

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF YORUBA CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN  
CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST.

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## ABSTRACT

The thirst for a contextualized Christian worship has been the major reason for the birth of African Indigenous Churches which sustained the growth of Christianity when the Missionaries that brought the gospel left as a result of the epidemic with the mindset that the Africans can not relate with the God they brought on their own. One of the things employed by these churches is the use of symbols in worship and also as a means of solution to the problems that faced the people at the time through the revelation of God. It was not difficult for the people to understand and exercise their faith in the messages preached to them because it actually met them where they were and addressed their immediate challenges. One of the churches involved in this practice is Celestial Church of Christ. Unfortunately, the church has received a lot of condemnation by people both within and outside Christianity on the use of symbols in worship. This thesis therefore looks at the general usage of symbols from both the cultural and religious point of view with reference to the other two major religions in Nigeria to establish the generality of symbols. The researcher through Interviews and personal observations gathered information on the use of symbols using some Celestial Church of Christ in Osogbo, Ede, Ofatedo, Ilesa, and Ife as a case study. The practices and belief of Celestial Church of Christ is explored with emphasis on the use of the Yoruba cultural symbols in worship. This thesis is, therefore, to present that the culture of a particular adherent can not be totally separated from his religious practices, and this exactly is responsible for the practice of the Celestial Church of Christ. Though, the use of Yoruba cultural symbols have been abused by some of these churches, it also still has its positive effects in Christian worship and can still be used in worship that will be acceptable to God. Some scriptural passages in the New Testament are considered as a confirmation to this, where Christ himself communicated with symbols and also wrought miracles and wonders with symbols. However, the symbols should not be placed in the position of God; neither should they share in His glory. This enlightenments and re orientation will go along way in bringing the gospel closer to the people for acceptance rather than some seeing Christianity as a white man religion.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

It has been submitted that human beings cannot prevent their encounter with symbols which are regarded as things generally acceptable as naturally typified representation of some things in a particular culture either in the physical or in the dreams and visions. And also that religion cannot be totally separated from the culture of the adherents. This of a truth is demonstrated by the Celestial Church of Christ in their usage of Yoruba Cultural symbols in both their private and communal worship. This need was necessitated by the need for the Christian faith to be contextualized coupled with some challenges that encountered the church when the missionaries that brought the gospel to us left as a result of the epidemic that broke out.

It should therefore be noted that no denomination has ever existed without their involvement with some of the symbols of their cultural environment. This therefore should send a message of caution to those who believe and also say that

Celestial Church of Christ should not be regarded as Christians let alone a Church of Christ majorly because of their involvement in Symbols. Though, there are some abuses in the way some of these symbols are been used by some of them, but that does not mean that the involvement of these churches in the uses of symbols are evil because symbol is not a sin in itself. And it will not be justified to say that any church making use of the Yoruba Cultural symbols in worship are not the church of Christ.

The reason for these submissions is because symbols in Africa are outlets and vehicles through which religious ideas are expresses (Nabofa 47), and ultimately the master Jesus himself made use of symbols in His earthly ministry. An important one among these was the Lord supper which he administered to the disciples as representing his flesh and blood. It may therefore not be justified for any one to stand and condemn the use of symbols in worship rather than the abuse of it.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary is commended and appreciated for their commitment to training minsters of the gospel to meeting the challenges of this end time. The school should also emphasise on how the pastors can use their cultural provided opportunities to minster to people especially with the use of symbols particularly at the grass root to the illiterate who may not be exposed to other cultural representations. This will go a long way in promoting the gospel of Christ particularly to the unreached.

The church of God can be re orientated through their pastors especially in forum such as Christian Council of Nigeria, Christian Association of Nigeria, etc. on the need to understand that the use of symbolic representations in worship is not a sin but rather the abuse. Those things are created by God and can serve as means of

communication both to God and to man, but they must not be turned to god and no glory or power should be attributed to them for whatever reason. This will help to reduce making over generalised statement that all gathering in the name of Christ making us of symbols in their worship are not church of Christ.

The Christian bodies such as Christian Council of Nigeria should be able to confront and address some excesses in love by some other denominations especially those that can bring reproach to the name of Christ and encourage sound teachings to be taught in their various gathering for the salvation of the people.

Pastors especially Baptist, should be ready to teach the undiluted word of God especially when it involves the use of symbols. Baptist Church members should be taught very seriously that while God can use any thing to bring his purpose to fulfillment, then those things should not be idolized regardless of what they are used to do and how they do it. The Baptist Pastors Fellowship should be used as opportunity to emphasis it to the pastors that the legacy of the sound teachings which we are known for should be sustained.