

MISSION FROM AFRICA – THE CASE OF THE CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST IN EUROPE

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Introduction

As the European society, or at least a large section of it, seems to be plagued by a sense of the decline, insignificance and obituary of religion (particularly in relation to church-oriented religiosity), a tremendous explosion of vigour, vitality and development is being dramatized on the African religious theatre. This is evidenced, for instance, by the remarkable proliferation of churches (African new religious movements) within and outside the African shores. Most of these new churches have developed their own mission, evangelistic strategies and dynamics, in order to exert some influence on the spiritual market place. To gain a more positive sense of being ›players‹ in the global religious rostrum, such movements have charged themselves with the task of taking their vision beyond their immediate geo-cultural and social contexts. Turner (1979: 291) aptly remarks this when he said:

»... Some of the African churches have a sense of mission towards us (*Europeans*)! They see how static and ineffective we are, and how little we share some of their own central convictions about prayer, fasting, healing, the power of the Spirit and the joy of worship. They ride on the crest of a religion that works. They share also in the new-found African convictions of having an important contribution to make to the nations of the world, especially in the realms of human relations and of the spiritual where we are increasingly desiccated and inadequate. One sign of the authenticity of their christian faith is a desire to share their discoveries and open up to us again the dynamic of our mutual heritage ...«

This view has been largely corroborated by Rev. Dr. Rufus Ositelu,¹ (Primate, Church of the Lord – Aladura Worldwide), one of the African instituted churches. Describing the mission of his church in Europe, he said *inter alia*: »The mission of our church is to bring Christ to all nations particularly outside Africa so that they too may experience spiritual fulfilment in Christ Jesus. This is as revealed to our founding fathers an age of importation

* *italics emphasis mine*

¹ RUFUS OSITELU, »The Church of the Lord (Aladura), Hamburg-Altona«, Paper read at *Werkstattgespräche zur Bedeutung der afrikanischen religiösen Diaspora in Deutschland*, Missionsakademie, Universität Hamburg, 9.–11. September 1998.

of the gospel or mission-reversed into the industrialized world from Africa [...] our church is making an attempt to restore life into the churches through Spirit filled worship sessions and in-depth studies of the word of God [...] Our mission is to bring good news to all people in this land irrespective of race or colour and to present to them yet another form of worshipping in the beauty of His Holiness in spirit and in truth ...»

This paper seeks to examine the nature, dynamics, and strategies for mission of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) in Europe. The paper will attempt to show the foundation and motivations of this new African religious initiative, and how they perceive Europe as one of the new homes and alternative mission fields especially in the last four decades on their soil. In attempting to reach out to the new context of Europe, the ›immigrant‹ African forms of Christianity such as the CCC are seeking to remain their own authentic selves. From this standpoint, it is suggested that European Christians can of course learn from them the further dimensions of their common tradition. The paper concludes by assessing the religious, political and socio-cultural factors which have stimulated or hindered the missionary enterprise of the CCC in Europe.

Towards a New Look at Mission

The nineteenth century is seen in many circles as the apogee of christian missionary enterprise beyond their own borders in global religious history. During the era of European imperial and colonial expansion, many christian mission bodies had made significant inputs in the ›Europeanization‹ of Africa and the so called ›Third World‹ nations. Substantial records and studies abound on the activities of these missions. Although these records serve as a vital source of information on their histories, they have nevertheless largely derived from the perspective of the (professional) missionaries themselves, or from merchants, explorers and soldiers with whom they have contracted some form of ›unholy alliance‹. While the hagiographical character of some of these accounts is not far to seek, few systematic, cross-cultural, and comparative studies of missions and missionary enterprises, were until now available. There has been no consensus among scholars about the nature and role of missionaries at the time. They have been portrayed variously as »the cultural agents of colonialism« (Rodney 1972: 277), »the major motor of social, intellectual and moral development« (Ki-Zerbo 1979: 481), and a middle position held by Groves (1969) & Gründer (1982), both of who saw missionary activities as resulting in »a humanizing of imperialism«. This movement in the nineteenth century perhaps marks a singular event in history when the propagation of the Christian faith was from a position of ›overwhelming power‹. To a large extent, this has resulted in the criticism that the missionary movement posed as a religious facade and the ›harbinger‹ of capitalism in its colonial phase. Thus, in the expansionist phase of the so-called European ›civilizations‹, the missionary movement was at the same time a cause, an expression and a result. No doubt, the mission church was involved with aspects of colonial rule. While we do not deny the influences of missionary activities, the degree and nature of such impact on

Africas' history has also remained somewhat contentious and ›dust-raising‹ (Cf. Ajayi 1969).

Mission in the nineteenth century and in later times is largely understood as »the overseas missionary movement«, and identified essentially with overseas mission. This seems to have been thought of in isolation from the mission of the church in its ›home‹ environment. Thus, churches which never spawn a missionary movement to foreign countries are therefore perceived to have been deficient in their missionary understanding. Such movements do have a clear ›mission‹ with relation to the cultures, churches and states in which they were set. But that process in my view has seldom been studied as mission.

With the demise of colonialism and the subsequent erosion of the hegemony of European mainline churches in Africa, the cause of christian missions seems to have lost much of its appeal and grip in most European churches today. The question of mission appears to have been thrown into the ›dustbin‹ of history. We contend here that the loss in grip is not because the ›great day(s)‹ of missions is over but because such churches are not sufficiently, or do not really care to be, in touch with what is really happening elsewhere. In our view, it is not missions that are out of date or behind the times, but rather the image of what is involved. Increasing globalization trends have exacerbated new forms, motivations and techniques of missionary activities in contemporary period. Such expansion has been stimulated by factors such as increasing transnational migration, improved transportation systems, global marketing, tourism, and the creation and use of new forms of global communication networks. This global interconnections has carried with it mission exchanges from one end of the world to the other.

Hitherto, the gospel travelled across continents almost exclusively in one direction, that is from Europe or America to Africa and the rest of the so-called Third World, or from the North to the South. But to speak nowadays of a one-way trend of mission, i.e. from North to South, becomes unfashionable and suspect. New mission structures are emerging from the churches of the South, many of which are at a formative stage in shaping their steadily growing response to the challenge of world mission. Globalization has further enhanced a ›two-way traffic‹ whereby mission (the gospel) now traverses continents in many directions. If this is true, then the word »mission« begs for or may be in dire need of new, contemporary and wider definition. Here, I share Prof. Jongeneels'² earlier suggestion that »a modern comprehensive history of the Christian mission must draw the readers' attention to the contribution of both men and women, and western and non-western people, to the Christian mission«. We shall now turn to the CCC, one of the African initiated churches which has demonstrated dynamism for mission and evangelism within and outside the African context.

² See JONGENEEL, J.A.B., *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, *A Missiological Encyclopedia*, Part I, Peter Lang / Frankfurt a.M. 1995, pp. 230. Prof. Jongeneels' encyclopedia of two volumes is a compendium of materials highly useful for missiologists and missiological research. Among other things, he has provided a rich analysis of the philosophy, science, theology of mission, and missionary theology in both volumes.

A Brief Foundation History of the CCC

The CCC is one of the most popular indigenous religious initiatives in the West coast of Africa. They belong to the group of Nigerian churches referred to as *Aladura*, so called owing to the emphasis they place on prayer, healing, prophecy and other charismatic activities. CCC emerged spontaneously around the life, visionary experience and charismatic personality of Samuel Bilehou Oschoffa (1909–1985), a Nigerian timber merchant who was born and nurtured in Porto-Novo (now Benin Republic). In 1947, Oschoffa had a visionary experience in which he claimed God instructed him to found a church. The nucleus of the CCC emerged as a consequence of this at Porto Novo and later spread to towns and villages in Dahomey (now Benin Republic) in the first instance. While the movement existed in Benin Republic since 1947, it was its inception and growth in Nigeria from 1950 onwards, that enhanced the worldwide popularity of the church.

By the following decade of its presence in Nigeria, CCC from its first base in Makoko-Lagos, began to witness a phenomenal growth with its spread first to virtually all the Yoruba speaking areas and later to other parts of Nigeria. By 1975, the church had reckoned at least 150 parishes in Nigeria, as well as a steady influx of new members in Benin Republic. Today, a remarkable ›internationalization‹ of the church has been witnessed as it maintains its quest for more global connections through her ›mission‹, ›evangelism‹ which transcends African geographical boundaries. Between 1976 and 1998, a twenty two-year period, CCC parishes or branches worldwide have increased from 254 to 2,316.³ Out of these figures, 1,991 parishes exist in Nigeria alone while 325 parishes are scattered in Europe (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands), Canada, America and other African countries such as Benin Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana, Cameroon, Niger, Gabon, Zaire, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Senegal and a host of others. The total population of CCC members worldwide as at 1981 was put at 1.5 million. The All Africa Church Conference (AACC) gave a conservative estimate of CCC members at 700,000.⁴ As we have noted elsewhere (1998: 143), due to a number of factors, these figures (total number of parishes and population strength) are far from being exclusive. It has remained impracticable to obtain a concise and accurate figure of the total number of existing CCC parishes and members worldwide. Since the death of the Pastor-Founder Samuel Bilehou Oschoffa in 1985, the church has been headed by his second in command, Abiodun Bada.

³ See *Celestial Church of Christ Bible Lessons and Parishes*, (1976, 1994–1996, 1998) Pastoral Publications, CCC International Headquarters, Ketu-Lagos.

⁴ See *Evangelisches Missionswerk in Südwestdeutschland*, Information, ›The Celestial Church of Christ – A Nigerian Independent Church in Germany‹, Stuttgart, 21. September 1981.

Sowing the Seed on European Soil

As we have noted above, the evidence of the continuing sparkle and vivacity of the Christian faith in Africa is now gradually becoming prevalent on the European religious scene as elsewhere. The presence and activities of ›immigrant‹ religious communities can no longer be ignored or simply waved off as ›sects‹ or ›cults‹. In most cases, African Christians coming to Europe as students, migrant workers and economic refugees suddenly find themselves impelled by the ›power‹ inherent in the faith they embody and from their experience in their home church into becoming »unofficial missionaries« in their host countries.

The CCC made its debut on the European soil in the late 1960s through Nigerian students, or people on business and official assignments who had no intention of residing permanently abroad. When more than one member found themselves in one city or community, the initiative came for them to meet and worship together. As their membership increases, the group becomes inter-ethnic and international in outlook. In a letter to all the overseas parishes, Philip Ajose summarized one of the set-goals of the church when he said, »the CCC shall cater for the well being of members and others in contact with her irrespective of race or colour in a charitable manner as she has means and strength«.⁵ This is perhaps a bird's eye view of the inter-ethnic and international outlook of the church. As the membership strength improved, the recognition of CCC authorities in Lagos was sought through the invitation of the Pastor-Founder to visit the Harton Street Parish (Deptford, Southeast London) which was then the only existing parish outside the African shores.

In July 1975, A.A. Bada, then Supreme Evangelist made his first visit to the United Kingdom on behalf of the Pastor-Founder. Such a pastoral visit which later became an annual event was an added impetus to the growth and development of CCC in diaspora. One consequence of this visit was the increasing proliferation of the church. The internal problems which confronted the early members in Europe were brought to the attention of the headquarters in Nigeria who had to act promptly by appointing a coordinator to oversee affairs of the parishes outside Africa.

Philip Ajose's deployment to Harton Street Parish, London as General Overseer of the Overseas Diocese (comprising Europe, U.S.A and Canada) was vide a duly signed ›letter of credence‹ from the Pastor-Founder and the Board of Trustees dated 2 August 1979. The expediency of his appointment and deployment was partly expressed in the letter: »... We have reports from our parishes in the United Kingdom and the United States of America of activities by members which not only conflict with the tenets and Constitution of our church but also impede its progress in the various parishes concerned ...«⁶

⁵ Official Correspondence of P.H. AJOSE, Superior Evangelist and General Overseer of Overseas Diocese, (Elephant & Castle Parish Secretariat, London) to all CCC parishes in Europe, USA and Canada, dated 31st January 1983.

⁶ See Letter of Credence from the Prophet Pastor Founder Rev. S.B.J. OSHOFFA and the Board of Trustees to Evangelist P.H. Ajose, Ref. CCC/1/79 dated 2nd August 1979.

He was appointed and charged with duties and responsibility of overseeing the parishes abroad. With these developments, the creation of an overseas diocese incorporating parishes outside Africa became formalized. By 1996, the number of parishes in the Overseas diocese had risen to sixty eight with United Kingdom 26, USA 26, Canada 2, Austria 3, Germany 4, and France 7 respectively.⁷ There are new CCC parishes established in Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The *›CCC Bible Lessons and Parishes 1998‹* shows that the number of overseas parishes had increased to ninety-five parishes. Other official church sources such as the CCC websites in Riverdale (USA) and London (UK)⁸ show that there are at least sixty and seventy parishes in the USA and Europe respectively. Such sources even note that they present *›a partial list of CCC parishes‹*. This however indicates that the church have or are *›coming of age‹* in terms of their geographical spread outside the African continent.

Socio-ethnic composition of CCC in Europe

As a religious movement develops and expands, so is the tendency to incorporate people from varying ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. CCC parishes in Europe throw open *›hands of fellowship‹* to people of all races and colour who have chosen to become members or those who are interested in visiting and participating in their worship services. Visitors are warmly welcomed and given recognition during services. African members of the church in Europe are not illiterates, but elites of their countries who have been sent to the western world as diplomats, businessmen, students; or those who have come on their own to seek the *›golden fleece‹*. The membership cuts across all the different levels of society⁹ from civil servants, diplomats, businessmen and women, skilled and unskilled factory workers to students, the unemployed, asylum (political, economic) seekers/refugees etc. Social (class) differentiation is not pronounced as members are allowed to use within the church only those appellations and or prefixes relating to their rank within the church. The use of appellations that relate to professional titles is optional for members outside the church. Except on closer relationship with members, it is sometimes difficult to discern their individual social statuses. It is mandatory for members to put on in all services or festivals their white sutana, their sacred regalia.

CCC membership in Europe cuts across ethnic precincts to include Africans (mostly West Africans), Afro-Caribbeans, Surinamese and Europeans. However, their membership has remained predominantly African with the Yoruba forming the largest share. Other members come from non-Yoruba ethnic groups in Nigeria and other countries such as

⁷ See *CCC Bible Lessons and Parishes 1996*.

⁸ See CCC website addresses under the section on *›The use and appropriation of media technologies‹* below.

⁹ At the inception of CCC in Dahomey (Benin Republic), its membership was characterized essentially by rural membership, farmers, fishermen, the poor, and people from the lower level of the society. Following its rapid growth and proliferation later in Nigeria and elsewhere, it started to attract both rural and urban clientele, civil servants, people of the business class, and the lower cadres of the society.

Benin Republic, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Senegal. The white population depends largely on the European country in question. On the whole, there seems to be more Austrians, English and Germans. Their membership can be linked primarily to intermarriage or casual/friendly relationship with black (African) members. Due to the increasing multi-ethnic character of CCC membership, conduct of services is also assuming a more polylingual dimension. Services are held in Yoruba, Egun, English, French and German languages respectively. Instructions and informations in one or more of these languages are given simultaneously or interchangeably during the service. The choice of language vary and depends on the mixed linguistic background of members of a parish in a respective country.

Dynamics and Strategies for Mission

Stackhouse¹⁰ defines a ›missionary‹ as »one who seizes or is seized by a universalistic vision and who feels a mandate, a commission, a vocation to bring the vision and its benefits to ›all‹«. One of the dynamics of missionary enterprise lies therefore in the fact that they must always be understood in terms of the universal incorporeal-moral perception that not only calls it into being, but gives it its transcultural *raison d'être*. At his inaugural vision Oschoffa explains:

»On the 29th of September 1947, while I was praying in my house with some visiting friends, I saw a strong ray of light [...] I then saw a winged being whose body was like fire and whose eyes were tiny flying towards me behind the beam of light. [...] This being then proceeded to say to me: ›God wishes to send you on an errand of preaching to the world. Many christians there are who, during their lifetime, when confronted by problems and difficulties of this world they seek after fetish priests and other powers of darkness for all kinds of assistance. [...] God wants to send you to the world on a *mission* of preaching and exhortation, but the world will not believe you. To assist you in your work so that men may listen to and follow you, miraculous works of holy divine healing will be wrought by you in the name of Jesus Christ. These works of divine healing and God's spiritual mark on you will testify to the fact that God sent you.« (CCC Constitution, p. 7)

Oschoffa's visionary statement could be compared with the claim of the Christian church to universal relevance. This universal dimension of the christian faith draws from the injunctions in Matt 28: 19, »Go forth, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...«.

The CCC also refers to itself as *Oko igbala ikehin* (the last ship, vessel or boat for salvation). This self-image of the church best exemplifies the fusion of this-worldly and the other-worldly orientation in their understanding of *igbala* (salvation). It was claimed to have been revealed by angels through hymns which were delivered to the prophets and prophetesses within the church. This promise is made manifest in the church both in spoken words as well as in their ›spiritual‹ hymns. Two examples of such hymns are:

¹⁰ STACKHOUSE, M.L., »Missions«, in: MIRCEA ELIADE (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 9, Simon & Schuster Macmillan / New York 1995, p. 564.

Oko igbala ikehin
 Oko igbala
 Oko igbala ikehin ni Ijo Mimo
 Eni ti ko ba wonu Oko na
 Yio rii sinu bu omi*
 (Y.H.N. – *(author's translation) / E.V. 142)

The last ship for salvation
 The last ship
 The last ship of salvation is Celestial Church
 He who fails to enter the last ship
 Will sink into deep water

Baba pa lase lat'Orun wa
 Ki gbogbo aiye si wariri
 Fun »Jo Mimo, lat'Orun wa
 Ijo yi ni, yio we aiye mo
 Aje, oso, yio wariri
 L'abe agbara Mimo yi
 Awon Angeli si kun f'ayo
 Iyanu f'oko ikehin
 Halleluya fun ise Oluwa
 (Y.H.N. 176 / E.V. 15)¹¹

Father from Heaven authorises
 That the whole world may all tremble
 For Celestial Church from above
 The fold to purify the world
 Witches, wizards will all tremble
 Beneath this new power Divine
 Angels are filled with happiness
 We marvel at this last ship
 Halleluya for all the works of God.

From the above, there are several references to »the last ship«, »sent down or descended«, »... this church shall purify the world«. But what does it mean to be the last church or the last ship? What does it involve to cleanse the world and how? Such hymns are pointers to the members' belief that their particular church was established to fill the vacuum created by the inadequacies of the older churches. A period of cleansing has come to replace the era of chaos and sin. It is a period to gather harvest fruits. The church sees itself as possessing the instrument of power with which it will cleanse and purify the other churches, and the world at large. Owing to this, the members regard themselves as a chosen group, specially called upon to render service to others. It is their belief that they possess some »superior« powers and skills which prepare them for the performance of this function. Oschoffas' inaugural vision and the self-identification of the church as the »last ship [...] to cleanse the world« illustrate both the missionary ideal that has inspired the church from its formative years and the way in which it was to be carried out. The spread and planting of parishes (branches) has been achieved more by individual efforts, through the migration or inherent mobility of members, or by the gradual incorporation of immediate neighbours than by large-scale, organized missionary movements or activities.

A significant feature of the church in the European context could be seen in the way they charge themselves with the task of evangelization. Such a missionizing role of the church underlie the annual overseas pastoral visits. According to Olatunji Akande: »As the membership of the church in overseas is predominantly Africans who have gone abroad to seek greener pastures, it becomes one of the priorities of Rev. A.A. Bada to forge a strong link with the children of God [...] Through these visits complemented with the power of the Holy Spirit at work, the fire of evangelism could be lighted in the countries

¹¹ See also *Yoruba Hymn Number* (Y.H.N.) 286 / English Version (E.V.) 74; Y.H.N. 330 / E.V. 13; Y.H.N. 554 and Y.H.N. 605 / E.V. 12.

visited and the machinery for the fulfilment of God's covenant that the church is the last vessel of salvation which will cleanse the world set in motion ...¹²

In a communique issued at the end of the 1995 Annual Conference of CCC Overseas Diocese, members resolved among other things to engage in active evangelization. A central CCC theological college is being established in the U.K. to further educate CCC shepherds around the Overseas Diocese.¹³ To be more involved with the local community, community services such as charitable for the poor and the needy, as well as counselling units were to be established on a wider scale.¹⁴ Some parishes have also been involved in social help services. Several religious magazines, newsletters such as the ›Angel Voice International‹, ›Christ Castle‹, Luli Voice etc. are been published monthly or quarterly by some of the parishes in Europe. Such literatures which are widely circulated among members and other interested christians are aimed not only at disseminating information about the church, they have served as a medium for evangelism as they always feature general articles on the Christian faith.

On the threshold of ecumenical links

There is no gainsaying the fact that many christians who are members of churches outside Europe and (North) America are increasingly becoming conscious of belonging to a local ecumenical body, a continental christian organization, or a single worldwide religious network and ecumenical umbrella, irrespective of their denominational label and leaning. Many share the view about the need for contemporary ecumenical movements for the unity and renewal of the Church, and also the fact that a reconsideration of the meaning of »mission« is long overdue. The CCC has been interested in both local and international ecumenical networks. At the national and continental levels, the church belongs to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC).

Pastor Bada's visit in 1989 to the World Council of Churches (WCC) headquarters in Geneva, marked the first attempt to register the existence of CCC on the ›world map of churches‹. Following this initiative, collaborative ecumenical activities at international level between WCC and CCC have now been extended to Nigeria. In a letter from WCC Headquarters to Pastor Bada, its General Secretary (Emilio Castro) stated, »We thank God

¹² See OLAJUNJI AKANDE, »Celestial Church of Christ International Network: A Reflection on Pastor Bada's visit to parishes of CCC Overseas 1987–1995«, in: *Celestial Eye*, a Brochure of CCC International Headquarters / Ketu-Lagos, 1995, p. 39.

¹³ Personal Interview with P.H. AJOSE (General Overseer, CCC Overseas Diocese) at CCC Overseas Diocesan Headquarters, London on 26th July 1996. This was also mentioned in his article, see P.H. AJOSE, »Ten Years Service to the Lord«, in: *Celestial Eye*, p. 38.

¹⁴ The 1995 CCC Overseas Diocese Annual Conference was held at Ayo Parish, Ontario-Canada on 1st July 1995. It was attended by representatives of parishes from Europe, U.S.A. and Canada under the leadership of Pastor Bada and Philip Ajose, General Overseer of CCC Overseas Diocese.

for the joint ministry we were allowed to undertake in Nigeria and pray that God will guide us as we pursue the tasks put before us [...] Thank you most sincerely for your keen participation in the visit ...». In September 1998, a three-man WCC delegation embarked on a one-week visit to the international headquarters of the church in Nigeria as part of the process of considering her application for membership in the ecumenical body. The church has also strived to be involved in other ecumenical activities both in Europe and elsewhere.

CCC Overseas Diocesan headquarters in London have embarked on several ecumenical activities within Britain and other parts of Europe. CCC (U.K. territory) are affiliated to the Lewisham Federation of Churches, an associate member of the British Council of Churches (now Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland). In 1993, Bada's pastoral visit to England established, among other things, a working relationship between CCC Overseas Diocese and the Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (CAAC) in London. In his introductory survey on African Independent Churches (AICs) in Britain, Thompson (1995: 228) attributes the large measure of cooperation between African churches and the formation of several councils of churches to two major factors. He suggests a common feeling of marginalization and ethnic solidarity while also tracing it in a much wider sense to a consciousness of a common Afro-Caribbean identity. However, it would appear that CCC like most other African indigenous churches have witnessed a relationship which is far from hostile and cordial with the mainline churches.

The Use and Appropriation of Media Technologies: A New Model for Mission?

The intensification of revivals and evangelism was not limited to Nigeria but has extended to the overseas parishes through Bada's »annual pastoral tours«. Such visits usually last from at least one week to several months depending on the lined out programmes (spiritual and administrative). In 1987, Bada, accompanied by an entourage of five members, embarked on a two-month (8th May – 9th July) tour of twenty eight parishes in the overseas diocese.¹⁵ Countries visited were the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, France and the United States of America. The Pastor has embarked on more frequent (overseas) tours annually. Evangelistic strategies such as revivals, public lectures and press interviews are increasingly utilized to register the church in the global religious map. The church leadership has participated in religious and public forum discussions through the electronic media.¹⁶

¹⁵ Details of his activities at this singular visit are documented in OKUNLOLA, D.O., *Bada and the Great Commission*, Lagos, 1995, pp. 59–77. Between 20th October and 2nd November of the same year, Bada embarked on pastoral visit to some northern states of Nigeria (Kano, Kaduna and Katsina). See OKUNLOLA, pp. 77–84.

¹⁶ During the Pastoral visit of Bada in 1975, the church featured for thirty minutes on Radio 4 in Britain. The first baptismal rites in the UK was enacted by him at a stream at Kingdom-upon-Thames in Surrey. In 1987, the Pastor was interviewed by the West Africa Magazine in North London, and delivered a live-sermon on the Sunday religious programme in a Chicago local Television (courtesy of CCC Chicago Parish on 21st June).

The church has attempted to spread their ideology by taking advantage of new forms of communication technologies. The tendency towards globalization was not uncommon in the church during the lifetime of the Founder. Ostensibly not unaware of the advantages inherent in an increasing worldwide interconnection and interchanges, the Pastor-Founder in 1985 conferred with the top hierarchy on the urgent need for evangelism through the electronic media (television and radio), using two languages (Yoruba and English) in the first instance. The exigency of this initiative was clearly brought out in the objectives he stated as follows:

- a. extending coverage first of all in Nigeria and some neighbouring West African countries.
- b. reaching out to other African countries and overseas through cassettes of recorded sermons.
- c. as time went on, breaking language barrier by introducing into the programme other languages e.g. French, Egun etc.
- d. establishing evangelism archive in form of recorded sermon, printed sermon etc.
- e. filing for action, record and reference purposes, public reaction or response to the programme.
- f. making the message available to certain regions of the world the Pastor may not be able to cover for reasons beyond his control.
- g. measuring the extent of ground covered, the degree of success achieved and failure if any.
- h. using available informative materials to make projections and evolve strategies capable of helping to achieve the best in the field of evangelism.¹⁷

Consequently, the church paid for 'airing space' from some local media such as the Lagos Television Channel 8 (LTV8), Lagos State Broadcasting Corporation Radio (LSBC), Ogun State Television (OGTV) and the Ogun State Broadcasting Corporation Radio (OGBC). Religious programmes were pre-recorded and episodes relayed on Sunday mornings for a duration of one-hour or thirty minutes as the case may be. With the demise of the Pastor-Founder, this initiative has not only continued, but has received added impetus from his successor. According to Okunlola (1995: 95), Bada had sent into the world more than 300 recorded sermons over OGTV (Message of God) and more than 60 recorded sermons over OGBC and LSBC (Word of God). The religious programmes enjoy sponsorship from the international headquarters, from individual parishes as well as from anonymous donors within the church. The institutionalization of these religious programmes has had far-reaching impact on the church. For instance, fieldbacks are received from listeners (both members and non-members) through telephone calls, facsimile and letters of prayer requests for blessing, victory, healing, counselling etc. Some individual parishes have also inaugurated religious programmes on local television and radio stations after due approval has been obtained from the church authority.

¹⁷ See OKUNLOLA, D.O., *ibid.*, p. 86.

The church seeks to create a global network through the use of Internet websites and electronic mail¹⁸ in processing and disseminating information. In a release on 15th December 1997, announcing its (Riverdale site) presence on the Internet, it stated *inter alia*, »Halleluyah!!! [...] Celestial Church of Christ now has a dominant presence on the World Wide Web. The main focus of this page is to present a unified and cohesive communication vehicle for Celestial Church as a whole, world-wide [...] As the web site evolve, we hope to use it as a vehicle to communicate news about Celestial Church of Christ on a global basis, both information geared toward Celestians and non-Celestians alike«. The UK site complemented the church's objective through her mission statement which partly states, »to introduce CCC to the whole world [...] to bring all the parishes together by obtaining free e-mail addresses for interested parishes and contribute to the free flow of information in the church [...] to use the medium of the Internet as a vehicle to recruit new members ...«. A careful look at the full contents of these mission statement shows the intention of the church as manifold. First, the new media technology would help to bridge communication gap between branches as well as between the church and the »outside world«. Secondly, it will serve as a medium of educating members and non-members about the church. Complementarily, as a strategy towards evangelism, the medium will function »as a vehicle to recruit new members«.

Coping in a new religio-cultural context

In this final section, we shall examine the socio-cultural, political and religious factors which inhibits or helps the church in their mission task in Europe. The proliferation and consolidation of the church is not unconnected with the increasing influx of immigrants into Europe, despite the recent harsh attitudes and policies against them. Unlike the propagation of mission christianity to Africa which was from a status of »overwhelming power«, owing to their closeness to the imperial power, the African churches in Europe are ostensibly in a position of »powerlessness«. Xenophobia or hostility towards foreigners is witnessing an upward increase, and now pose a major problem in Europe. One way in which this development has affected some African migrants is in sharpening their religious zeal in coping with the situation. Ter Haar (1995b: 132f.) rightly observes that African religions in diaspora are been increasingly forced into the margins of society by the prevailing political climate in Western Europe. Under such pervasive state of anxiety, uncertainty and unwelcomeness, religious practice serves as a succour for many legal and illegal immigrants in order to survive in the new situation and environment. In such circumstances, the church has become »a home away from home«. Through its elaborate rituals, a sense of identity, security and protection has been provided to members.

¹⁸ See for instance the website addressess: <http://www.celestialchurch.com> (operated by a parish in Riverdale, USA) and <http://www.celestialchurch.mcmail.com> (administered from the UK). Their electronic mail addresses are webmaster@celestialchurch.com and celestialchurchofchrist@mcmail respectively.

There is also the hostility of neighbours due to the loudness of their services. Services are usually characterized by warm, loud and rhythmic worship. Songs are accompanied with dancing and the use of traditional and modern musical instruments. Such services normally last from two to four hours, and create a relaxed and homely atmosphere for members. The duration may be longer on special church services or festivals. Members coming to Europe for the first time are really shocked about the resentment of the neighbourhood where their church buildings or service halls were located. Private residents near parishes are full of complaints of disturbance during their services. They get a culture shock when neighbours often accuse them of been too noisy and boisterous.

One of the major problems parishes had to contend with in Europe is the lack of their own church buildings or space for worship. Most of the parishes started as small house congregations or prayer groups where members meet especially on Sundays to satisfy their religious needs. Due to the non-availability of space and sufficient funds, private rooms or residence of members served as temporary sacred space for worship. The enlargement of the group raises a further problem of space. They now move out for a bigger place (more suitable accommodation) either to rent a hall, lease a hall or building, or purchase a permanent building depending on the financial might of the group. A few parishes have purchased or leased landed property from European mainline churches. This perhaps is another indication of the positive relationship that appeared to exist between CCC and the host mainstream churches. The spiritual exuberance of the church which enables them to operate in Europe in spite of the frequent lack of church buildings of their own is but one facet of the great dynamism this church display in their home (African) context.

Another feature of parishes is the transiency of its membership especially in the earlier years of its existence in Europe. As some members do not have permanent resident statuses to live in Europe, many especially students have to return to their home countries at the expiration of their study period. Such impermanence applies also to members granted temporary residence for a number of years. It is even much more unstable for illegal immigrants or asylum seekers who have their stations changed frequently from one city to the other. Such a fluid character of its membership has immense impact on the growth of the church in Europe. There are cases where parishes physically fold up due to the dearth of members. However, increasing emigration trends coupled with mixed marriages between Africans and Europeans have resulted ostensibly in the stabilization of their membership. An interesting feature of their membership is the growing number of what may be referred to as British-Africans, German-Africans, Dutch-Africans etc. which emerged out of such relationships or associations.

The weather conditions in the new geographical context has often affected members way of dressing. It is mandatory for all members to wear their sutana in all services and festivals. In all cases when the sutana is worn, members are forbidden to put on any kind of footwear. In most parts of Africa where the weather is relatively warm all year round, members are often seen with their ›spiritual gowns‹ within and outside the church precincts. Members are easily noticed on the streets bare-footed, walking to or from the church. While many members may love to follow this practice in Europe, the cold winter

weather however acts as an impediment. Members could not dress on their white sutana and walk bare-footed during the biting winter season. Rather, dressing rooms are provided in each parish. Members go to the church premises with their ›profane‹ clothes and immediately change to their *aso emi* (cloth of the spirit) prior to the commencement of the service.

While the membership of parishes in Europe is increasingly becoming inter-racial and international in outlook, there is no doubt that the number of Europeans is still relatively low. This low reception can be attributed to the critical attitude of some Europeans to some of the tenets, rules and regulations of the church. For instance, the prohibition of members from drinking wine and all types of alcoholic drinks, cigarette smoking, and eating of pork meat, are some tenets which seem to chase away or discourage some potential members. Others can hardly cope with the long ritual services which go on for several hours. Finance is another major problem in some of the parishes. It is the practice of the church that every individual parish bear its own running cost which includes payment of the shepherd and accommodation. Due to the low membership of some of the parishes in Europe, it has become increasingly difficult to cope financially. Some parishes recur to asking for financial assistance from the international headquarters or from other parishes. This poor financial base has also hindered their missionary activities in Europe. Some parishes have become financially handicapped to carry out their mission plans and activities on a large scale.

For the CCC, while maintaining a universalistic vision and witnessing an increasing missionary zeal beyond the place of origin, they do not extricate themselves from local elements and activities. The general belief pattern and praxis of the church in Europe has remained essentially the same with what obtains in their home parishes. The church may continue to flourish and sink their roots deeper and deeper into the European soil, so long as the uncertainties, anxieties and vacuum created by prevailing socio-economic and political realities do not go away or at least seem to be mitigated. Its mission and evangelistic strategy characterized by an openness to non-Africans, irrespective of race and colour, has launched the church on the ›train of globalization‹. Thus, the church is now re-christened CCC Worldwide. The taking up of extra-religious functions such as social welfare programmes is meaningful and relevant in contemporary European societies where social workers, bureaucrats and governments are engaged in a tug of war to reform failing welfare systems. CCC's spiritual role of creating a home away from home, coupled with their involvement in welfare and charitable programmes, may provide some hope of turning around the lives of the poor, needy and underprivileged in a hostile and unstable environment. Through their mission of ›cleansing the world‹, they are also striving to lay the foundations for a new spiritual world order by transforming the souls and minds of individuals and the social habits of their society.

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