

THE PLACE OF RITUALS IN AFRICAN RELIGIOUS MOTIF AND NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Akiti Glory Alamu

Department of Religions,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
agalamufreelance2004@yahoo.com

Abiola Theresa Dopamu

Department of Religions,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The notion of ritual is synonymous with virtually all religions. Thus, ritual is a dramatic transformation of the individual persons beyond the mundane by dint of social conventions which transcend class distinction with a sense of identity. As a re-enactment of sacred archetype, it strengthens and re-affirms the corporate beliefs, optimizes structure and re-invigorates the role of the individual in the society. Within the province of religion, ritual has primordial formality, transformative quality, sacred prototype and revitalizing sensuality which stimulates an awesome contrast with ordinary conduct. This primordial formality and transformative quality has made many Nigerian Pentecostals to believe that ritual motif does not exist in Christianity. The paper therefore adopts historical-liturgical and comparative approach with the view that ritual is not only most elaborate and celebrated in African religion but also among Nigerian Pentecostal believers. The paper seeks to posit that ritual is a paradigmatic intent and purpose of religion itself by applying symbols with intellectual and sensual images that promote individual with sense of identity. The paper therefore concludes that the place of ritual in all religions is incontestable.

KEYWORDS: African religion, Nigeria, Pentecostalism, Christianity, Comparative Analysis

INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that ritual motif is a mono-axial picture of all religions. It is of interest to note that ritual is a paradigmatic and dramatic transformation of the individuals from the mundane to the realm of the divine by breaking social barriers with the application of symbols whether visual or aural with intellectual and sensual images for the purpose of societal identity. Ritual is the most subscribed and elaborate aspect of all religions, yet, the Nigerian Pentecostal believers fail to recognize this fact, instead, they distaste hearing the notion of ritual motif in Christendom. To this end, the thrust of this paper is to assert the place of ritual in African religion and Nigerian Pentecostals through comparative bird's eye view.

RITUAL: AN ACCOUNT

The term 'ritual' is open to different interpretations depending on the perspective each authority subjects it to as a result of its relevance in virtually all the religions. But for the purpose of this study, it would be appropriate to look at the submissions of some scholars with regard to ritual. Benjamin (1976:78) sees ritual as 'a way of communicating with the divine for the purpose of changing the human situation'. This definition implies that ritual is equivalent to the gristmill of attaining the level of the divine by virtue of elevation through the rites of passage. Meanwhile, Clothey (1980:23) submits that ritual functions as 'a paradigm and dramatization of the intent of religion itself' by using symbols, both visual and aural which along with intellectual and sensual images provide participants with a sense of identity (in Offiong, 2005:92).

In another development, Plavoet (1983:42) notes ritual as 'any sequence of customary symbolic actions which are standardized through repetition in social interaction. Besides, Hargrove's (1979:30) is similar to Plavoet's (1983) and Eliade's (1985) positions, which depicts the fact that ritual is repeated symbolic behaviour and Eliade describes ritual as 'a re-enactment of sacred prototypes the repetition of the action of divine beings or mythical ancestors. The definition of Mircea Eliade tallies with the position of Olupona (1986:31) who posits that ritual signifies a re-enactment of a primordial existence which revitalizes the structure of a community. It strengthens and re-affirms the group's beliefs and maximizes order, reinforces the place of the individual in his society, and strengthens the bonds of a society vis-a-vis the individual (Ogungbile, 2003:186). In retrospect, Eliade's (1985) submission with regard to the meaning of ritual would serve as a guide in this narrative which seeks to posit the place of ritual in African religion and Christianity cum Pentecostals.

It is not out of place to assert the various types of ritual in religions (Offiong, 2005:93). They are Piacular, Non-Periodic and Calendrical Rituals. Without any equivocation, Piacular rituals according to Mair (1972:240) are performed in situation of danger...often thought of as being brought by some fault and in them ideas of propitiation and expiation are prominent. Gennep (1985:56) sees Non-Periodic ritual as a change in life crises. By and large, his understanding of the rites of passage has enabled him to situate it within the confine of change in social status. Therefore, such change of social status may be connected to marriage, birth, puberty and at death. Every rite performed at these stages assist the individuals through transition and prepares them for the new roles. Lastly, Van Gennep (1985:70) also refers to calendrical ritual as communal rites of passage. It is performed at a fixed period known to the believing community.

A PANORAMIC VIEW OF AFRICAN RELIGION AND ITS RITUALS

The fact that Africans are religious is incontestable. Mazrui (1976:23) debunks the erroneous claims that Africans were bereft of history, culture and the concept of God. He appositely claims that before the advent of the cross and crescent, Africans were at worship. In other words, he attests to the fact that before the incursion of Christianity and Islam, Africans had their indigenous way of worshipping and approaching the Supreme Being. No doubt, Idowu (1996: 1) opines that in all things Africans are religious. Mbiti (1980: 78) speaks of Africans as notoriously religious. Abe (2004: 1) supports the fact that Africans are religion personified.

According to him, in the beginning it was religion and in the end it shall be religion. Ejiofor (1974:45) observes that religion is the provenance and consummation of all things. According to him, men take off from religion, march alongside religion and arrive at religion. Therefore, religion is a minute to minute phenomenon in the lives of the Africans. African Religion embraces all aspects of life. Dopamu (2005: 1) attests to the fact that Africans do not know how to exist without religion playing a leading and major role. According to him:

“Africans do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on everything without bringing in religion.”

The foregoing reveals that Africans are incurably religious hence they bring in the understanding of God and His vicegerents in the theocratic rule of the universe. Africans take off from religion and their lives terminate with religion. Put variously, Africans transit with religion. Kwame Gyekye (1987: 24) continues from where Dopamu stopped by stating that in all undertakings-whether it be cultivating, sowing, harvesting, eating, travelling-religion is at work. To be born into the African environment is to be born into a culture that is intensely and pervasively religious that requires, participating in the religious beliefs and rituals of the community. We cannot detach ourselves from the religion of the community, for to do otherwise would be to isolate ourselves from the group and to disrupt the sense of communal membership and security and to lose much of the meaning of existence. Thus, it has been said that in the traditional African society, there are no atheists or agnostics. Religious life, then, is not an individual but a communal affair, woven into the culture of the people. Thus, African understanding of the universe points to the fact that there is one universe that accommodates the tangible and intangible, sensible and super sensible, material and immaterial. We must be quick to add that African religion is thus a natural religion, independent of revelation. Since humankind has seen himself/herself as a created being, he/she infers that there must be a creator worthy of worship and adoration.

For Africans, religion is simply life and life is all about religion. This assertion critically supports Kungs' (1993:xvii) interpretation of religion thus;

A believing view of life, approaches to life, way of life, and society, humankind and the world, through which is a person, though only partially conscious of sees and experiences, thinks and feels, acts and suffers, everything. It is a transcendently grounded experience and immanent operative system of co-ordinates by which human beings orient themselves intellectually, emotionally and existentially.

For Africans, religion is far more exceeding way of life or an approach to life as directed by a holy writ. It is a way of life and life itself, where there is no dichotomy between religion and human nature vis-a-vis existence.

Gaiya (2004: 32) emphasizes that a study of the beliefs and practices of the African peoples lead to the theological understanding that African Religion is a religion of salvation and wholeness. As a matter of fact, African Religion is careful in analysing both worldly and spiritual salvation. Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships that may either promote and preserve life or diminish and destroy it. According to Gaiya (2004:33)

The goal of religion is therefore, to maintain those relationships that protect and preserve life. For it is the harmony and stability provided by these relationships, both spiritual and materially that create the conditions for well-being and wholeness.

Therefore, the condition for well-being and wholeness depicts peace as a religious credential and tonality of African Religion. As is the case for most other people, religion is the keynote of the people's cultures. Hopfe and Woodward (1998:55) assert that "a basic understanding of African Religions will provide knowledge of customs and attitudes toward the family, society at large, the environment, and death and the life beyond." The above elucidates the essential features of African Religion, but African Religion is not many, we only have one African Religion. It is wrong for Hopfe and Woodward to think that Africans have many religions. However, it is true that there are varieties and diversity in African beliefs. Dopamu (2006:18) nevertheless argues that varieties in African Religion must not be taken to mean a diversity of fundamental beliefs rather he assuring, avers that these varieties have underlying affinities running through them. Corroborating Dopamu's statement Magesa (1997: 17-18) writes:

Varieties in African Religion must not be taken to mean a diversity of fundamental beliefs....Much has been made of the differences within African Religion based on the distinctive lifestyle of the peoples of Africa. It is not possible to deny that these lifestyles affect the religious symbols of the people. Yet to conclude that there is therefore no internal essential unity in the various expressions...is to exaggerate...if we study African Religion in a special place among a special ethnic group, as many scholars have done and still do and, indeed as it is necessary to continue to do it is for the sake of depth and should not be used to support the argument that African Religion is not a generic whole.

Studies have revealed, however, that in spite of the multiplicity of religious systems, there are numerous doctrines, practices and rituals that are common to them all. These commonalities justify the existence of African worldview.

African Religion has actually had sizeable proportion of effect with the incursion of proselytising religions of Islam and Christianity. Gaiya (2004: 45) observes with precision that the arrival of Islam and Christianity in Africa, the whole scenario of Nigerian perhaps African religious wholeness and experience metamorphosed into series of changes. Thus, the religious structures or institutions that held the African people together into various communities went through drastic form of transitional experience. It is an irrational and inadvertent experience that created and thus creates tension, mutual suspicion among ethnic and religious groups that make up the continent. Through this obvious fact, religious wholeness of the Africans has been tampered with severally.

The 19th and 20th centuries had adversely affected and contributed to the setback of African religion. As a matter of fact, many factors have been advanced to have been responsible for this setback. First and foremost, the proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity give a death blow to this indigenous religious tradition. Rather, it was named devil or Satan worship, fetish and

barbaric belief, a dead religion or a *deus remotus* and among others. Furthermore, the sacred spots of African religion which were regarded as forest of the Gods by Fagunwa were destroyed by the missionaries with the help of the converted Africans. Also, the African educated elite who were influenced by westernization did not help matters. Even African traditional custodians who were in possession of African values and heritage vehemently refused to transmit or transfer the patent right of the traditions to future generation with the guise of 'they are too small to handle the traditions'. Meanwhile, the extent of this effect almost gave a frazzle to African religion to wear.

However, the 21st century has staged a strong resurgence of African religion. Of a truth, Africans with existential challenges and with billow of life have recourse to their root especially when these proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity fail to find solutions to these problems. Again, it is not out of place to state that the first generation scholars of African religion such as Idowu, Awolalu, Mbiti, Gyekye, Dopamu, Onibere, Adewale, Nabofa, Dime, Danfulani, and among others vigorously and uncompromisingly promoted the study of African religion. Today, their products have been propagating the importance of African religion in African Universities and beyond. Despite the current trends, many values of African Religion will continue; the emerging Islam and Christianity in Africa have distinctive African qualities. As long as the religion continues to speak the language of the people, it will continue to survive.

In view of rituals in African religion, Ogungbile (2003:186) has asserted that it is the most celebrated and an elaborate aspect of African cum Yoruba religion because it has formality, dramatic quality and sensuality which provide an intriguing contrast with ordinary behaviour. He further buttresses that rituals in African religion as evident in festivals and other private and corporate worship fall within the liturgical calenderical rituals that follow a regular cyclic pattern of repetition. This ritual cosmos in African religion is thus a creation and the dramatization of primordial events during which festivals and other rites of passage are properly established (Ogungbile, 2003:187).

In African religion, every ritual has its root in the myth of the believing community. Durkheim (1971: 160) posits that ritual is one of the keys in religious society, putting collective veneration of the sacred at the heart of his theory of social solidarity. For him, ritual organized around sacred objects as its focal points and organized into cultic practice was the fundamental source of the collective consciousness that provides individuals with meaning and binds them into a community. This accounts for the sacralisation mechanism of the social and spiritual dimensions of the myth of the people. In addition, rituals in African religion are broad and they depend on the aspect to be carried out. At times, they are massive and they are in stages. There are some rituals that are liturgical, libationary, invocative, sacrificial, singing, dancing and drumming in procession. While some are connected with the consumption of articles like bitter-kola, kolanut, alligator pepper, salt, honey, even massive feasting. As far as these three types of rituals are concerned, they are symbolic, mythical and cosmic as they are connected to the rites of passage.

Suffice it to say that looking at the Piacural, Non-Periodic and Calendrical rituals, a strong priest or priestess normally leads the devotees for these rituals performance. Idowu (1996:176) has explained that this priest or priestess possesses power to 'see', hear' and relate with the deity concerned and the devotees. The Priest or Priestess acts as a cultic or religious functionary or intermediary between the deity and the devotees. Consequently, it is crystal that in African religion, the performance of piacural and calendrical rituals are very elaborate and enormous

considering the fact that Piacural ritual is associated with propitiation which is always urgent and crucial for the survival of the community, while the calendrical ritual is connected with festivals which are fixed either bi-annually, annually or biennially or as the case may be. The fact, however, remains that the festivals are fixed by the believing community. Rituals in African religion symbolically bring past events to reality by offering the devotees privilege of imitating their divine models. Thus, it tends to hold a linear view of history and repeat rituals as the historical events of the community are retold and re-enacted (Cox, 1998::xiv).

Rituals in African religion help to repeat and re-affirm the sacred origin of their liturgies. It recalls and preserves past events as well as transmits the foundation of their beliefs. The observance of rituals in African religion promotes religious and social solidarity as well as social integration. Ritual behaviour is sometimes motivated by the desire to obtain some practical benefits and satisfaction, such as health, fertility, change of status and general welfare. Thus, ritual is more than the expression of man's dependence on the supernatural world. Above all, the devotees re-enact their relationship to their sacred objects and beliefs (Offiong, 2005:96).

THE NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES: A SYNOPSIS

It is the feeling and eagerness that was manifested in the early Christians during and after the feast of Pentecost that has triggered the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in contemporary era. The modern Pentecostals take their name from a story recounted in (Acts 2). The plot describes how the confused followers of the recently crucified Rabbi, they believed was the messiah gathered in Jerusalem to mark the Jewish holiday called Pentecost that occurred fifty days after Passover (Ukpong, 2008: 4). The Pentecostal movement in the modern form supposedly and purportedly said to have started in 1906 after about decades of preliminary preparation and desires revealed in the holiness movement and the Wesleyan doctrines of sanctification. Its peculiar characteristic was the fact that it was led by William Seymour "African-American preacher with no theological formation, its first adherents were poor domestic servants, janitors and days workers black and whites who had the audacity to claim that a new Pentecost was happening, the new Jerusalem was coming soon, and that they were its designated heralds and grateful first fruit (Ukpong, 2008: 5). As earlier observed, there are four leading interpretative schools of thought on the origin of Pentecostal churches in Africa, with each implication for understanding their theology and wider social impact. However, only two relevant schools of thought shall be considered here. One school of thought represented by Paul Gifford (2004: 66) sees African Pentecostal churches as a replication or derivative product of western Pentecostalism- more precisely, the sort of Pentecostalism associated with American television evangelist and conservative Christianity. A related argument acknowledges the black holiness preacher William Seymour and his Azusa street (in Los Angeles) revivals as the starting point of the modern day Pentecostalism in the early 20th century. Hollenweger (1999: 36) stresses further that Pentecostalism's break taking growth does not lie in a particular Pentecostal doctrine in spite of what Pentecostals think, the reasons for its growth lies in its black roots. The second school of thought, more convincing interpretation finds in African Pentecostal churches a new chapter in the African re-imagination of Christianity addressing concerns on African terms in a manner similar to the African Indigenous Churches. Along these lines, Ogbu Kalu (1998: 36) indicates that the Pentecostal churches are part of a

continuing and indigenous effort that follows on the failure of the missionary churches. They are not, in this historical evaluation, following the line of Azusa but have developed independently to meet their own requirement (Gornik, 2011: 33).

The phenomenon of Pentecostalism in contemporary Nigeria is not new as earlier pointed out. Ogbu Kalu (1998: 36) argues that the emergence of Pentecostalism in Africa perhaps Nigeria could be dated back to the establishment of African Indigenous churches (AICS) between 1914 and 1947. These include the Christ Army Church, 1918; Christ Apostolic Church 1930; the Church of the Lord, Aladura 1947; Cherubim and Seraphim 1925; the Celestial Church of Christ 1947; among others. Christianity is a salvation faith for African believers. Prior to practice and belief is the presence of God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer, and the Spirit of life, which in turn shapes practice; belief, and life. If such experience is central to African Christianity, it is not at odds with holding strong theological beliefs (Gornik, 2011: 34). Isiramen (2010: 307) opines that these churches exhibit elements found among Pentecostals such as healing, miracles, speaking in strange tongues, prophecy visions and dream. Thus, African Indigenous Churches possess vibrant contextual theology, local liturgy and lived experience that are central to life in these churches. Daneel (1987: 65) maintains that the Independent churches are a constructive reinterpretation of Christianity in African terms.

Afe Adogame (2004: 494) clearly emphasizes the correct strands of African Independent Churches. He posits that they share many features and common typology, but each Aladura has its own religious dynamic. There are significant differences, especially in specific doctrines and details of ritual acts and performance, the charismatic personality of the founders, their organizational policies and foundation histories. Overall, the African Independent Churches emphasize the experience of the spirit, healing, testimony and a rejection of western modes of worship as imported by the missionaries (Pobee and Ositelu, 1998: 40-42).

Be that as it may, many Pentecostal churches have diametrically opposed and vehemently disagreed with this truth. Most of these churches believe that Pentecostal and charismatic churches sprang up in the seventies. While Neo-Pentecostals came into Africa through some American faith healers and tele-evangelists like Kenneth Haggin, Kenneth Copeland, Oral Robert, T.L. Osborn and John Arazin (Isiramen, 2010: 307). Again, Isiramen argues that by 1968, the Nigerian born dynamic and charismatic preacher, late Archbishop Benson Idahosa emerged and founded the Church of God Mission Intl, Inc, with headquarters in Benin City, Edo State. Eventually, he came to be recognised as father of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The middle of 1980 recorded an unprecedented upsurge of numerous neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Some of the founders of these churches are William Kumuyi of the Deeper Life Bible Church, David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church aka (Winners chapel), Daniel Kolawole Olukoya of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Chris Oyakhilome of the Believers Loveworld Assembly (Christ Embassy) and Temitope Balogun Joshua of the Synagogue Church of all Nations (Isiramen, 2010: 307-309). In the light of the foregoing, it is crystal clear and worth-asserting without contradiction that Pentecostalism started in Nigeria as a result of the emergence of African Indigenous churches in the 20th century. Most of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches have their bearings from some of the African Indigenous Churches. For instance, the founder of The Redeemed Christian Church of God late Rev. Josiah Akindayomi left Cherubim and Seraphim to form a Christian body that flowered to RCCG. The founder of MFM, Rev. Olukoya also has CAC background. The

implication of this is that the phenomenon of Pentecostal in Nigeria was not imported to us, and also it did not fill any social or religious vacuum. To this end, charismatic/Pentecostal affinities coalesce to constitute an overall culture in Nigeria.

Nigerian Pentecostals introduce boisterous singing and dancing to their liturgy, Pentecostal worship is vibrant, ecstatic, jubilant, all-consuming and tailored towards the well being of the individual and the community at large (Emielu, 2010: 290). Corroborating the above, Asamoah-Gyadu (2013: 5) aptly observes that the prevalence of a holistic spirituality is the hallmark of African Pentecostal churches. Gornik (2011:6) avers that all African Pentecostal churches emphasize the relevance of the worship of Jesus, celebrating joy and expectation of blessing. Moreover, a strong awareness of the place of the Holy Ghost in the Christian life is evident by such charismatic activities as “the exercise of all the gifts of the spirit and a strong belief in the necessity, power and effectiveness of prayer in the life of a believer. Prayer meetings where believers are given opportunity to express their feelings freely are a common feature among the Pentecostals (Isiramen, 2010: 306).

THE PLACE OF RITUALS IN THE NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

In Christianity, the only well-celebrated and cherished ritual before now is the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion. It is one of the most significant rites performed in Christianity. It is a celebration of the unity of the church in Christ and the memorial of His passion, death and resurrection. The Roman Catholic Church calls it Eucharist or Mass. While the Protestant churches refer to it as the Holy Communion or Last supper (Offiong 2005:93). Interestingly, bread and wine are used for the celebration of the Holy Communion or Eucharist. And after their consecration by the officiating priest, they symbolically become for the Christian the body and blood of Jesus Christ respectively.

This Holy Communion is still being practised in all the mainline churches, African Indigenous churches and Pentecostal churches. Contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal churches have transcended the level of Holy communion to the stage of adding other objects as rituals in order to strengthen the faith of the believers as a result of their African background. These objects are symbolic but they don’t want to categorize them under rituals. In fact, the Nigerian Pentecostals have been condemning some of these African credentials. Akintunde (2009:64) substantiates the above by stating that:

These Churches tend to oppose some traditional African practices as well as those of old AICs. They ban alcohol, and tobacco, polygyny, the ancestor cult, the use of symbolic objects in healing, rituals and the wearing of church uniforms.

Yet, various rituals have constituted major parts of Nigerian Pentecostal worship. Even, some of these are sold for members depending on the pressing need of the members. This compels one to conclude that they are culpable of simony. Nevertheless, Andrew Wall (2002:119) posits that African Christianity is undoubtedly African religion as developed by Africans and shaped by the concerns and agenda of Africa; it is no pale copy of an institution existing somewhere else. African Christianity must be seen as a major component of contemporary representative Christianity, the

standard of Christianity of the present age is a demonstration model of its character. That is, we may need to look at Africa today in order to understand Christianity itself. This is also relevant to Nigerian Pentecostal churches. Nigerian Pentecostal churches have exercised tremendous capability in terms of religious rituals and cultural sensibilities in the believing community. The religious rituals in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches have overtime displayed sensational sacralisation of materiality such as the use of anointing oil, mantle, handkerchiefs, holy water, morning water, water fire, water rain, staff, bell, anointed clothes and among others. Akhilomen (2018:35-36) buttresses further that contemporary Christianity is like a business corporation where monies are raised from the sales of all kinds of spiritual items such as holy water, anointing oil, hand bangles, etc and these have become like talisman in order to encourage high patronage from deluded members. Akhilomen (2018:45) adds that church ornaments, olive oil, handkerchief, mantles are sold, believing that they contain miraculous potency.

Apart from the mastery of Akhilomen (2018) in this regard, Adedibu (2018:21) has explicitly narrated the true position of ritualization practices in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches. We will quote him in *extensor*

Nevertheless, the religious creativity has fostered religious consumerism characterized by flagrant display of rituals and sacralisation of materiality such as the use of anointing oil, mantle, handkerchiefs, holy water and morning water. The ingenuity of some of the leaders of African Pentecostal churches raises various exegetical and ecclesiastical issues on the role of materiality in the ritualization practices of some of these churches. This inevitably has led to branding of these churches along the line of their ritual idiosyncrasies as the Living Faith Church a.k.a. Winners' Chapels is rooted for its claim in the efficacy of mantle while the Synagogue church for All Nations known for its brand of morning water, which might be misconstrued for disinfectant due to unique branding and packaging for its clientele. The emerging trend is not only to use the mantle as a sacred article to encounter the miraculous, but also implicitly, as noticed by this author, that many car users tie their mantle to cars, bags, and part of their dress codes. At the slightest perception of emotional, physical or physiological challenges or social strain, the mantle is utilized as a point of contact or carrier of the anointing to ameliorate or cancel the challenge.

Apart from the few Pentecostal churches mentioned by Adedibu above, there are a handful of Pentecostal churches that display rituals through sacralisation of materiality or object such as 'Water fire' and 'manna rain'. This sacralisation of ritual object is synonymous with Mountain and Fire Ministries. It is believed that once prayers are being offered by the Presiding Priest, it can burn or consume any physical, spiritual and existential challenges of life. More often than not, the use of hand bangle is also common with members of the Pentecostal churches especially The Redeemed Christian Church of God members, Mountain and Fire Ministries members, among others. In the same vein, the use of stickers is also common among Nigerian Pentecostals during special programmes or events. No doubt, this religious creativity as characterized by the display

of ritualization practices has been rebranded and repackaged by these Pentecostal leaders in order not to be categorized as using symbolic objects in Christianity.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

It is the responsibility of comparative study to objectively and scientifically undertake an unbiased study of comparing areas of common interest and points of departure so as to appreciate objectively their common themes and objects. Therefore, the foregoing will be subjected to comparative analysis by comparing and contrasting rituals in both religions.

POINT OF CONVERGENCE

In the light of the above, it is clear that the term ‘ritual’ is incontestable in both religions in spite of the fact that the Nigerian Pentecostal leaders have rebranded and repackaged the sacred objects. Akintunde (2009:62) is of the view that Nigerian Pentecostal leaders develop theology, which takes into consideration Nigerian culture and practices thereby adapting Christian teaching and liturgy to indigenous cosmology and patterns of worship of which they stressed expressive and emotional phenomena and cater for the strong fear of witchcrafts among Nigerians. Not only that, in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches, the use of symbolic objects like blessed oil, mantle, bangles, holy water, staff, candles, handkerchiefs, morning water, water fire, among others is believed to possess miraculous efficacies for healing, deliverance, security and victory over Satan. Akintunde (2009:66) is again apposite when she opines that healing and deliverance through these symbolic objects such as staffs, blessed oil, candles, medals, incense and scapula are today common with some of these Pentecostal churches. These are thought to possess magical power that can proffer an immediate cure or offer protection from evil spirits just like amulets and talisman from a traditional healer.

Furthermore, the use of these elements or sacred objects is African in flavour and inspiration. These elements or sacred objects receive elaborate aspect of celebration both in the secular sphere and in the church. Though, they are received with solemnity and awe. Akintunde (2009:64) attests to the fact that the whole celebration was African in ingredient and inspiration. The use of these sacred objects was very distinct from being Western celebration with African elements inserted. This was ensured among other things, by continuous dance by African instrumental and vocal music.

Adedibu (2018:21-22) infers that such a committed appropriation of the use of materiality as a medium of the Supernatural might not be far from the appropriation of African indigenous religious practitioners’ worldview as these churches have provided a replacement orientation to the use of charms, incantations, talisman and amulets which perhaps have bearing with cosmic and supernatural phenomenon within the traditional interpretative perception. Supporting the foregoing submission of Adedibu, Smith and Campos (2005:61) write that “I give the symbol of the sacred; a rose; a vial of holy water, a few drops of healing oil. Use the sacred substance... resolve your problems.”

POINT OF DEPARTURE

The Nigerian Pentecostal churches and leaders still demonise most of these sacred symbolic objects as they see them as African beliefs and practices. Again, we have agreed that the celebration of these sacred elements is massive and elaborate. Yet, the mode or pattern of celebration varies from belief to belief.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed the assertive role of rituals in African religion and the Nigerian Pentecostal churches. As observed earlier, rituals constitute an elaborate strand in African religion, while in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches what constitutes their rituals is unequivocally seen as aids to Christian spirituality. Apart from the fact that the observance of the Holy Communion in Christendom is very essential to Christians, they still explain away other sacramental materials or articles by rebranding and repackaging them as miraculously efficacious. The study again showed that both African religion and Christianity cum Nigerian Pentecostal churches observe the triadic aspects of rituals especially the calendrical and historical-liturgical ritual. The devotees of these religions partake in the divine sacred past. No doubt, ritualization practices are motivated by the quest for practical benefits and spiritual satisfaction such as health, fertility, security, promotion and general well-being. Besides, ritualization practices in both religions have the capacity of strengthening the unity, cohesion and integrative stance of the mundane and the Supernatural world. The font of social solidarity in ritual practices help to re-enact, re-affirm and preserve the sacred origin of the various liturgies. To this end, the paper therefore seeks to postulate that ritual practices in both religions examined so far have strong implication and theological expression in the overall interest of the devotees. Despite the parallel approach of the Nigerian Pentecostal believers to ritual practices, more sacred elements would still emerge because these churches have provided and are still providing a replacement orientation to the use of charms, incantations, talisman, and amulets, among others which are supernatural phenomena within the traditional interpretative belief.

REFERENCES

- Abe, G.O., (2004) "Yahwism Tradition Vis-a-vis African Culture: The Nigerian Milieu" *The first Inaugural Lecture* delivered at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko.
- Adedibu, B. A.(2018) "The Redrawing of the Political Map of World Christianity through the Glocalisation of African Pentecostal Churches" in Adedibu, B.A. and Igboin, B. O., eds, *The Changing Faces of African Pentecostalism*, Akungba-Akoko: Adekunle Ajasin University Press
- Adogame, A, (2004), "Engaging the Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare: The Public Face of Aladura in Diaspora" *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 24: 4
- Andrew, W, (2002), *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Akhiolomen, D. O. (2018) *The Church on Earth and The Quest for Heaven: Gleanings From Salient Church Historical Experiences*, The 70th Inaugural Lecture, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria
- Akintunde, D. O. (2009) "Vestiges of Indigenous Spirituality in the Life and Experiences of Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders and Founders" *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.5
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2013), *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*, Oregon: WIPF & Stock
- Awolalu, J.O., and Dopamu, P.A., 2005 *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Macmillan
- Benjamin, C. R.(1976) *African Religion: Symbol, Ritual and Community*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc
- Cox, J.L., (1998) *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press
- Daneel, M. L. (1987), *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a study of African Independent Churches*, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press
- Dopamu, Ade. P. (2005) "The History of the Changing Relationship between Religion and Science", *CORES: Journal of the Confluence of Religion and Science*. (LSI, University of Ilorin, Ilorin) Vol.1, No.1,
- Dopamu, Ade P. (2006) "African Religion (Afrel) and the Humanist Perspective in the Global Age", *Science & Human Journal*, Vol.1, No.1,
- Ejiofor, L.U., 1974 "Religion and a Healthy Political System" *Nigerian Dialogue*, Vol.1, No.1
- Eliade, M., (1983) *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Sheatle: T&T Clarkes
- Emielu, A. (2010) "Music and Pentecostalism in Nigeria: The Afro- American Influence" in S.O. Oyewole, et.al, eds. *Science in the Perspective of African Religion AFREL, Islam and Christianity*, Ilorin: LSI
- Gaiya, P.M. (2004) *Religion and Justice: The Nigerian Predicament*, Kaduna: Espee Printing and Advertising,
- Gennep, A. V, (1985) *The Rites of Passages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gifford, P, (2004), *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004
- Gornik, M. R, (2011), *Word Made Global: Stories of African Christianity in New York City*, Grand Rapids: W.B Eerdmans Publishing co.
- Gyekye, K. (2002) *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Legon: Sankofa Publishing Company,
- Hans Kungs et al.(1993) *Christianity and World Religions: Path of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York: Orbis Books,
- Hargrove, B. (1979) *The Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Approach*, Illinois AHM Publishing Corporation
- Hollenwenger, W. (1999), "The Black Roots of Pentecostalism" in W. Hollenwenger (ed) *Pentecostals after a Century* , Sheffield: Sheffield academic press
- Hopfe, L. M. and Woodward, M. R. (1998) *Religions of The World*, 7th ed, New Jersey: Prentice Hall
- Idowu, E.B.,1996, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman Ltd

- Isiramen, C. O. (2010), "Pentecostalism and the Nigerian Socio – Economic Debacle: A therapy or a Delusion" in C.O Isiramen. et. al. eds *Religion and the Nigerian Nation: some Topical Issues*, Ibadan: En-Joy Press & Books
- Kalu, O. U.,(1998), "The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa 1970-1995" *Journal of African Christian Thought* 12
- Magesa, L. (1997) *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, (New York: Orbis Books,)
- Mair, L. (1972) *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Mazrui, A. (1976) *Introduction to the Study of Social Anthropology*, Eldoret: Moi University Press
- Mbiti, J. S. (1980) *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy*, New York: Orbis Books
- Offiong, E. A. (2005) "Ritual" in Wotogbe-Weneka, W. O. ed, *Themes in Comparative Religion*, Ado-Ekiti: Hamaz Global Publishing,
- Ogungbile, D. O. (2003) , "Yoruba Cultural Identity: A Phenomenological Approach To Osun Festival" in Dopamu, P. A. and Odumuyiwa, E. A. *Religion, Science and Culture*, Ikene Remo: NASR
- Olupona, J.K. (1986) "Dialectical Sociology of Religion as Applied to the Yoruba of Nigeria" Paper presented at the xi World congress of sociology, New Delhi, India, 18-22 August,
- Plavot, A.J. (1983) *Understanding Rituals in Contemporary Africa*, Edinburgh: T&T
- Pobee, J. S. and Ositelu, G. (1998), *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts, and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches: A Challenge to Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: WCC Publications
- Smith, D.A. and Campos, L.S., (2005) Christianity and Television in Guatemala and Brazil: The Pentecostal Experience' *Studies in World Christianity*, 11,(1)
- Ukpong, D. P, (2008), *Nigerian Pentecostalism; Cases, Diagnosis and Prescription*, Uyo: Fruities' Publications