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The Practical Approach of the African Apostolic Church in Contextualising Christianity in Nigeria

Mepaiyeda, Solomon Makanjuola

Abstract

The question some Conservatives and Evangelicals often ask is whether contextualization will not lead to a scientific syncretism or a kind of christo-pagan religion? Such enquirers must not forget the history of Christianity in Africa and especially Nigeria. It must be noted that there was a church in North Africa that produced great church fathers and thinkers like Augustine, Tertullian, Athanasius and their like, but today, that church has gone into extinction. The reason given by some critics of the church is that it was never a grass root religion. It remained foreign to the people and seen as the church of aristocrats. Thus, the Islamic invasion wiped out of existence the rootless religion that once existed there. It must also be recalled that the first attempt to christianise Nigeria in the 15th century by the Portuguese and Spanish Missionaries failed because the church's activities remained in the palaces.

Historically, Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society reeled out an epoch-making policy aimed at achieving a contextualised and indigenised Christianity in Africa. Against all odds, he contended that the African Church must be self supporting, self governing and self propagating. The first patriarch of the Methodist Church Nigeria, his Pre-eminence Bolaji also took a bold step to contextualise Methodist worship and clerical vestments.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the extent at which The African Apostolic Church has contextualised Christianity. This became pertinent because since its emergence in Nigeria, it has witnessed astronomic growth due to its conscious efforts at divesting itself with European garbs which identified with the western education and culture.

I. Introduction

It is expedient to attempt a working definition of the term contextualisation used in this work as it may either sound ambiguous or connote different meanings entirely to people of different fields, and intellectual capabilities.

The early scholars of this field of study including Bolaji Idowu, writing in connection with this term made use of the term "Indigenisation". While both terms basically connote the same meaning, some academics may want to push the debate further as to see the technical difference between the two terms.

The term "contextualisation" is hard to come by in dictionaries; nevertheless, the World Book Dictionary gave the figurative use of the word "context" as "the immediate environment, attendant circumstances or conditions; background:"¹ Contextualisation will therefore mean doing something or acting in the context or situations of the immediate environment in which the event takes place. Thus, contextualisation of Christianity would mean making Christianity to operate in the context or cultural background in which she finds herself so as to meet the demands of her immediate environment. Bolaji Idowu speaking in the same vein said "... the church which affords Nigerians the means of worshipping God as Nigerians; that is, in a way which is compatible with their own spiritual temperament, of singing to the glory of God in their own way, of praying to God and hearing His Holy word in idiom which is clearly intelligible to them".²

Therefore, when we refer to contextualisation in this context, then we talk of a situation where the African is

¹ Clarence, L. Barnhart and Robert K. Barnhart (ed), *The World Book Dictionary*, Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1976, p.448.

² E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, Ibadan: Literature Department, Methodist Church Nigeria 1973, p. 11.

able to express himself and worship God in his cultural setting so as to make Christianity meaningful to his spiritual dictates, yearnings and aspiration and consequently the church in Africa having the “stamp” of Africa³ and being a true Christian church in Africa and for Africans.

II. A Brief History of the African Apostolic Church

The history of the church could be dated back to 1935 or 1936 when through divine inspiration, Emmanuel Omotunde led a group in a night vigil every forth-night at No. 11 Ajaye Street, Aramoko – Ekiti West, Ekiti State. This exercise continued for about one year. At the beginning of 1937, two members of the group, Mr. Michael Ojo Ajagunigbala and Joshua Adeyemi Moso, went about the usual job of cutting logs out of Iroko tree at Ajalu, 10 miles from Aramoko and 5 miles from Igede in a thick forest. On this particular day, the log held their saw and thus could not remove the saw. Having made several attempts which proved abortive, they were inspired to pray and were consequently directed through divine providence (they claimed the Holy spirit descended upon Moso) to clear a particular spot in the forest for prayers and that a man by name Joseph Agun from Igede-Ekiti should be invited to consecrate the praying ground. Having done this and prayers offered on the spot, the saw was removed and that marked the beginning of the tradition of going there to pray each time they were at work.

The history took another turn when during one of the prayer sessions, the spirit directed them to go and call Mr. Omotunde to inspect their work. Ajagunigbala thus went for him, he in turn did not hesitate to go. He however told them that he was not a sawyer but that they should not

³ *Ibid*: p.7

quarrel among themselves, instead they should endeavour to do a good job so that they could enjoy massive patronage.

On his return, he was re-invited to the site through divine inspiration and this time a message came through Moso that he, Omotunde, was going to be used for evangelistic work but that he needed a three-day fasting with them in the forest. He obeyed and did fast, but few days after his return to Aramoko, his father died and after burial the spirit directed him to the forest again and was told that he has been unclean by touching the corpse and thus seven-day fast was demanded of him.

It is worth noting that for the three periods he visited that forest he was with his two wives, Maria Abisatu and Abigail Adeoti. During the seven days fasting, there were prophecies that the Lord will cloth him with great spiritual power to evangelise and to deliver many souls from bondage and sin and to win them for Christ but before the commencement of the spiritual work, the Lord will give him a business of building a house at Ilesa in Osun State, but that the spirit would tell Omotunde when he got there and that the sick will be healed through his ministration. All these revelations came to fulfillment and the work also began at Ilesa. Omotunde recounted that while sleeping one night, a miraculous great man appeared to him in a dream and his appearance was like the crucified Christ. The man's arms stretched towards the ends of the earth, his head touching heaven and a voice came from the man:

I am God Almighty, I send you to the world to deliver many people from the bondage of Satan and the evil spirits. Therefore, you will hence forth continue to evangelise people and great miraculous power will be displayed through you and I order you to be selling coconut oil to be drunk by patients that their various

sicknesses may be healed and the money realised from there will sustain you in the work of the ministry, I will continue to be with you until the end of the work.⁴

Few days after this encounter, while moulding the walls of the building he had embarked upon, a woman with stomach ache came to him at the site, the spirit of the Lord filled Omotunde and inspired him to instruct the woman to go and bring drinking water, which he consecrated. The woman having drunk the water was instantly healed. The testimony of the woman attracted crowd to Omotunde and as he prayed for them with sanctification phrases, they got healed from their diseases and to chronic diseases he applied coconut oil and they got healed after purging them. Many objects were said to have been purge out; like toads, snakes, some with two heads, cowries, sand wrapped in objects, crabs, bitter kola and ordinary kola and parrot red feathers. Charms, stones and needles were also vomited. What authenticated the work of Omotunde and gave his adherents unshaken conviction is the fact that some who even brought coconut oil from their homes and had only the words of sanctification pronounced on it also had their miracles. The oil became efficacious, a lot of people got relieved from their various lymph infections, the lame walked, the blind saw, the crippled stood erect, the dump spoke, the deaf heard, many dead were raised and the barren became fruitful. Witches and wizards also made open confession, when hooked by the spirit power, they confessed all their atrocities. The Emere and Ogbanji⁵ Ibid.

(Elemental Spirits incarnated in human body) also confessed their activities in their various spheres, the spirits

⁴ Interview with Rev. Samuel Oluwatayo Omotunde, son of Emmanuel Omotunde, age 62, Lagos, 2004.

having been rebuked from the human persons got the liberated persons converted for Christ.

As this continued prophet Omotunde was divinely directed to go with his adherents to Ajalu. On their way to Ajalu, they stopped at Aramoko on a market day; Saturday, 8th July 1939. The congregation came down from their lorries with singing and the scene immediately attracted the market people who gathered to see what was happening. Miracles were wrought and news quickly went round that a real and true prophet had come. The then Alara of Aramoko, Oba Atewogboye II was alleged to have placed his maze on the road that they should not leave Aramoko but stay and minister there. The reason given for this action is that he was jealous of Babalola's revival at Ilesa which had made Ilesa popular and also wanted a similar thing for his kingdom. However, after the prophet had healed many people, he told them that the spirit demanded that he should go to Ajalu. Thus he left with the whole congregation and arrived he arrived Ajalu on the 8th July 1939. On Sunday 9th July 1939, the spirit renamed Ajalu, meaning "battle ground for warriors where death occurred" to Ajaye, meaning land of victory" till today. People with various problems visit Ajaye daily to receive their healing. When the news of Omotunde's exploits got to Prophet Joseph Babalola (founder of C.A.C.), he came to meet Omotunde and decided to merge their movements and consequently placed a minister in charge of evangelism at Ajaye in the person of Joshua Adeyemi Moso while Babalola and Omotunde went down to Lagos to start a revival. The two of them thus continued their ministry under the same banner. Omotunde accepted Babalola as his superior and was always ready to go to any where Babalola sent him to. They jointly founded churches all over Nigeria until they separated due to some reason especially polygamy.

The mission thus came to bear Aladura Apostolic church and after metamorphosis of nomenclature came to bear its present name, the African Apostolic Church. Evangelical work continue and many churches today have been founded under this new nomenclature and the mission could boast of about 119 churches, 68 ordained ministers and about 10,000 members all over Nigeria and The Republic of Benin in 1990s. The African Apostolic Church World wide has its National Headquarters located at no. 58 Aguntasolo Street, Ijesatedo, Surulere, Lagos while the official seat of the missionary Headquarters is located at the Holy City of Oke Ajaye via Aramoko, Ekiti in the Ekiti West Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

III. Strategies for Contextualising Christianity

A remarkable characteristic of the Indigenous African Churches is the contextualisation of their worship and liturgy coupled with emphasis on Divine Healing, Prophecy and Visions as they meet the spiritual aspirations of the Africans.

a. Liturgy/Worship

Idowu simply defines liturgy as

as people's way of approaching God in worship; a means of expressing themselves especially in a congregational setting, before God and of assuring themselves of communion with Him. It is a means by which human soul finds a link with the living spirit who is God.⁶

He makes us to understand that the history of liturgies makes it clear that each liturgy emanates originally from the cultic needs and spiritual temperament of the people

⁶ E. Bolaji Idowu, *op. cit.* p 26.

to whom it is designed. This argument is buttressed by the fact that in Christian worship we find cultic elements the history of which is older than Christianity. This therefore makes it abundantly necessary for liturgy used by Nigerian Christians in Nigeria to be distinctively Nigerian in nature, that is to say, before it could meet the spiritual aspirations of Nigerians, the liturgy must of necessity originate from the local cultic needs and spiritual temperament of Nigerian Christians.

Amusan⁷ corroborate this view by submitting that liturgy is the important basis and foundation for spirituality. It is the submit toward which the activity of the church, that is, the expression of spirituality is directed; at the same time, it is the foundation from which all its power flows.⁸

The African Apostolic Church, according to Rev. Samuel Omotunde, has contextualised Christian liturgy through their use of local drums, talking drums and other African musical instruments, singing of locally composed lyrics, which is normally led by a chorus leader to be echoed by the rest of the congregation. African tunes are also used and clapping of hands, jumping and dancing also play to a large extent great role in their worship.

The lyrics and tunes quite often are the result of the inspiration of the individual member consequent upon his or her personal religious experience, spiritual needs and temperament. The use of native musical instruments such as talking drums, horn of ram and pawpaw used as trumpet, clapping and dancing is often supported by biblical references being their text of reference.⁹

⁸ *Ibid*

⁷ S.O. Amusan, *Anglican in Search of Identity*, Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd. 1998. p. 84.

⁹ Holy Bible – Ps 148 and 150.

The leader through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives different appellations of God in the native language while the lyric is going on. Sometimes while the worshippers are seriously engrossed in the singing and dancing, some of them claim to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, and many of them speak in diverse tongues while others prophecy for the edification of the church.

Another area of contextualisation of liturgy is the prayer aspect of this church. In contrast to the stereotyped and recited prayers of the mainline churches, the African Apostolic Church emphasises and encourages their members to pray extemporaneous and quite often spontaneous the result of divine inspiration and religious experience. This of course makes their prayers meaningful and relevant to the local needs and aspirations.

After a session of prayer, looking at the faces of the worshippers, one finds a sort of relief and liberation of their troubled hearts. Extempore prayer has become very effective in the mainline churches, today as adherents express a sigh of relief and satisfaction after prayer session. In addition, the language of prayer is quite often a true and pure African idioms that gives meaning and life to the religious experience of the people. In this regard therefore, the African Apostolic Church needs commendation in the contextualisation process. Furthermore, in contrast to the cold worship of the mainline churches, worship in the African Apostolic Church is lively, action packed, soul inspiring, pragmatic and full participation by every member of the congregation.

b. Divine Healing

Appiah-Kubi writing on the Indigenous African churches of the Akan people of Ghana has this to say,

But the most important single reason why people join the Indigenous African Christian Churches is healing... In dealing with psychomatic problems these churches are very successful through the powers, techniques, and willingness of the spiritually endowed leaders and members. They are also successful with chronic diseases considered incurable by western technological medicine...

In the established churches, medical practice has become so specialised and secularised that the ordinary pastor has been radically excluded from the service for sick; thus healing and worship have become separate. In the Indigenous African Churches there is a reintegration of healing and worship. This corresponds with the Akan understanding, for religion in the Akan concept must be concerned with the health and fertility of human beings, animals, and land.¹⁰

The analysis of the above claims is that, in the traditional African society, good health and fertility or prosperity of man and his environs is of supreme importance and is not estranged from religion. Religion in actual sense offers man life security, therefore a religion that does not assure the African of good health and deliverance from the forces of darkness will definitely not satisfy the African. This is because the continent of Africa like other continents is plagued with all kinds of mysterious diseases, and practical African life attributes these infirmities to contrary spirits and workers of darkness in high places, namely witches, wizards and wicked fellow.

This divine healing branded as *cura divina* by Ayegboyin and Ishola¹¹ Ayegboyin Deji and Ademola Ishola.

¹⁰ Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (ed), *African Theology en route*, New York: Orbis Books, 1979, pp 121-122.

¹¹ Ayegboyin Deji and Ademola Ishola . *African Indigenous Churches*, Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1999, p. 29.

African Indigenous Churches, Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1999, p. 29.

As been argued to be one of the most important benefactions to Africans. It is also the firm beliefs of the African that the Supreme Deity has power over and above these other powers, therefore appeal to Him for deliverance and protection is often necessary. Consequently in traditional African religious practices, sacrifices are offered and prayers are made to God for protection.

It is therefore expected that Christianity that claims superiority over and above the indigenous religion of Africa must be able to meet this spiritual quest of Africans, but with the mainline churches, like Kubi said, contrary is the case. The pastors and spiritual leaders of the main line churches do not offer medical services. To them infirmities and psychomatic problems are meant for the secularised medical clinics with western medicine as its instrument of healing which in most cases do not solve the psychomatic problems of the African. The result is that a vacuum is created in the life of the African Christian who is an adherent of a mainline church. This thus leads to syncretism and ambivalence on the part of most of the African membership of the mainline churches as they, after routine worship in their churches, patronise the native doctors and herbalists for spiritual protection and cure from their various infirmities and psychomatic problems.

The African Apostolic Church attempts to fill this vacuum by effecting through the power of the Holy Spirit, divine healing on their sick members. Instead of herbs and incantation of the native doctors, the spiritual leaders of the African Apostolic Church effect healing by lying on of hands and anointing of members with coconut oil. This is in accordance with the Holy writ:

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.¹²

In this therefore we see a clear contextualisation of scriptural injunction. Leaders of The African Apostolic church in this wise make use of that scriptural injunction to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of their members. In their healing ministry, sometimes water is blessed for their adherents, depending on the direction of the Holy Spirit, an adherent may be requested to go and bath at a flowing stream or river with or without local sponge and native soap.

This perhaps is in accordance with Christ curing a blind man with a mixture of clay and spittle and at the same time Naman bathing in the Jordan River to cure his leprosy. The adherents of the African Apostolic believe that most people have spiritual leprosy and even the physical problems that mankind encounter are at times greater than leprosy, thus by divine direction, it may be necessary to take a bath in a flowing river.

It is interesting to note that sometimes after prayer, one may be directed just to drink his empty palm to receive healing from any kind of sickness. Here we see faith in display. The inherent fact is that faith is what is expected from the adherent. So through mere drinking of empty palm, the African Apostolic Church perhaps unconsciously raising the faith of her adherents to a level of receiving spiritual blessings.

All that has been said above boils down to one fact, African most of the time, want practical things, they need some physical things to raise their faith, thus when a priest

¹² James Ch. 5 vs 14ff

offers ordinary prayer for the traditional African without any physical accomplishment, to him nothing much has been done. This after prayer the Indigenous African Churches will normally recommend an act or work which will of course compliment faith. Here in therefore lies a contextualisation of the general epistle of James.

c. Vision and Prophecy

In traditional African setting, no venture or project is embarked upon without consulting an oracle to tell the subsequent future and possible end of the venture or project. For instance, when a man wants to clear a piece of land for a building project, he will normally consult a diviner to divine for him if it is the will of the gods for him to clear the piece of land and to put the type of structure he wishes to put up.

The same applies to a farmer before clearing the bush for farming; a young man or lady before entering into marriage, whereby the parents and close relations consult the oracle to ascertain the possible future of their son or daughter; a woman after delivery, to know the future and the kind of person the baby will be. Going to a diviner even extends to death. When some one dies, especially a young person, the diviner is consulted to know the cause of his or her death, whether the death is natural or was brought about by the machinations of an enemy. Thus from birth to death, in health or sickness, in every aspect of the African's life, the diviner is often consulted.

It is therefore the firm belief of the leaders of The African Apostolic Church that their denomination is founded on vision and prophecy without which the church is not complete. They claim that Africans are incurably religious and since Africans do not do anything without consulting

or relying on god, it will therefore create a wide vacuum in a situation where prophecies and visions are not part of the liturgy of the church.

Consequently, with Biblical influence and backing, The African Apostolic Church encourages and practices visionary and prophecy in all their worship services. In fact nothing is done without consulting God, perhaps through fasting and prayers, for Him to reveal his divine will to them through dreams, visions or prophecy. In a worship service of this church therefore, at interval especially during prayers, divine messages are given through visions and prophesies and some men and woman who are so gifted are designated prophets and prophetesses.

Before a young couple goes into marriage, a session of prayer and fasting must be observed for God to reveal his will and their future to them perhaps through the prophets and prophetesses. Same goes with any one embarking on a programme or project. The call of their ministers and workers is also based on either vision or prophecy.

When a member is faced with calamity, the church prays to find out through visions, the cause of such calamity and divine instruction is thus given to the member for solution. In a nutshell therefore, the African Apostolic Church is founded on vision and prophecy, nothing is done without seeking divine revelation. Therefore The African Apostolic Church takes her place among the Indigenous African Churches and supplies in Christian manner to the African Christian what the traditional religion will normally offer to the Africans, consequently, leaving no vacuum in the religious life of the African Christian.

d. Baptism

The African Apostolic Church lays emphasis on the need to be purified through baptism. It sees baptism as a means

of admission to the church universal and to become a covenanted member of their mission. It is noteworthy that the African Apostolic Church baptises only adults, the reason being that, the mission believed that children who are not responsible could not be initiated ignorantly into a faith they know little or nothing about. This replicates the views of the Anabaptists¹³ who refused infant baptism on the ground that confession should precede repentance. Furthermore, personal confession is necessary for an initiation rite. Thus, members only dedicate their children and when they are of age, they are expected to attend catechumen class after when they might have well been nurtured by the word of God and in the things of the church, after which they are received into full membership by the rite of baptism and confirmation.

Baptism here is done by immersion. There is no doubt that, they perhaps follow after the baptism of John and the general conception held by most 'Pentecostals' and 'Evangelicals'. Nevertheless, a striking significance is here drawn out, as the act of immersion will to the African be a pragmatic symbolic action of cleansing and purification. Again, holding to the Pauline doctrine of dying and rising with Christ, immersion serves as a more practical demonstration of that spiritual event. The African Apostolic Church accepts baptism administered by any other denomination – as they consider themselves as part of the one catholic and Apostolic Church – but rejects any other form of baptism other than immersion. They consider such baptism as not properly administered and therefore any person seeking membership into their mission would have to be re-baptised by immersion.

¹³ Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christianity*, Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, 2007, p.255

e. Eucharist

This covenant meal is a very important feature in most African societies like the Yoruba community from where the African Apostolic Church originated. In certain fraternities or cults, covenant meal is eaten by members to signify their unity of mind and purpose. Through this means, members enter into covenant relationship with one another, indicating that they could not harm themselves but are under obligation to love and cherish one another. Ralph's interpretation of the rite suggests that since the meaning and history of the Eucharist is bound up with the Passover feast; what that Passover feast meant to the Jews is what the Eucharist means to Christians. It is in this light we can see the unity and ethical significance of the Lord's Supper. At the Passover feast, the Jews are united and knitted as the people of God in a single covenant relationship. Consequently they see themselves as brethren who belong to one nation, being one people with one destiny. Similarly the fellowship (Gk. Koinonia) at the Christian Eucharist has a horizontal as well as a vertical implications, Ralph says

As we are knit with an unseen yet present Lord at His table, so we are united with His people. This is the meaning of 1 Corinthians X, 17 'seeing that there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body; for we all partake from the one loaf'. There is one loaf (Paul is saying) which is broken so that all who are present may have a share. But, he goes on, this common participation in a single loaf now joins you together as the spiritual counterpart of the one loaf.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ralph P. Martins, *Worship in the early church*, Grand Rapids: Erdmann's Publishing Company, 1974, p 112.

Consequently the Eucharistic feast is supposed to unite all believers not only with Christ, the Lord and master of the church, but also with all who participate because through the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup, they have become a covenanted community.

This may perhaps be the reason why members of the African Apostolic Church not only see themselves as 'brothers and sisters', but are strongly bound together more than perhaps their blood relations outside this covenanted relationship. In this Church, it is unheard of for a member to speak ill of another member of the mission. Members share things in common and sometimes live and eat in one another house as if they are members of the same household. In addition, Eucharist does not only help to unite the people of God but as covenanted people, they are required to live a pure and chaste life, shun all evils and turn from their former bad ways to a new life in Christ.

Consequently, the Lord's Supper seen as a covenant meal by the African Christians brings to bear upon them the necessity of living a true, pure and chaste life as it is demanded of a covenanted person in an African society. No wonder then that morality is highly appreciated and immorality and indecency is seriously frowned at in the African Apostolic Church. Any member of the mission found living an 'unworthy' Christian life is either excommunicated or suspended as the case may be. The penalty quite often is derived from revelation from God. The elders will normally seek what is the will of God in that respect. Quite often also, before the deviant is received back to the fold, he or she will have to undergo a purification rite to be pronounced clean, lest he could not hold office or any responsible position in the church.

f. The Ministry of Women

In the African Apostolic Church, women play various roles, ranging from Church matron, deaconesses (who are female church elders), treasurers, Sunday school teachers and any office which the elders and pastors of the church deem fit to give any capable women. One important office held by women in this church is in the area of prophetism. It is noteworthy that women are not appointed as pastors but could be prophetess.

Rev. Samuel Omotunde claims that since the mission is founded and sustained on vision and prophecy, then women play greater role in the mission; because despite the fact that they are no pastors, they are highly involved in the machinery that sustains the mission. In fact in every branch of the African Apostolic Church there is expected to be either a prophet or a prophetess and where there is no pastor, the prophet or prophetess heads the church.

Therefore, my view of this practice is that even though women are not allowed to perform the sacerdotal functions of a priest, the role given to women is of such immense importance as it determines the fate of the church and her members. Consequently, the African Apostolic Church either knowingly or ignorantly contextualise Christianity in this regards, i.e. make Christianity relevant to the African woman. This step has removed male chauvinism which female theologians have criticised. Amba Oduyoye had agitated for great recognition of women in the church with emphasis on being involved in both the ministry and administration of the church. She thus asks:

Can the church have specialists in the worship of God as the Academy has specialists in law and astrophysics? Should women's associations continue to contribute to the maintenance of a male

dominated clergy and thereby remain supporters of the ecclesiastical status quo?¹⁵

She speaks of women being “the acknowledged backbone of the church’s finances and upkeep”, how could they therefore be left out of the church’s ministry. It is in the light of this that this paper discusses the subjugation of women in a man’s dominated society; the role of women in African traditional religion and how the African Apostolic Church as an indigenous African church been able to involve women in the ministry and administration of the church.

Pragmatically, one needs no statistical knowledge to be convinced that women form the majority of the membership of most churches and a visit to our churches shows the immense devotion with which these women worship their Lord. If these claims are right, then it is indeed unfortunate for the church not to recognise women and their ministry. It is a firm belief that any church led by the Holy Spirit will be far from committing such error.

Kubi, while corroborating Oduyoye’s view says that, most traditional shrines in West Africa have priestesses and a good example is Nana Opanebea of the Akonondi shrine at Larte. Parrinder also speaks of the Seaboard of Ghana where Ga priests are accompanied by *woyo* (Female devotees). These women are mediums charged with messages from the deities. He claims that

Each god has at least one **woyo**, her appointment is an official one, and she lives at the expense of the worshippers as does the priest himself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, New York: Orbis Books 1980 pp 125-126.

¹⁶ Kubi, *op. cit.* p. 124.

g. The Question of Polygamy

One controversy that has over the years plagued African Christianity and thus divided African Christians is the question of polygamy. The western oriented Churches following the opinion of their 'Colonial masters' still hypocritically hold to the doctrine of monogamy and thus try to preach it on their pulpits – even though some of them don't go by it. Most indigenous churches in Africa on the other hand seem indifferent to the issue. As much as they will not encourage it, they do not see it as an obstacle to one's salvation in Christ and therefore look at the 'offense' with levity.

The African Apostolic Church does not encourage polygamy per se but has a liberal attitude towards it. They claim that their position is as a result of their not being able to find any concrete biblical text opposing polygamy. Secondly, they only regard the preachers and advocates of monogamy as being hypocritical; this is because they claim that many of the mainline church leaders and members who hold this view are secret polygamists and Europeans who introduce this view have only one wife but many mistresses which to them is adultery because that amount to having sexual intercourse with a person not legally married to them.

The leaders of the African Apostolic Church buttress their argument with a spiritual claim. Their founder had to break away from Ayo Babalola of the C.A.C. for the same reason. Their argument is that for the three times Emmanuel Omotunde was invited to the forest for spiritual exercise, he was with his two wives, Maria Abisatu and Abigail Adeoti. If God was against polygamy there would not have been any reason for revealing himself to prophet Omotunde and again chose him for the task of winning souls and performing miracles and wondrous works.

Some western theologians may see this stand of the mission as absolute syncretism or a christo-pagan religion; but the salient question on this matter is, was Christ really concerned with the issue of monogamy and polygamy?

As much as this writer shares the view that monogamy is the best form of marriage, it should be borne in mind that the purpose of polygamy in African cultural setting should be understood by Christian theologians. It is a society where one's economic and social status is dependent on the largeness of the family.

Dr. Sarpong gave credence to this claim with additional factors that necessitate polygamy:

...in most human communities, women outnumber men, a tendency accentuated in Ghana by the fact that in the past, men often engaged in more dangerous activities than women... which inevitably reduced the number of men. In Ghana, where an unmarried woman is a social anomaly, polygamy provides that all women in a community can be married and so be cared for.¹⁷

The African Apostolic Church believes that God is not against polygamy but rather adultery and that He is mostly interested in saving the lost.

IV. Conclusion

From the discussion so far on the approaches adopted by the African Apostolic Church, it is evident that Christianity only thrives when it is practiced within the cultural setting of the people. In many ways, the church under review has

¹⁷ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation 1974 p. 48.

tried to derobe Christianity in Nigeria of European culture and elements so that its relevance to the natives could be revealed.

In addition, the strategies used were in consonance with African pragmatic tendency because they afforded members the opportunity to worship in a freer atmosphere, expressing themselves in native languages relevant to their needs and aspirations, being bounded together in covenant meal which solidifies brotherhood.

However, for full contextualisation of Christianity in Africa, more areas should be looked into. It is expected that by now, the African indigenous churches should have addressed the issue of clerical vestments and change to native *Agbada* because more than eighty percent of such churches still prefer the vestments used in the mainline churches.