
Syncretism and the *Aladura* Christianity: Celestial Church of Christ

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Abstract

While Celestial Church of Christ does not in any way support syncretism ideology, syncretism remains a very controversial theme among the Aladura Christians owing to some beliefs carried over from African Religion to the Christian faith. In affirmation, Celestial Church of Christ constitution read: “*On the 29th of September, 1947, in the deep mystery of the divine appearance, during prayer, of the winged angel bathed in intense light, word came from God to the Founder: "It is the wish of God to send you on an errand of preaching to the world. Many nominal Christians there are who, when confronted by difficulties and problems of this world, they run after fetish priests and other powers of darkness for all kinds of assistance. Consequently, on their death, they cannot see Christ because, by their action, Satan has left his spiritual mark on them... Thus was born the world-wide CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST*”.¹⁴² This article attempts the evaluation of this concept in the light of Celestial Church of Christ. The work is a socio-historical study. Data were collected by library research method and oral interview. The research brings to the fore the notion that there should be intentionality in the process of making disciples in a way that deals effectively with the African worldview. The article points out the reality of the syncretical among the adherents of the church.

¹⁴² _____. 1980. *Celestial Church of Christ Constitution*. Paragraph 2. Page 17.

CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

Many people today, both in Africa and elsewhere, tend to believe that the introduction of Christianity to the continent is relatively recent phenomenon. One of the grounds alleged in favor of the view is the appeal to the statistical data that suggest that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, only 3% of the African population were classified as Christians.¹⁴³ Another aspect also referred to is the fact that most of the denomination and indigenous churches have a history of existence of no more than two centuries. Christianity has a closer tie with African than European countries or Northern American. It was opined that Missionaries from Europe and North America brought the gospel to Africa in modern times; however, they are not the first messengers of evangelism to Africa continent.¹⁴⁴ Christianity can be said to have come and stayed permanently on the African soil. In fact, it could be called a “traditional religion” in African¹⁴⁵ in light of the continuity of the faith from the first century of its planting to the present time.

In Old Testament, we read of Abraham with his wife came to stay in Egypt in order to get food, Joseph and the whole family of Israel came to dwell in Egypt for about 420 years, Queen Sheba who visited Solomon was from Ethiopia in Africa, Moses, another Old Testament historical figure was married to a woman who was possibly an African (Num. 12: 1). It was an African who rescued Jeremiah from a pit when no one else could do it (Jer. 38: 7), the Bible attested to Egypt and Ethiopia several times (Ps. 68: 31). The New Testament also presents the direct link of Africa and the Palestine. In fulfillment of a prophecy made about 700 years earlier (Hosea 11: 1), Jesus

¹⁴³ S. A. Fatokun. “Christianity in Africa: a historical appraisal” in *Academia*: <https://www.academia.edu/resource/work/61563146> Accessed 18th August, 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Emmanuel Temidayo Ogunmefun. 2019. *Atonement and Celestial Church of Christ: An Appraisal of the Theology of Atonement in Light of Celestial Church of Christ*. Ibadan: Scepter Publishers. 123.

¹⁴⁵ G. Parrinder. 1969. *Africa's Three Religions*. London: Sheldon. 112.

Christ was brought to Africa as a baby for safety from Herod (Matt. 2: 15), when Jesus was carrying His cross to the Golgotha for crucifixion, He was so tired that He could no longer carry it (as a man) it was an African who helped Him –Simon, who came from Cyrene in North Africa (Matt. 27: 32). On the day of Pentecost, Africa was represented, settlers from Cyrene were there when the Holy Spirit inaugurated the Christian Church (Act 2: 10).

Augustine, who became an outstanding Christian leader, was from North Africa. His mother, Monica was from the Tuareg – an African ethnic group found in the Sahara. His writings which greatly affected European theological thinking reflect a lot of African background. Therefore, this indicated that Africa must have come in contact with Christianity prior to the time of the missionaries but it can be suggested that Christianity took a firm root in Africa with the work of the missionaries and evangelists.

During the first two hundred years of the existence of Christianity, North Africa and modern-day Turkey had the strongest churches.¹⁴⁶ It was from North Africa and Turkey that Christians went out to evangelize in Western Europe, including the British Isles, and the converted Europeans later brought Christianity to Africa.

When Christianity was brought to Africa, it was from the missionary-established churches. These are the oldest well-established churches. They were established by foreign ‘civilizing nations’ and the European colonizing peoples. They were given official recognition by the colonial governments. In fact, this discriminatory official attitude is retained by some government organizations today. They operate on Christian principles, and tenets adopted and practiced in the countries of origin of the missionaries in which the administrative

¹⁴⁶ S. A. Oladele. 1985. *The History and Development of Christianity in Africa*. Ilorin: Kwara State College of Education Press. 5.

headquarters of these denominations are located. The additional 'civilizing' mission added to the spiritual ones made these denominations, for so many decades, to reject the African culture and the Nigerian worldview. Though Nigerians went to churches on Sundays, yet, many visited traditional priests during the week and in their villages when on leave. The reason for this is given by Adrian Hasting:

The deep African sense of the morality of the universe and all that happens therein requires that a moral explanation be given for sudden or undeserved misfortune. They were, one may say, too committed to the primacy of order to accept an explanation of the random in matters of importance... the answer in every case is to call in a spiritual expert of one sort or another and see what he or she can do to help.¹⁴⁷

Christianity was seen and regarded as the white man's religion, with a foreign background, culture and worldview. The Christian priest dismissed some African core values and regarded them as superstitious and this idea created fear, anxiety and real problems to the Africans who saw and experienced the practical effect of *juju*. He saw, among his friends and relations, people who were cured and healed by the local medicine man of diseases considered incurable and resulting from superstition by the White orthodox doctor. He had witnessed traditional rituals that have brought dramatic changes to the lives of communities and individuals. So, the African Christian was torn between his native worldview and the local cultural influences. Many of his local problems could not have been solved by the foreign mission churches. He is a man with a split personality. This ideology made the African man to crave Christianity which has a touch of his African

¹⁴⁷ Adrian Hastings. 1976. *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation*. London: Geoffrey Chapman Press. 124.

heritage and this has in turn led to the establishment of African Christianity.

ALADURA CHRISTIANITY

Aladura Christianity is a strand of African Prophetic Movements, which first appeared on the religious landscape of Africa, specifically in Western Nigeria around the second decade of the twentieth century, a movement which, with its vigorous prayer/ prophetic revivalism and healings, foreran and laid the foundation for the Pentecostal-evangelical movement of the present day in Nigeria.¹⁴⁸ This strand of African Prophetic Movements has been the subject of much scholarly study, research and publications which ranges from the works of Turner¹⁴⁹, Peel¹⁵⁰, Ayandele¹⁵¹, Mitchel¹⁵², Olayiwola¹⁵³, Oshun¹⁵⁴, Ademowo¹⁵⁵, Fatokun¹⁵⁶ and Ogunmefun¹⁵⁷.

¹⁴⁸ Moses Oladele Idowu. 2013. "An Idea Whose Time Has Gone? The Trials and Travails of Divine Healing in the 'Salvation History' of the Aladura Movement in Nigeria (1918-1941)" in *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology: OJOT*. Ogbomosho: Baptist Press. 98.

¹⁴⁹ H.W. Turner. 1967. "The Place of Independent Religion Movement in the Modernization of Africa" *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2 (1).

¹⁵⁰ J.D.Y. Peel. 1968. *ALADURA: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba*. London: Oxford University Press. 292.

¹⁵¹ E.A. Ayandele. 1969. "The Aladura Among the Yoruba: A Challenge to the Orthodox Churches," in *Nigeria Christian* 3 (7).

¹⁵² R.C. Mitchel. 1965. "Babalola: A Non-Arrested Prophet Movement" *Vanderbilt University Paper*.

¹⁵³ D.O. Olayiwola. 1980. *The Aladura Movement in Ijeshaland 1930-1980, Ph.D. Thesis*: Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife.

¹⁵⁴ C.O. Oshun. 1981. *Christ Apostolic Church of Nigeria: A Suggested Pentecostal Consideration of its Historical Organizational and Theological Developments, 1981-1978. PhD Dissertation*: University of Exeter.

¹⁵⁵ O.A. Ademowo. 2001. *Conflict and Co-operation Among Selected Churches in Ijesaland 1927-1990, PhD. Thesis*: Obafemi Awolowo University.

¹⁵⁶ S.A. Fatokun. 2005. "Pentecostalism in South Western Nigeria With Emphasis on the Apostolic Church, 1931-2001" *PhD Thesis*: University of Ibadan.

¹⁵⁷ Emmanuel Temidayo Ogunmefun. 2019. *Atonement and Celestial Church of Christ: An Appraisal of the Theology of Atonement in Light of Celestial Church of Christ*. Ibadan: Scepter Publishers.

Aladura Christianity emerged in the southwest of Nigeria in 1918 when a few members of an Anglican church in Ijebu Ode formed a prayer group as a response to the influenza epidemic, which defied orthodox and traditional medicines.¹⁵⁸ The group metamorphosed into Precious Stone Society (PSS).

There are four major strands of Aladura churches, namely the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), the Church of the Lord Aladura (TCLA), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) of a later dispensation and countless number of minor ones. Between 1920s and 1960s, Aladura Christianity became the most prominent independent Christian formation on the religious landscape in Nigeria. The Aladura churches are the fastest growing churches in Africa today. They have so much impact on the missionary-founded churches that in December 7, 1981 an issue of West African Magazine had an article titled "Desertions of the Orthodox Churches - Changes in Worship."¹⁵⁹ Aladura Churches have been variously defined. A common thing in all the definitions is that they are churches founded in the African soil, particularly by Africans. These churches are often called African Indigenous Churches, Breakaway Churches, Separatists, Ethiopian, Spiritual, Zionist, Prophetic Movements, and Praying Churches, etc. Irrespective of the name, the definitions offered has shown among other things that the Churches are rooted in Africa.¹⁶⁰ It is however important to note that African Indigenous Churches and African Independent Churches refer to the same institution. There is a need to focus on a specific case study of this paper, Celestial Church of Christ.

¹⁵⁸ Moses Oladele Idowu. 2013. "An Idea Whose Time Has Gone? The Trials and Travails of Divine Healing in the Salvation History" 98.

¹⁵⁹ Cornelius Abiodun Olowola. 1996. "An Introduction to Independent African Churches" in *African Journal of Religion*. (Vol. 8 No. 3) 45.

¹⁶⁰ Emmanuel Temidayo Ogunmefun. 2019. *Atonement and Celestial Church of Christ: An Appraisal of the Theology of Atonement in Light of Celestial Church of Christ*. 74.

CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

One of the ecclesiastical organizations that have aroused much curiosity, excited wide investigative interest, and elicited varieties of comments and commentaries, nationally and internationally in recent time is Celestial Church of Christ. In fact, the church has enjoyed more than a normal media exposure both as a result of activities within its fold, and because it has consciously and unconsciously become a force to reckon with among the African Independent Church movement. Attitudes to C.C.C range from outright condemnation and rejection, through cautions tolerance to zealous admiration.

The name of the church, Celestial Church of Christ came by divine revelation through Mr. Alexander Yanga, who was at that time undergoing spiritual healing at the residence of the Pastor-Founder Revd Samuel Bilehou Joseph Oshoffa, and who was held in a trance for seven days. On the seventh day, while still in trance, he asked for a piece of chalk and wrote the name of the church on the wall thus: “EGLISE DU CHRISTIANISME CELESTE” meaning “Celestial Church of Christ.”¹⁶¹ It was assumed and believed among its adherents that the church was founded in 1947 in Porto Novo, from a small village where the founder started the church then, the church has spread far and wide across various continents. Celestial Church of Christ is closely tied to the life of its founder, Samuel Bilehou Oshoffa. Many scholarly writings show that Celestial Church of Christ is believed to have developed out of the religious experiences of its founder in Dahomey, before spreading to Nigeria in the 1950s where it has its National (Diocesan) Headquarters at 12/15 Church Street, Makoko, Yaba, Lagos State, International Headquarters at Mission House Ketu, Lagos State, Nigeria, and its Supreme Headquarters in Port Novo and the World

¹⁶¹ S. O. Odeyemi. 2015. *The Covenant of Christ with Celestial Church of Christ*. Lagos: EAS Print Concept. 203.

Headquarters at Imeko, Ogun State, which is called Celestial City.¹⁶²

CCC came into Nigeria in the 1950s through the activities of some Egun fishermen from the Republic of Benin.¹⁶³ The set of people that brought Celestial brand of African Christianity were fishermen. It was reported that these group of fishermen had settled at the beach side of Makoko, a shanty village on the outskirts of Ebute-meta East of Lagos Mainland. They were hardly noticed by residents of the area except when they interacted during the sales of their day's catch of fish.¹⁶⁴ The fishermen who were Celestial converts came into contact with a certain Madam Comfort who was dual born (part Egun and part Yoruba) and understand both languages. The interaction between Madam Comfort and the Egun fishermen led to her conversion and she became the first Nigerian Celestial convert. This happened later in the year, 1950 and Madam Comfort paved the way for a membership growth that escalated within a decade, beyond the imagination of the fishermen who started the first Celestial Church of Christ on the soil of Nigeria. Hackett¹⁶⁵ gave a narration of the activities of these fishermen who were incessantly exploited by the natives due to their inability to communicate in Yoruba which was the local language.

The founder of the church came to Nigeria on a visit on March 3, 1951 and formally settled in Makoko area of Lagos in 1952. It is on record that with Oshoffa's charisma and the powerful gift of performing extraordinary miracles, CCC grew far more rapidly in Nigeria than it had been the case in Port Novo. As a church, CCC was duly registered under the land perpetual

¹⁶² S. B. J. Oshoffa Parish, Mosan 1 Cathedral Lagos. 2012. *The Journey so Far*. Ogun State: Grace Impact Int'l. 17.

¹⁶³ Hackett F. Morgan. 1980. *Celestial Church of Christ and Oshoffa*. Oxford: University Press. 432.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

succession ordinance Act on 24th November 1958, the first of the African brand of Christianity to be so registered.

TENETS AND DOCTRINES OF CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

The tenets of Celestial Church of Christ is believed to be ordained by the Holy Spirit as clearly stated in the constitution of the church. For the peculiarity of this paper, the most relevant aspect of the tenets is: *Members of Celestial Church are forbidden to engage or participate in any form of idolatry, fetish ceremony or cults, black magic and charms... In Celestial Church of Christ, only white candles are to be used. Colored and image candles are strictly forbidden... Members of the church are forbidden from joining cults or secret societies, taking traditional chieftaincy titles as those involved in traditional ceremonies and obligations or joining any association that involves traditional rites and rituals.*¹⁶⁶ Every member of the church is expected to adhere strictly to this extracted tenets of the church but what is seen in the practicality negates what the liturgy of the faith stands for.

On the aspect of the doctrinal values of Celestial Church of Christ ranges from visions and revelations, prophecies, worship, prayer, child's birth, musicals, baptism, anointment and healing. The Pastor founder opined that CCC has four things namely: the Law, Tenet, Doctrine and Spiritual works¹⁶⁷ and on this premise, the concept of healing would be viewed. Healing is part of the doctrinal practice of Celestial Church of Christ and it forms an important aspect of their worship service. This is one of the primary concerns of the church. Ray declared:

¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel Temidayo Ogunmefun. 2019. *Atonement and Celestial Church of Christ: An Appraisal of the Theology of Atonement in Light of Celestial Church of Christ*. 74.

¹⁶⁷ Ademola Bolaji. 2016. 'Exclusive interview on C. C. C Ketu Lagos' in Robert Agidotan (ed.) *Kingdom Advance News* Vol. 4, Dec 2015 – Feb 2016. 41.

The whole purpose of prophecy-divination in the church of the Lord is to save men from the evils of this world. And illness is the primary concern. Despite the widespread introduction of Western medicine into West Africa, medical services are still in very short supply and the treatment given is often far from adequate. Consequently, many Africans are not entirely convinced of the effectiveness of Western medicine. There is also a tendency in the Aladura Churches to reject all Western medicine, because the African word for medicine is a generic term that does not distinguish between pagan medicines which the church condemns and Western medicines. There is also a tendency to reject all medicine as the work of men.¹⁶⁸

Ray has given us three important reasons why people sought divine healing: first, the non-availability of adequate medical care; second, the word used in describing medicine in Yoruba does not distinguish between traditional and Western medicine; and third, the Church's attitude towards medicine as the work of man.

However, the Celestial Church of Christ has a dualistic attitude towards medicine and sickness. Rosalind Hackett in her research on the attitude of this church writes, "Some illnesses have natural, physical causes, such as malaria, injuries, colds, appendicitis; others are unnaturally caused by the spiritual agents of evil."¹⁶⁹ This church encourages those who are suffering from natural causes to visit the doctors and benefit from modern medicine. Hackett continues:

There is nothing unholy about patent medicines or Western medical type medical services and the use

¹⁶⁸Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions, Symbols, Ritual and Community*, 212-213.

¹⁶⁹Rosalind J. Hackett, "Prophetism and Healing" in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Tennessee: Holman Publishing, 2004), 248.

of them is not believed to detract from the power of God. The position adapted by some Aladura Churches, notably the Christ Apostolic Church, regarding the absolute power of God in the treatment of all ailments and consequent refusal of any type of medicine is strongly criticized by the Celestial Church of Christ as tantamount to testing God.¹⁷⁰

However, the Celestial Church will excommunicate any of her members who take traditional medicine and who consult native doctors or herbalists. The idea of the Church is that the one who does so shows lack of confidence in God. Such a person is seen as looking for help from other gods. For spiritual or unnatural illness, the person is advised to come to the church for prayer and divine consultation through the prophets before seeking medical attention, for the evil spirit needs to be driven away before modern medicine can do its work.

Prescription is usually done after fasting, prayer and possibly trance. Hackett observes that when any newcomer or member comes to the church for healing, he is immediately directed to a prophet or prophetess; who will then go into a trance and diagnose the cause of the sickness or problem and announce certain ritual prescriptions or prayers which are to be carried out by the sufferer. In case of unnatural illness, the prayer will be offered by elders and prophets with the use of candles; then holy water or oil will be applied to the ailment, or the patient will be asked to go and wash in a nearby stream. Complicated instructions are often given such as how and when the washing should be done e.g. twice every day for a week, then daily for a fortnight. This involvement by the patient means that he is engaged in his own cure.¹⁷¹

Two things must be said in regard to divine healing. One is that this church is still involved in the African traditional way of

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 250.

healing which was brought into the church by some heretical prophets after the demise of the Rev. S.B.J Oshoffa, and second, that witches are often the cause of unnatural illnesses.

Hackett has this to say about Celestial Church, "Many of the healing techniques and symbolic objects used by the church resemble traditional and magical curative practices."¹⁷² In an interview by Nigerian Television Authority with the founder of Celestial Church about the use of green water, the pastor declared, "Some people have asked me about that. It is useless, and has no bearing on the real powers of the church. It is only a mixture of green alum, water and lime. It cleanses the chest. It has nothing to do with the power of God."¹⁷³

In summary, from the foregoing, one of the greatest reasons why the Celestial Church is growing so fast was the art of divine healing. Western medical facilities are inadequate to help the people and so they either resort to these problems and prophetesses or to traditionalists.

SYNCRETISM

Despite that the first tenets as contained in the constitution of CCC negate the practice of syncretism by members of the church, yet, a large number of adherents engage in one form of syncretism or the other. The word syncretism comes from the Greek word *Synkretismos*¹⁷⁴ whose verb *synkretizein* means to combine. Syncretism, according to Watson Mill, is "the fusion or adoption of beliefs and rituals by one religious tradition from another."¹⁷⁵ The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines syncretism as "the reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief." From the definitions above, we have discovered that

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 248.

¹⁷³ Ademola Bolaji, *Drum Magazine*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ W. Vines, *ibid*.

¹⁷⁵ Watson E. Mills (ed.), *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible* (Georgia: Mercer University, 1991), 868.

different forms of beliefs or practices are combined to come up with something different from the original. This is because of the experience of synergy or fusion that takes place during the process of combining the two teachings and practices.¹⁷⁶ It is therefore viewed as a process through which elements or practices of one or more religions are combined with another practice resulting in a change from the original nature of the basic religion or practice concerned. The outcome of the combination becomes a new thing altogether which is referred to as syncretism.

The origin of syncretism is traced back to the custom of the people who lived in the Island of Crete in ancient times, who always fought themselves, but when enemies from outside attacked, they combined forces with each other to combat their foreign enemy.¹⁷⁷

Religious syncretism takes place when foreign beliefs are introduced to an indigenous belief system and the teachings are blended. The new heterogeneous religion will now take a new shape of its own. This is seen clearly in most African Christian churches with Celestial Church of Christ inclusively where they mix Christianity and African traditional religious beliefs and practices to come up with something else.

When church members get involved in secret practices with activities that border on spiritualism and yet, when they participate in normal church programme they pretend to be faithful stewards of God, such kind of behaviour is viewed as syncretic and there is the need to combat this religious concubinage. In order for us to understand what combating syncretism in contemporary Celestial Church of Christ is all

¹⁷⁶ Philemon O. Amanze & et.al. "Combating Syncretism in Contemporary Seven-Day Adventist Church Through Enlightened Ministry" Paper presentation at the 3rd International Conference on 'The Future of Higher Education in Africa' (August 24 – 26, 2015), 2.

¹⁷⁷ Jinadu A. Sofola, *African, Culture and African Personality: What makes an African Person African* (Ibadan: African Resources Publisher, 1978), 179.

about, we shall begin by looking at the biblical perspective of combating syncretism.

SYNCRETISM AND CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

There is noticeable observation of the manifestation of syncretism within the Celestial Church of Church by her members. Some members with experiences in magic and other occult phenomena struggle to leave completely behind their connection with evil powers. The baptized membership of CCC has been growing fast and by the end of the last quarter of 2014 it was 7,031,189¹⁷⁸. It is interesting to note that a significant number of conversions to Celestial Church of Church come from the pool of Pentecostal Christians, and African Religion.

Generally won over by the convicting unique biblical truths taught by the church clergymen, some of these converts tend to preserve the worship styles and practices of the previous religious and denominational affiliation.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, Charles H. Kraft calls the practice as “dual allegiance” meaning that since they find within Christianity little or none of the spiritual powers they crave for, to meet their needs of healing, blessing, guidance and even relief from demons, they continue their pre-Christian practice of going to diviners.¹⁸⁰ This could be the reason why syncretic practices are common in the church today.

Philippe Denis indicates that African Christians recognize African Religion’s worldview because they are part of it. During the day, many people separate themselves from African religion, but at night, they consult traditional healers and attend the

¹⁷⁸ _____, *Support the Kingdom Giants Builder* (An official donation letter sent out by HERALD Ministries for CELESTIAL LITERACY 1.0, 2018), 1.

¹⁷⁹ Kwabena, Donkor (ed.), *The Church Culture and Spirits and Adventist in Africa* (Reviewand Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 2011), 4.

¹⁸⁰ Charles H. Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity* (William Carey Library, C.A, 2005), 361.

healing sessions of the indigenous churches.¹⁸¹ To this, Donkor asserts that:

African worldview is inculcated in the Africa child so well that it takes strong ideological shift to stem its influence in adulthood. This worldview, somehow, has a lingering influence on a Christian who is not well instructed in Christian doctrine. Among Celestial Church of Christ adherents in Africa, fear of magic, witchcraft, and other spiritualistic arts remains a temptation.¹⁸²

From this assertion, it can be observed that ministry should endeavor to change people's worldview in order for them to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. The question that arises is, what makes some Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) members to maintain both Christian and non-Christian beliefs? Jefferson G. Nogueira observes that, "people seek in mysticism and the supernatural something to provide them with peace of mind and security."¹⁸³ In contemporary African Religion setting, healing, eradication of suffering and other adversities that affect people, are frequently associated with mystical powers. The following are some sensitive areas where Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) members fail to resist while defending their faith. Africans have a very strong sense of community, (community solidarity). It is a system where to be a human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, rituals and festivals of the community.

The central point in the understanding of the African view is, "I am because we are, therefore I am". This theory becomes hard to those who have accepted the gospel to live a true Christian

¹⁸¹ Philippe Denis, "African Traditional Religion", *Encyclopedia of Missions and Missionaries* Jonathan Bonk & et'al, (eds.) (NY: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2007), 12.

¹⁸² Donkor (ed.), *The Church Culture and Spirits and Adventist in Africa*, 227.

¹⁸³ <http://www.historiaehistoria.com.br/materia.cfm?tb=alunos&id=205>
16th May, 2018.

life. The expectations of family and community members put enormous pressure on those individuals who have accepted to live differently.¹⁸⁴ Many professing Christians, including Celestial Church of Christ members, rely on the mystic powers of witchcraft and sorcery in times of great temptations and problems. In times of need, reliance on the ancestors seem irresistible to most Africans. This religious-concubinage makes people embrace what is good and helpful to them from both Christianity and African traditional religion.

Again, needs like wealth, struggle for power, visible progress in career, success in business, finding a spouse, marriage, childlessness, fear of untimely deaths in the family, fear of the future and inordinate ambitions to rise to higher positions, cause many to consult mystical powers. Sometimes when sickness comes and orthodox medication fails to heal the sick person, there is again the tendency of appealing to a mystical power to handle the issue.

Furthermore, it was discovered that some members get involved in syncretic activities as a result of sickness, inordinate desires, funeral rites, childlessness, marriage rites and position seeking among others. These sad stories showed that syncretism is real in the church. On the other hand, the gospel must be assimilated into each culture and context without compromising the heart of the message or diluting the authority of the scriptures.¹⁸⁵ Philemon Amanze asserts that, “As spiritualism more closely imitates the nominal Christianity of the day, it has greater power to deceive and ensnare.¹⁸⁶ In view of this, the leadership of the contemporary Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) should do something urgently in order to help many members and their shepherds to avoid syncretic activities and make it to heaven.

¹⁸⁴ Donkor, 42.

¹⁸⁵ Philemon Amanze, *Seven-day Adventist Response to Spiritualism: The Nigeria Experience* (Babcock University Press: Ogun State, 2011), 153.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

CONCLUSION

Taking into account that syncretism is one of the major challenges that is confronting the Celestial Church of Christ laity and clergy inclusively, the under listed numeric recommendations should be adhered to in order to minimize and gradually eradicate syncretism in the worship of God in this denomination:

There should be intentionality in the process of making disciples in a way that deals effectively with the African worldview.

The church leadership must take seriously the responsibility of teaching the members all the doctrines, particularly key themes like the state of the dead, spiritualism, cosmic conflict, assurance of salvation, and Christ's victory over demonic powers.

The leadership must intentionally develop a continuous nurturing programme, including ongoing review of biblical doctrines for newly baptized members.

Members should be encouraged to participate in church programme and activities in order to enhance spiritual growth.

The Church should intentionally seek to cultivate an atmosphere of unity and togetherness in order to enhance a culture of caring in the church members.

Fasting, constant prayer and consecration: These activities should become integral parts of the daily activities of church members and especially ministers (Matthew 17:19-21). Whatever the Master had said we must go home and do likewise.

Acquire sound knowledge of the theological and philosophical worldviews of African traditional religion:

knowledge is power. The tenet and practices of this religion must be acquired by ministers and communicated to members of the body of Christ. Ministers of the gospel in training should have courses on African traditional religion every academic session while those who are already serving should be equally equipped through Seminars. This knowledge will help the ministers to contextualize and also apply the tenets of the Christian religion as espoused by the Bible.

Understand that mystic powers as demonstrated in magic, witchcraft and spiritism are from the enemies of righteousness (Satan-devil-demon or the fallen angels). These facts must be made clear at all times. Demons are rendered as unclean spirits in (Matt 8:16, Luke 9:42); angels that sinned (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, Matt. 25:41). Other names that are associated with him are the great dragon, old serpent, deceiver (Revelation 12:9); god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4); prince of this world (John 14:30); prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

These powers are real as seen in many biblical passages such as Exodus 7, 8; Daniel 1, 2, 4, 5; 1 Samuel 28; 1 Timothy 3:8; 11 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Revelation 9:1-20; 13:13-18, etc. These are clear indications of the spiritual battles which every child of God must fight and overcome by the power of the Lamb. This knowledge should empower us to call upon the Lord whenever we are tempted. This power will come only as we feed daily on the Word of God, through Bible study sessions, meditation, and with a determination to stand for what is right no matter the consequences. When we do our part, Jesus Christ will grant us victory.

The Christian life is a battle and we must submit to the divine will of God in all matters. The Lord in His Omniscience may decide to inform us that His grace is sufficient to us as He communicated to Paul (2 Cor.12:9), even when we are afflicted by the evil one. But one fact is

important, after all harassments here, at the expiration of the temporal sufferings we experience here on this sinful planet, we will partake of an eternal glory which cannot be compared with any suffering we had encountered on this earth (Rom. 8:18).

Stop magnifying Satan: Many a times, the children of God focus their attention on Satan. This should not continue. We should rather focus our attention on Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith. On this issue, Ellen G. White has counselled as follows:

There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast out the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1991), 493.