

## **DIVINATION IN POST-MISSIONARY AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY**

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### **Abstract**

*The Christian churches in Africa are growing tremendously, and churches are breaking out virtually every day and metamorphosing into new ones. The vocations to priestly and religious life are abundant. The number of pastors, evangelists, prophets, etc. can hardly be quantified. About ninety nine percent of the clergy men and women now in Africa are Africans. In spite of the evident success of missionary work in Africa seen in the teeming population of Africans who have embraced Christianity, there is an evident resilience of African traditional paradigms. This paper studied the issue of divination in Post-Missionary African Christianity. It employed the phenomenological method of inquiry in the collection and analysis of data. It observes that in spite of the celebrated success of Christianity in Africa, the issue of divination still persists, expressing itself in different forms of worship employed, especially by the Pentecostal Christian folk.*

**Keywords:** Globalization, Divination, Post-Missionary, Africa, Resilience, Christianity, Traditional, Paradigms

### **Introduction**

Peoples all over the world have developed rational human constructs for themselves as a scheme that serves as explanations for individual things and events. These traditional constructs, otherwise known as traditional paradigms serve the human search for meaning. As Oguejiorfor (2010) observes, "everything acquires some meaning in so far as they are resolvable into the scheme within which life is lived" (p. 21). Traditional paradigms are borne from historical, religious, cultural experiences and geographical peculiarities. In the face of globalization, traditional paradigms have been affected and changed progressively by a barrage of influences. The progressive weakening of traditional paradigms in Africa began with the advent of the Slave trade, compounded by the emergence of colonialism and the coming of Christian missionaries. With these developments, it is no possible that fundamental African attitudes founded on convictions that have religious undertones have been eroded or altered.

In the face of these developments, a *prima facie* consideration would appear to give the impression that globalization, of especially Christianity, has led to the complete change of culture, worldview, identity or traditional paradigms. This paper takes a second and closer look at the effect of globalization on African traditional religious practices, precisely divination. It has the burden of going beyond the impressive changes, to see religious practices such as divination has resiliently continued to feature in the contemporary religious practices of African Christians.

### **The Ontological Basis of Divination**

Life for the African is full of mysteries, and in fact, life is a mystery itself with all kinds of possibilities. Gyekye (1987) discusses the African doctrine of causality, distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary events in life. Ordinary events would include, rain during rainy season, drought during dry season, a pregnancy that lasts for nine months, the growth of plants, catching of few fish at some particular times of the year, etc. Such events do not constitute a problem for the mind of the African. They are empirical, scientific and non-supernaturalistic. They have been observed by people who now know that there is a necessary connection between such events. For instance, they know that during dry season, river, streams and canals dry up, or that a child stays in the mother's womb for nine months before delivery. However, extraordinary events are those that engage the minds of Africans, and such events would include, a woman being pregnant for more than nine months, drought during rainy season, a tree falling and killing a human being. Such events, he argues are "infrequent and hence are considered abnormal; they are discrete and isolated; they appear to be puzzling, bizarre, and incomprehensible; they are not considered subsumable under any immediate known law of nature" (p. 78). Such events have led the African to ask questions, not only about the present but also about the future. It is through divination, according to Quarcoopome (1987) that the African "seeks to interpret the mysteries of life, convey the message of god, divinity and other spirits to the members of the community" (p. 82). Thus, Oguejiofor (1996) avers that diviners have the numerous duty of ascertaining the wishes of the spirits.

### **Meaning of Divination**

Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) understand divination as the practice of attempting to foretell the future by finding out the wishes of a divinity or spirit. The word literarily means "let the divine manifest". Expatiating further, Onwujeogwu (1997) interpretes divination as prediction, and a process of reaching a judgement of the

unknown or future through the study of the physical and metaphysical evidence found in the various signs of the *locus*. Divination, therefore, together links the physical and spiritual worlds, making it a religious activity. Diviners are, therefore, according to Iroegbu (1974) the empowered mediators between the visible and invisible realms of reality. They were the hope of the hopeless, and the counsellors of the ancient African societies. Kanu (2015 a & b) avers that they put smiles on the faces of many who are in search of liberation as they give them guidance in daily affairs, reveal the past, diagnose their diseases, and give solution to their various problems. The diviner reveals their past, predicts their future, helps find lost articles, helps barren women who desire children, explains strange dreams, helps those in search of their right life partner, when it is important to know who has reincarnated, to know the cause of a mysterious death and discover thieves. He or she is the wise man or woman of the village and beyond. With all these, it is not surprising that Park (1965) and Ilogu (1985) would argue that divination is connected to situations of life, such as illness or difficult moments generally.

### **Diviners and other Sacred Specialists**

Questions regarding the identity of the diviner in relation to the priest often arises-questions like: 'is the diviner different from the priest and the medicine man?' The answer is: 'not necessarily'. This is because, it is very common to see a diviner who is also a medicine man and a priest. Adibe (2008) goes further to explain that a diviner could be an elder, a titled man in the community or a mystic. Madu (2004) distinguished between two types of medicine men: herbalists and diviners. Parrinder (1975) specified the kind of medicine man the diviner becomes: he deals with drugs, most of which have a magical rather than a pharmaceutical value. He is more interested in the spiritual causes of the disease rather than the physical.

### **Methods of Divination**

There are different methods of divination in Africa. Through these methods, diviners help their clients to find out what is wrong, they tell who has done the evil magic or sorcery, or the spirit that has possessed a person and what it wants.

1. **Hydromancy:** This is also referred to as 'water gazing' divination. Usually the diviner pours water into a container placed at some part of the room and after some incantations which arouses the spirit of divination. Usually, the person who needs help is asked to look into the water.

2. **Mirror Gazing:** This is like the first, people are asked to look into the mirror for revelation.
2. **Throwing Dice:** When these strings are cast, their arrangement on the floor is interpreted by the diviner. Objects used in this case could be seeds, cowries, etc.
3. **Animal Entrails:** Like the entrails of a goat, by throwing it around and allowing it to settle. The final position it takes is interpreted by the diviner.
4. **Reading the Palms:** It is believed that people's destinies are written in their palms. The diviner reads it and interprets it for the client.
5. **Mediums:** These are people who are often attached to diviners. Since they are in touch with the spirit world, they easily provide information for the diviner. Sometimes, by the beating of a drum, dancing and singing they become possessed and fall to the ground during which they begin to reveal things that are hidden.
6. **Seers:** These are people who have the natural powers to see into the future and tell people what awaits them. There are times when such persons are attached to diviners.

### **Globalization and Divination in Post-Missionary African Society**

With the advent of the globalization of Christianity, urbanization and industrialization, many people have left African villages for the cities. This has seriously affected the practice of divination and the patronage of diviners. This is not in any way to say that divination has died; the African concept of life as *summum bonum* (the highest good) and the struggle to preserve it still creates enough appetite for divination. Many African Christians and Africans of other faiths still queue at shrines for the services of diviners. In many places where this might not be obtainable, there are indices of divination being practices under the garb of Christianity. It is, therefore, not surprising that men and women who are preparing to get married very often bring the pictures of their fiancée or friend for a pastor to tell them if it is their right partner. Families meet pastors and ask him to find out the cause of lack of progress in their family. Many who are Christians are also seen in the shrines of diviners asking questions about the future and the unknown.

Moreover, the recent development in Pentecostalism has provided a breeding ground for the relevance of divination. Through its teachings and methods, it has created a scenario of fear and an avenue for freedom from bondage. And the fear created makes the average African Christian to be in continuous search for a path

that would be free from misfortune. Virtually, everything has been demonized by Pentecostalism. Gradually, the reality and efficacy of traditional practices and the gods are returning through the backdoor. The gods that were on retreat are now exerting their creedal influences on African Christians. This is evident in the Pentecostal,

1. over emphasis on the power of occult and paranormal, practice of family cleansing, exhumation of mystically buried poisonous objects, extraction of poisonous materials from human body, invoking of the spirits of dead persons, separation of mermaid/spiritual spouses and many more;
2. attribution of sickness, barrenness, misfortunes of all sorts and poverty to be demonic or humanly manipulated or as wrath of God due to sin or non-payment of appropriate tithe.
3. attaching demonic presence in every meal and household items;
4. labeling school children as agents of demons that initiate others by sharing drinks or snacks with them;
5. attributing the manufacturing of goods especially weave-on, wigs, and cosmetics of all kinds to mermaid spirits;
6. claims that placentas and umbilical cords are being sold by some hospital workers who are agents to occult members for manufacturing of cosmetics;

### **Conclusion**

At the heart of divination is the African's philosophy of causality. The African sees everything as caused by an agent or a force. This until our time has not been changed by globalization or education, making the eradication of divination very difficult. Moreover, demons, occult and God's wrath are attached to virtually everything one eats or uses, fear, horror and terror are created in every corner of social life. To solve the terror homes for healing and deliverance from bondage of God's wrath and demonic manipulation are established by traditional sacred specialists and Christian denominations at a very high cost. Rather than eradicate divination, a new form of divination has been established- it is one that fits into the modern structure and attends to the needs of the modern person.

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