Spirituality in African Traditional Religion: A Case Study of The Sacred Temple of Mother "S" in Patani Community, Patani Local Government Area, Delta State.

By

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Abstract

The significance of spirituality in African Tradition Religion lies in the fundamental customs, tradition and culture of Africans. However, the abandonment of several indigenous cultural practices for western culture has brought about the low practice of African Traditional Religion in the African way, as such this study therefore is meant to assess the concept of African spirituality in African Traditional Religion and modernism, using the sacred Temple of mother 'S' of Patani community as a case study. The study was carried out using phenomenological and sociological and theological methodologies to guide the work and in the case of data collection, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. Key informants and members of the Sacred Temple of mother 'S' a cult of God were interviewed to gather information. The study found out that not much about African Spirituality as practiced by devotees or the adherent of the sacred Temple of mother "S" of our focus has been documented and that is the objective that this study is out to achieve.

Keywords: Spirituality, ATR, Sacred Temple, Mother "S", Patani

Introduction

Growing up in Ijaw land, the researcher observed that Ijaw traditional worshippers have the concept that the supreme Being is feminine. This concept is also obtained in other African Cultures but the author of this study have not seen in a place where it is been practiced like the way that is been done amongst the western churches, as in the case of the devotees of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'.

The way of their practice of this African heritage of the direct worship of God, ***Woyingi*** as it is known in Ijaw land, patterned after the Christian way of worship drew the attention of the researcher to commerce this study. The African ways and spiritual dealings of the people is a vital part of their societies as such, it has to be practiced by all African traditional religion's adherents. It is a rich culture and part of the inheritance of the black race that cannot be shoved aside for other foreign religions as such, it is not out of place to create records on the activities of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'.

It is expedient to know that African traditional religion and its spirituality is a vital way of the cultural heritage of Africans and with the restoration of its lost glory, it will be more of positivism to Africans than harm to its adherents. This is because African lifestyles are unique to them and not common and the mortal man cannot phantom what the spiritual man can. Therefore, it is premised on this that we carry out this research to discuss on the "Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' ways of worship, their beliefs, rituals and other paraphernalia, everything that is a needful information that we are supposed to kown about the subject matter.

The *modus Operandi* of the Sacred Temple of the Mother 'S' activities are patterned after the western style's religious ways of worship and this is a new development in African Traditional religion practice. This is indeed a new innovation in the worship styles of the adherents of African Traditional Religion as such, it needs to be documented for posterity.

This study will provide theoretical and academic exposition on the activities of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' of our focus. The findings will add something new to the body of knowledge.

The research methodology employed for this study includes, phenomenological, historical and theological approaches. The methods for data collection were through oral interviews, the use of the library and participants observation.

African spirituality is holistic and it impacts on the whole life of traditional Africans. It is not practiced individually by Africans. It is not practiced individually but expressed at all facets of African societal life for example in social,

economic, political etc., hence it's an agency in the building of a typical African nation.

Like the submission of Boardmass in an oral interview 2021, African spirituality is identified as reflecting the wholeness of life and is important in harmonizing life in all its fullness'.

The above assertion is apt with what is obtained in spirituality in African context as it is also exhibited by the followership of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' members, African spirituality has to do with the concept of nation building and by implication the integrity of creation. In life generally, spirituality in the lives of others and the ancestors are also involved in their process in every African traditional setting.

Discussion:

The history and Activities of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'.

The Sacred Temple of Mother "S" as it is called by its adherents is located in Ekise quarters, at Patani an Ijaw community in Patani Local Government Area, Delta State. The Ijaw people believed that the sex of the supreme being is feminine, as such, as we say the sacred Temple of Mother 'S' its implication is that the Temple is dedicated to be the Supreme Being as it is conceived by the Ijaw people, that is mother Supreme.

Historically the Temple was founded in the early hours of the 4th of March 1974, by the Grand Priest and Shepherded Chief Dr. Thompson Felegha EKiyor of Blessed Memory (Boadmas Oral Interview).The founder of the group, was led into a trance where by the Supreme Creator *woyingi* revealed herself to him. During the trance, the grand priest was given a commandment by the supreme creator who they refer to as Mother 'S' to gather my children and teach them the true ways of life, the way of truth'. This vision eventually led to the setting up of the Sacred Temple of the Mother 'S' GOD of our ancestors, *Temerau* (Jenny, 2015).

To the Devotees of the sacred Temple of Mother "S" or Supreme, they believe that:

> All spiritual elements in Africa are expressed in structured ways with defined deities, rituals ceremonies, taboos and practices.

> Hence, in the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S', their concept of spirituality is that religion is not theology or ideology. It is the way of life, pure and original as was given or directed by the most high of creation. Spirituality is a network linking mankind to the most High, the universe and one another. As such, the votaries of this Temple strive to carry out their activities in tandem with the dictates of the most High God, the Mother Supreme, *Temerau* and the Holy Spirit *Ebiteme,.* (Boma Ekiyo, Oral Interview).

Religious practices of the Devotees of the Temple of Mother 'S'.

The religious practices of the votaries of the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' are strictly regimented or strictly organized according to the dictates of *Temerau* and *Ebiteme*, holy spirit. There are also taboos hinged around their activities and worship system. Among such laws are that all members of the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' are expected to attend their worship session in their temple or elsewhere as the case may be on uniform, and that is white regalia. The women wore white gown and the men, white shirt and parrot trouser. Men also in some cases wear long flowing gown as the occasion demands. Symbolically, white symbolizes purity and as the worshippers of the most high *teme*-spirit, the devotees must appear in white attire.

All members of the temple are also expected to live a puritanical life. They must keep their hands and hearts clean so as to attract the blessing of *Temerau*, or *Woyingi* by that we mean, the action of the members must reflect the thought of *Temerau* the supreme being, (Ebiolomu, Oral Interview).

Before the commencement of every of their annual festivals, for they celebrate feast annually, they use to embark on 40 days fast and this entails the abstinence of members from sexual intercourse, whether married or not and minimal intake of food, preferably light meals for example fruits traditional snacks among others.

While entering their temple for worship, all members must be purified with a sacred water through sprinkling. The sacred water is believed to cleanse the adherents of all spiritual infirmities that such member must have been polluted

with, if this ritual is not undertaken by a devotee, the person so concerned could not be allowed into the temple for what-ever activities.

On the floor of the temple just before the altar, the symbol 'S' is boldly inscribed and when a worshipper eventually goes in, the devotee must place his of her right hand on her chest, preferably left hand side position of his or her breast and kneel down at the edge of the 'S' symbol and would mutter a short prayer while gradually shifting to the left hand side of the 'S' symbol and would then bow down towards the alter before the adherent could take his or her seat. This is a sign of respect to the Supreme Deity, Mother 'S', (Ebideketubo Amieyeibo, Oral Interview).

Taboos observed in mother 'S' Temple

In religious circles, many taboos have developed around institutions and the devotees of such religious tradition, cults or society and the case of the sacred temple of mother 'S' is not an exception. In their religious practices, they observe so many taboos. Among them are as follows;

> Women on their menstrual flow are not permitted or allowed to attend their worship session because it is believed that such persons are unclean and it is assumed that the presence of an unclean member among them could hinder the potency of the power of the sacred in their mist and hence neutralize its efficacy.
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> Any member who had sexual intercourse on their worship days are not expected to be present among them in the sacred temple, for it is believed that such person is unclean and so should not be allowed into the congregation, (Justina Ikiyor, Oral Interview).

Sacred and Worship days among the congregants of the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'

Worship days amongst the adherents of the sacred temple of mother 'S' are only on every sacred day of the Izon people's native calendar known as *akenbai.* They have their worship days on every *akenbai*, that is four days after each service or meeting.

In their worship calendar, they have some days referred to as Super Sacred Sundays. In some cases,' these are Sundays in the Gregorian calendar that coincided with the sacred days of the Izon people's native calendar, and they also have what is known as 'Super Bumper Sundays'. These are Sundays of the conventional calendar that coincided with the *Akenbai* of the Ijaw calendar and that falls at the end of every month of the year.

They have special worship programmes on each of these aforementioned specific days of the *kurai* or year which they carry out. However, they also celebrate what they call annual feast in every year and it starts from the month of March precisely from the 4ht to 8th every year. (Miebi Prince, Oral Interview).

The Significance of Specific Programmes Celebrated by the Believers of the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' Denomination.

The members of this cult of God, Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' celebrates some programmes that they have outlined every year in their yearly calendar of activities, they are; (a) The feast of true love and faith which they tagged Tru-Lo-faith, (b) Supper Bumper Sunday Feast, (c) Communion fellowship feast, (d) Cleansing of the land worship programme, (e) Sunday special services among others.

The celebration of the True-love and faith (Tru-Lo-faith) has to do with the period that the adherents of this traditional cult of God observe and reflect on the vision of the founder of the cult concerning the establishment of the Temple.

This is the period that the devotees of the Sacred Temple gather at Patani community to observe and celebrate the divine vision of the founder, a revelation given to the shepherded of this faith Chief Dr Thompson Felaghayofa Ekiyor.

This is an annual event that usually takes place as we have earlier mentioned from the 4th to 8th of March every year. They gather at Patani community for worship in line with the divine revelation that the founder had, commanding all believers of this extraction to congregate around that period for spiritual blessing and the renewal of their faith.

The feast or activities proper is normally preceded with a 40 days fast and this involves abstinence from sexual intercourse as earlier mentioned, for the period in question by all members, minimal intake of food, and members are also advised to avoid oil containing foods, reduce the act of gluttony, reduce the intake of alcohol and smoking of what ever substance be it *Igbo* or Marijuana, cigarette etc, and every other activities that gives body pleasure.

According to them, there are so many spiritual benefits attached to their participation in this sacred feast. It is believed that during this period, members are purged or cleansed of all diseases and infirmities as they undergo water baptism by immersion. This is usually carried out in the river after the offering of sacrifices to the water spirits that is believed to live in subterranean cities in the rivers and creeks of Bayelsa State and the entire region of the Niger Delta.

Communion Fellowship

Members also participate in communion fellowship administered by the head of the sacred temple in line with the revelation that the founder had. The temple have members all over the world including some of the adherents of the indigenous religion of the Ijaw people studying abroad. At the appointed time, they all come to Patani to participate in the above mentioned rite. Nevertheless, this is meant to strengthen the faith of the believers in this course, that is faith in African Spirituality.

Cleansing of the land Rite

The adherents of this cult of God in African Traditional Religion carry out a religious rite of cleansing of the land of the Ijaw nation. They carry out this ritual in to order to usher them in to the new year according to their calendar. This helps in warding off all evil spirits and negative forces from the land, that is Ijaw land. This is laden with the showcasing of the Izon rich cultural heritage as there is usually the presentation of traditional Ijaw dances with various cultural display in their different costumes and wrestling bouts. Food is also usually served to entertain the congregation and even other nominal visitors.

In the final week preceding the feast, there is usually a visitation programme that the worshippers embark upon. This takes the worshippers to various shrines in

Ijaw land for example shrines of deities of wealth, prosperity, fertility, deities for the elongation of life and good health, war deities etc. In the course of these visitations, they invoke all elements of nature spirits, ancestral spirits, aquatic spirits, forest spirits, etc. As earlier indicated, traditional dances and traditional wrestling bouts are organized to commemorate the period. Other activities that they carry out during this period are water baptism as earlier indicated in this work, traditional religious expository teachings, evangelism, sacrifices of various types and in the process prophesies about people in Izon land and this had always come up with the solutions provided through the prophesies. (Boardmas Kemepadei, Oral Interview).

The feast period creates the opportunity for adherents to tap into the realm of the supernatural and its abundance blessings. Members that needed fruits of the womb are said to have received such miracles and there are testimonies of members that experienced financial breakthroughs.

This is also the period that recruitment drive into the cult are carried out and there have been confirmations of cases that adherents of other belief systems for example, Christianity and Islam had identified with the cult activities.

The very good aspect of this organization is that, it is meant to show case the positive aspects of African traditional religion to the globe. This is done in order to correct the wrong impression associated with African traditional religion. This aspect of their enterprise have helped to discountenance a lot about the wrong impression that is associated with African Traditional Religion.

Ritual Activities of The Sacred temple of Mother "S"

Religious beliefs and rituals play central role in every days life of most Africans, the Ijaw People inclusive. Few African societies make distinctive difference between religious behaviors and other form of social conduct. Suffice it to say that most African languages lack a definite word that could be translated as religion and many of the words associated with the idea have a meaning closer to 'Custom' or proper 'Behaviour' than to religion.

Nevertheless, ritual as understood by the adherents of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' are series of mindful action directed towards a specific purpose based on the leading of the words of, to them; "Our Supreme Mother in you'. Our Supreme Mother here is referred to as our God.

In the word of Amieyebo (Oral interview);

> When one is involved in a mindful action directed at specific purpose, one won't react negatively to mere things. Ritual is different from habit. Looking at their belief, one can see how they carry out their rituals. The Muslims don't play with their prayers. In India, they follow their ritual to the letter. The Hindus follow their rituals to the letter. However, when African does their own in their indigenous beliefs system, this is regarded as Idol Worship by the believers of other religious traditions, this is a misnomer.

Ritual is natural to the members of the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' as it is in other religious cults, and it plays essential role in the building of their personal and cultural identity. Ritual give shape to their emotions and helps the members to be in terms with the major events of their religious life. Rituals in the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' is generally seen as indispensable in deepening their spiritual insight. The performance of their ritual insight instils spiritual reawakening and its values in them and this sharpen the attitudes and the life of the believers. Ritual generally also expresses and emphases the thing that binds the members together socially, religiously, culturally and other wise. Through rituals both individuals and their community make visible aspirations in the sacred Temple of Mother "S". The major events marking their circle of life are given prominence and marked through rituals, for example birth, adolescent, adulthood, marriage and death. Seasons of the year are also marked by the members through harvest thanksgiving, and that is what they called "Blessing of the fleet' a ritual that is related to the market days in Ijaw calendar.

Music too has been central to ritual worship since primitive times and this is also obtained in the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'. Music reflects moods and this sustains and evoke emotions and ecstasy among them. This is primarily a very important aspect of their liturgy.

The objects used while carrying out their various rituals includes; native chalk known as tori in Ijaw language, it is also known as holy block in English among them, sacred water for cleansing or purification. This water is fetched from natural sources like the river, ocean and springs. Herbs of various types, incense and candles of various colours are also ritual objects obtained during the activities of Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'.

Code of conducts of The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S'

The Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' has some code of conduct that the members observe.

The Sacred Temple of mother 'S' tagged their code of conducts as 33 articles of our beliefs. Why is the no 33? The number 33 is unique to them symbolically. There are 33 vertebrates in human anatomy of our body, and the logo of the united nations has 33 circles with an olive leaf. Jesus Christ one of the ascended priests, according to their belief, for the also believe in Jesus Christ as their master, he lived for 33 years. He was also born in 33 AD. These are some of the reasons why the no 33 is symbolically sacred and unique to the members of this cult. There article also prescribed the following as their religious beliefs, they belief in the Almighty God which is referred to as the Supreme Being. Africans generally believed in the existence of the Supreme being and so this is not an exception to the members of the cult; no other race has stronger belief in the existence of God than Africans.

In Ijaw mythology, God is known as *Woyingi* or *Temera* as earlier indicated. Africans have known God *Woyingi* for a long time before Christian missionaries and colonialists came to colonise Africa.

They also believe in, and worship the deities or divinities of the Indigenous Religion of the Ijaw people. The devotees recognize the existences of deities and divinities in African traditional Religion and reverence them. In fact, the movement is simply a movement for change in the Ijaw people's Traditional Religion's ways of worship. What we mean is that, it is just a new religious movement of the Ijaw peoples belief system and so they also believe and worship the deities in Ijaw land, but acknowledging the fact that *Woyingi*, the supreme Being is the head of all the divinities and deities and that, they take order from her.

And so for one to even belong to the cult, one must be a carrier of one of the numerous deities in the Ijaw indigenous belief system.

They acknowledge that gods *orus* and goddesses of Ijaw land and every tribe and even other races have divinities, that is key to the race. Therefore, to them those Africans that worship the almighty God in African way should go back to their ancestry and do what their ancestors were doing before the coming of Christianity and other foreign religious traditions to Africa that this will make life easy for Africans, the Ijaw nation inclusive. Sequel to the above, they believe that the worship of other lesser divinities, spirits and deities is not satanic or idol worship; hence their belief in spirits and deities, particularly benevolent spirits *Ebiteme* which they see as the equivalent of the angels in the Judeo-Christian Bible, (S.T.K. Appah, Oral interview).

Other of their beliefs are belief in the law of karma, that is the natural law of action and reaction, belief in reincarnation and transmigration, belief in the use of water as symbol of purification and fire or light as the symbol of God, *Woyingu* and the holy Spirit, *Ebiteme*. Hence in all there worship sessions, they light candles of various colours in their Temple or the worship arena in the case of festival cerebration.

For as earlier indicated, they have some sacred festivals that they celebrate to mark the seasons of the year in their religious calendar, for example the *Orukoro* and the initiation ritual of water baptism. This ritual and others are officiated by the men only. This is because of their belief that if women are involved in such sacred duties, and may be, the scheduled period for them to officiate coincides with when they are under menstrual flow, they cannot be allowed to officiate, and if they officiate under that condition, it would neutralize the effect or the potency of such sacred sacerdotal act and so, the women folk are exempted from carrying out sacrifices and other rituals that has to do with the sacred Temple of Mother 'S' programmes. In fact, every woman that is under such condition is not even allowed to enter the holy chamber of the sacred Temple of Mother 'S' shrine.

Other of their beliefs that they held in high esteem are. belief in the use of eggs and native chalk which they call the "holy Block". They believe that egg and native

chalk has both spiritual and pharmacological potency. To them, the greatest gift that *Temerau* or *Woyingi* gave to Africans or the Ijaws as in this case is not crude oil but African native Chalk, known as *utiin* among the Epie-Atissa people of Bayelsa State.

Whatever object that is involved in their rituals, they always choose ritual objects that bears natural colour, that is white, black, red and blue. They prefer using objects that bears natural colours to artificial or objects with variegated, multiple or mixed colours.

Holiness and righteousness are their target goals for all members to acquire. They discourage hypocrisy, and that, that is what led to the down fall of man, (Ebideketubo Amiebi, Oral Interview.) They also believe in clairvoyance and encourages it, and also believe in prophetic messages from the sacred ream.

They believe in duality of nature, that is good and bad. They believe in the existence of witches, wizards and sorcerers and discourage their members from acquiring these malevolent powers. They also believe in the use of herbs for curative and defensive purposes but not for malevolence cause. They believe in their hands to be clean according to them, by that, it means one living a righteous life. They believe in life after death, that when a typical traditional African die, he comes back to the family or in other areas to be reborn, otherwise known as reincarnation.

Socially, they cultivate and encourage communal life or in their words been ones, brothers keeper. They also encourage chastity of the marital institution, that it is ordained by God to be so. They also encourage life of godliness, individual spirituality, alms giving, unity of faith, predestination, and sacredness of the traditional institutions of Africans.

They encourage the extended family system and the given of birth to many children, in other words Polygamy. They preach that believers can go to God *woyingi* in various ways, it must not be through one source like the belief of the Christian religion where it is believed, one can only go to God through Jesus Christ. They believe in the efficacy of fervent prayers and supplications and finally

believe that every human being is created by God and so people should be treated equally, in other words, they encourage human equality. The population of this great cult of God, *Woyingi* as at 2024 was about 300 registered members and about six hundred 700 non registered members. The qualification of membership to the cult is that, one must be a believer of the indigenous traditional religion, so if one is a traditionalist, he is an automatic member.

Conclusion:

This study has discussed Ijaw Spirituality in relation to the Sacred Temple of Mother 'S' a traditional religious cult group in Patani community, Patani Local Government Area in Delta State. The Study has taken a panoramic look of this religious movement and how their system of worship and other paraphernalia involved therein are patterned after the Christian style of worship.

However, despite the advent of Christianity in our area of study, this group have been able to blend the traditional system of the Ijaw people's belief system and that of Christianity together thereby forming a syncretic type of religion that was not common in the area of study. This new fusion can help to strengthen the strength of the traditional religion of the people to a large extent in conformities with modernism. The submission of the author is that the Ijaw people's belief system that is been threatened by western culture could stand the test of time with the coming into being of this movement, and so its existence be encouraged. The younger generation of the Ijaw people be encouraged to identify with this movement, because its gospel or epistles is of benefit to the Ijaw nation.

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