and among others. The similarities between Yoruba religion and Celestial Church of Christ are in the area of material objects offered to be used as sacrifice.

Area of Dissimilarities

The practice and concept of religion varies from belief to belief. This is because in Celestial Church of Christ, "the apparent use of invocatory prayer on Yoruba religion and African Christianity portrays the prominent place occupied by the supernatural in people's conception of disease and healing", (Olademo 2012:54). Therefore, it is important to note that in Yoruba religion, emphasis on the use of incantations various types of prayer for diverse purpose while the Celestial Church of Christ employ the use of specific portion of the Bible like Psalms for various uses.

The difference is in the objective or victim of sacrifice. They went further to assert that animal and human being make sacrifice in all the religion of the world more efficacious than lifeless materials. It is germane to note that in Yoruba religion atimes blood sacrifices are usually required as goat, sheep, ram, cock even human being depending on the magnitude of the events that happened while in Celestial Church of Christ they made use of ritualistic and materialistic objects without recoursing to blood-letting.

Again, dissimilarities in both religions are that the sources of their revelation are from various sources. This does not mean that the Africans revelation is not received like others. Further to this, is that the *modus operandi* of spirit possession in Yoruba religion is the processor made mention of the name of the deity by which the possession takes place while in Celestial Church of Christ mention the name of Jesus.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the paper has examined the comparative study of some religious elements in Celestial Church of Christ and Yoruba religion. The study revealed that both religions use some elements such as water, revelation, prophecy and sacrifices.

The study also revealed areas of convergence and points of departure between Celestial Church of Christ and Yoruba Religion. The paper so far

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highlighted the importance and functions of these elements in both religions. These religious elements are sometimes motivated by the desire to obtain some pragmatic benefits and satisfaction over some existential challenges of life. These religious elements are more than the expression or confession of man's dependence on the supersensible world, which are laden with the effect of strengthening their unity and cohesion. To this end, the purpose of religious elements is to re-invigorate man's relationship to his/her sacred objects, beliefs and expression.

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Oral Interview

1. An Interview with Superior Apostle Shola Ayeni on 13/1/2020.
2. An Interview with Prophetess Adewumi Ologede on 12/2/2020.
3. An Interview with Prophetess Janet Motoni on 14/2/2020.

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