

Socio-Religious Effects of Patronage of Sacred Places In An Indigenous Church And Their Significance For Transnational And Diasporan Ministries

ALABI, DAVID O. PhD¹, EKPAOGBA, SUNNY M. PhD², OLOWOOKERE,
ADENIKE F.³, OLUFEMI, OLUKUNLE, OLUFEMI O.⁴

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Joseph Ayo Babalola University,
Ikeji-Arakeji, Osun State Nigeria

Abstract:

Sacred places serve as wings on which the prayer liturgy and miracles in Christ Apostolic Church thrive to high extent; but the beliefs and patronage of these places in the church as an indigenous Pentecostal church have not received a considerable scholarly attention as expected. This is the vacuum the paper filled and equally highlighted the beliefs in and religious patronage of the same by Joseph Ayo Babalola who was believed to be the founder of most of these places in Christ apostolic Church. It is observed that sacred places played sociological, psychological, religious and spiritual roles in the liturgical practices and missions of the church. The study traced the geographical, traditional and religious relevance of these places to their host communities as well as their origin in Christ Apostolic Church. The study employed an intercultural hermeneutic theory which accommodates African socio-cultural realities in the study and understanding of the Bible. It also, hinted on the spiritual functions of these places as well as the factors that make relevant in the church till date. The need of sensitivity to one's culture and importance of incorporating such relevant cultures where applicable to enrich the adaptability of Christianity in transnational and diasporan ministries are also highlighted. The need to take care of the sacred waters especially in hygienic ways for safe use forms the conclusion.

Key words: Africans, Sacred places, Patronage, Socio-religious, Effects, Diasporan churches

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I. Introduction

Sacred places are part of the features of any living religion. They give living religion media of expressions beyond the conventional places of their liturgies. Sacred places are regarded to be sanctified places where the Divine and human meet. They are meeting places for spiritual communion. They are as old as religion itself in history, beliefs and practices. The people in antiquity understood the mysteries around them in nature and felt the religious importance of certain spatial realities around them. Sacred places are revered by religious men and are patronized due to many religious and spiritual reasons. Eliade opines that the sacred reveals itself to man. It is his view that "man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane".¹ Proposing the term *hierophany*, he means "something sacred shows itself to us".² This manifestation of the sacred is experienced through ordinary elemental objects like stones, trees, waters and the likes. Yet, it is not the veneration of trees, stones, waters or mountains not their cults but the reality they convey or reveal to man which he calls *the sacred*. As Rudolf Otto expresses the features of the holy of the sacred, "these express their element of awefulness, (tremendum), or overpoweringness (majestas) in the way it is kindled and manifested ... like a hidden force of nature, like stored up electricity, discharging itself upon anyone who comes too near. It is in calculable and arbitrary".³

African Cosmological Views

African cosmological views are permeated with the world of the gods, spirits, divinities, departed souls and ancestors. Also, supernatural forces, personages and powers are firmly believed that are in control of the universe and they have their abode in sacred places. Traditionalists worship these sacred beings for many reasons and for their favours on behalf of their clients. Idowu opines that "these (the spirits and divinities etc), according to the indigenous belief of the Yoruba, serve the will of *Olodumare* (God of the Yoruba) in the creation and theocratic government of the world".⁴ The fact that they were saddled with the duties of serving the will of *Olodumare* on earth did not connote the powerlessness, inability and remoteness of *Olodumare* to govern what He has created. The Yoruba did not bother themselves about their origin and creation than to affirm that

they were created or came from *Olodumare*, the Origin, Source, Creator of all things who Himself was not created.⁵ In a nutshell, these gods, spirits and divinities were given name like *Orisa*, whose etymology is obscured but could be rendered as emanating from the ultimate/original source, who is *Olodumare* according to Farrow.⁶

It is this sacred instinct of appeasement and according worship to these sacred beings that draw men to them. The elemental objects with super sensible and ambiguous features like trees, plants, lakes, lagoon, ponds, streams, rivers, grounds, stones, rocks, hills and awe striking mountains were considered to be super ordinary places in traditional African setting. The mystery of nature experienced during the pre-historic and historical eras who have led the progenitors to consider them as being sacred. It could be said that there was a time in the history of religion when physical and symbolic representations of the invisible, incorporeal and spiritual beings in the natural world were considered and allowed. These objects and natural elements serve the purpose.

According to the Yoruba, every object is animated and therefore personified. These objects are regarded as being sacred due to the encounters that the progenitors have had with them. As a result, many hills and mountains are deified and considered being sacred. For instance, there is “*Olumo rock*” at Abeokuta, Ogun State, in western Nigeria. As Parrinder opines, “*Olumo cave*”, was “a shrine where the people hid during the Dahomean slave raiding”.⁷ There is *Oke ‘badan* cult also in Ibadan, a capital of Oyo state with *Aboke*, its chief priest who “performs worship every five days and leads the annual festival of the town, going from house to house blessing the people. Idanre is another noted town with mountain cult in Yoruba land and religion. The annual festival called *Odun Orosun*, meaning the festival of *Orosun* leads to the climbing of the mountain and the ceremonies carried out there.

As far as Africans are concerned, religion permeates every facet of life and nature. Corroborating this, Mbiti opines that “according to African peoples, man lives in a religious universe so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God”.⁸ Many praise chants and songs, intrinsic attributes of God and anthropomorphic characteristics attributed to God in African culture and religion are taken from the world of nature. Simply put, it is because “man lives in a religious universe” and “God is read to it”.⁹

Origins of Sacred Places in Christ Apostolic Church

During the era of African indigenous churches, these African cosmological views were not abandoned but incorporated into Christianity. Since the founding fathers were Africans, exposed to African views of the universe, they had this mentality of the spiritual world visible to men through the elemental objects around them. By one way or the other, the idea of sacred places was developed through divine instructions, directions, prophetic signs, revelations and prayers. Unlike Eliade’ idea of *hierophanies*, the revelation of nature or deification of natural places, the founding fathers especially Joseph Ayo Babalola established sacred places as abodes of prayers and resting places from crowds that thronged to him for healing and miracles.¹¹

Three prominent sacred places in the ministry of Babalola and in Christ Apostolic Church would be focused because of space. These three are notable among Christ Apostolic Church members and non members. Think of sacred places in the Church your mind goes to these places and the impactful ministry of Joseph Ayo Babalola. They are common and well known sacred places in the church with great historical events. They also featured in the ministry of Babalola

Ori-Oke-Isegun* or *Ori-Oke Babalola Sacred Mount of Victory at Efon Alaaye Ekiti

The revivalistic campaigns of late Apostle Ayo Babalola extended to Efon Aalaye on 29th September, 1930 when he arrived in the town at 5:30am.¹² His first place of contact was the palace of the king Oba Solomon Aladejare Agunsoye, the Alaaye of Efon Aalaye. The king of the town accommodated him in his palace. Joseph Ayo Babalola conducted revival in the town and as usual, many people were converted and their charms, idols and concoctions were submitted for burning. Many miracles were wrought which attracted people from various towns, Ghana and Sierra-Leone.¹³ the population of the people trooping to Efon Alaaye was too much to the point that they ran out of space. They began to look for a space to conduct the religious activities in the town. According to Isaac O. Ojo, an eye witness of the revival of Ayo Babalola, he claimed that it was on a Galilee service in the year 1931 at Efon Alaaye that *Ori-Oke Isegun*, popularly called *Ori Oke Babalola* or *Ori-Oke Baba Aladura* was founded.¹⁴ After the service, Babalola observed that people were many and he prayed to God for more space. As directed by God, he was searching for a place on the hills around Efon particularly the region of his revival. He was accompanied by Late John Oloruneto, Erinle Atoseloso, Isaac Alo and few others until they got to a spot, where they stopped in order to pray. It was a forest without any armllet or hut.

According to Michael O. Ajayi,¹⁵ when Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola and his entourage got a spot on the mountain, they started praying as conducted by himself. All of sudden, there was a thick cloud on the firmament, with a heavy rainfall. Apostle Ayo Babalola asked the people to bring their Bibles and clothes and placed them on a particular spot. It rained heavily and everywhere was soaked with the people praying but the

spot where the Bibles and clothes were placed was not touch with the rain. Babalola was told by God and sensed spiritually that it was a sign that God wanted them to be there. Hence they went further no more as they believed that God has chosen the spot for Prayer Mountain and it was dedicated as a sacred place. The particular spot where the Bibles and clothes were placed was called *Ile Agbara*, meaning, “place of power” and a monument as a sign of demarcation from other spots was erected there till date. It is regarded as the “centre of prayer and power on the mountain”.¹⁶ There is a rectangular pavement with a monument on the spot of power within it.

This monument reminds people about the spot where Joseph Ayo Babalola and others placed their Bibles and clothes and it rained but the rain did not touch them. According to the people this was a divine indicator and pointer that God has chosen the place as being sacred and the place Babalola was looking for as a prayer mountain. Since then, it has become a sacred place in Christ Apostolic Church world-wide. Originally, this mountain formed part of the topography of Efon Alaaye in Ekiti State. A visit to the town will show that Efon Alaaye is full of mountains, hill and the gulfs. But due to the experience of Ayo Babalola on this fateful day in April, 1931 this particular mountain had been a sacred place. As regards its name, it is called various names. Examples are *Ori-Oke Ayo Babalola*- Prayer Mountain of Ayo Babalola; *Ori-Oke Efon*- Efon Prayer Mountain *Ori Oke-Adura*-Prayer Mountain. *Ori-Oke Efon*, is the most popular name in all publications referring to the sacred mountain but its spiritual designation is *Ori Oke-Isegun*, Mountain of Victory, as given by Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola. The naming of the mountain as our interview revealed to us was traced to the power of darkness and the use of a gulf below the mountain to trap their prey. Whosoever was attacked and conquered by the agents of these diabolical powers would be dumped inside the gulf spiritually. Now God had taken over the mountain top of the gulf; it was their turn to be dumped in their dungeon. The gulf now became a dumping ground for God to dump all the problems of the people who would patronize the mountain, hence *Ori-Oke Isegun*, Mountain of Victory.

Ori-Oke Aanu (Mount of Mercy) at Erio Ekiti

The present *Ori-Oke Anu*, Mount of Mercy as a sacred place was originally called *Eleju* in Ekiti language.¹⁷ *Eleju* was a local farm produce being used for woven mats then in Erio-Ekiti. It means a mountain with mat making weed. At times it was associated with a name of the owner of the land and people called it *Eleju Obanla* meaning *Eleju* that belongs to Obanla. Chief Abiodun Obanla was a Chief of repute in Erio Ekiti. He was a traditionalist who was never converted to Christianity. It was reported that one Prophet Simon, a native of Modakeke, Osun-state Nigerian was the first person who used to go to this mountain before the coming of Joseph Ayo Babalola to the town.¹⁸ Prophet Simon had been to Oke-Ooye revival at Ilesa, being conducted by Joseph Ayo Babalola. He was one of the disciples of Joseph Ayo Babalola who had come to the town. Before the coming of Joseph Ayo Babalola to Erio, Prophet Simon had been conversant with this mountain, going there from time to time for prayers whenever there was need for it.

According to the history of this mountain, it was this Prophet Simon who gave the name “Aanu” meaning mercy to this mountain. He even prophesied that no one would bring any problem to the mountain without getting the right solutions and antidotes to it. Hence *Ori-Oke Aanu*, Mount of Mercy became its name till date. During his revivalistic campaigns in Erio-Ekiti having come from Aramoko Ekiti a neighbouring town, Babalola informed people of Erio that God instructed him to find a praying ground on a mountain. This led Babalola to visit *Olosunta* Mountain in Ikere Ekiti but God said no and the place was not suitable. He contacted Erio people for this request and Prophet Simon called his attention to the mountain he had been visiting for while. The family of Chief Obanla was contacted and through the influence of late Chief Samuel Ikudayisi who was an in-law of Chief Abiodun Obanla, the mountain was released to Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola. On getting to the mountain, he was pleased to see expanse of mountain that was suitable for his praying enterprise.

The mountain is full of rock that spread for almost two kilometres and layers. He ordered that they should move round to find a suitable place. On getting to the apex of the mountain, he then prayed perhaps for divine instruction from God for confirmation whether God would approved the mountain for prayers. According to our investigation through the interview conducted, after the prayer, he instructed his entourage to collect some broken stones for construction of a circle or monument on the rock for him. He personally made a cross sign on the rock and used the broken stones collected to construct a circle and the circle was divided into two halves. As soon as that was done, he instructed that women should not be allowed to use the constructed circle to pray.¹⁹ Soon after this exercise and instruction, Babalola and his entourage prayed till late evening, before they came down from the hill. God told him that “the mountain would be called a place of mercy and that whosoever comes there would receive mercy from Him”. Thus he confirmed the name given to the mount by Prophet Simon as being authentic and consecrated the mountain as *Ori-Oke Aanu*, meaning, Mount of Mercy.

Ori-Oke Iyanu (Mount of Miracles) At Ido-Ile (formerly Ido-Ajinare)

This is a notable sacred place in the history of Christ Apostolic Church and ministries of Babalola. There are other sacred places he patronized as mentioned above, but this is a unique sacred place. Both the

healing ministries of Babalola and his prayer retreats are epitomized in this sacred place. *Ori-Oke Iyanu* as the name connotes, Mount of Miracles is popular for the demonstration of the wonders of God. It was established by Babalola as a result of divine guidance and instructions. He used this mountain for many reasons. Primarily, this sacred place served as his spiritual retreat abode for prayers as well as resting shelter after many evangelistic campaigns to many towns and cities. There are three special places on this place, all together being referred to as *Ori-Oke* Ido which is a commonest name for this great sacred place.

There is wonder-working water on this mountain popularly called *Omi-Babalola*, meaning Babalola's Water. History has the record about this small spring that it was invoked by Babalola himself after he had prayed and there was no water to drink. He had to cry to God for water like Samson in Judges 14 and God answered him. The water never dries and flows throughout all weathers. It is serving as the drinking water for the people who come there for spiritual exercise and prayers. The testimonies of people who have patronized this mountain attest to the fact it is miracle water. Many great prophets have been raised by God on this mountain and spiritually empowered by Him. The prayer mountain is known for efficacy of prayers as many who have had contacts with the mountain could testify.

Socio-Religious Effects of Patronage and Functions of Sacred Places in Christ Apostolic Church

The patronage of sacred places in the church by members and non members has brought about lots of sociological effects to the Church and communities at large. Sacred places have served platforms for many families to have spiritual retreats when on holidays or when there is a need to leave their conventional houses for secluded places like these. Other tribes apart from the Yoruba have had reasons to travel out of their traditional domains to these places for many reasons. This has brought social anthropological and cultural exchange of friendliness, companionship, fellowship and communion to many Christian adherents. They have served as fora for social interactions with religious connotations and exercises. For the people in the host communities, they served as avenues for interacting with people from Yoruba towns and other tribes.

Besides, unity and harmony have been promoted among the believers through the patronage of sacred places belonging to the church. In their traditional setting, sacred places are centres for learning cultures and customs. They have equally served as centres for learning more of Yoruba cultures by other tribes. It has been a thing of joys to non members of the denomination to see the footsteps of Joseph Ayo Babalola on these sacred places as they travel to these places. The disseminations of the religious cultures of Christ Apostolic church have been better passed to other denominations through their patronage of sacred places in the church. More importantly are the praying cultures of the church and the prophetic exercises and nature of the church. During our visit to *Ori-Oke Iyanu* at Ido-Ile, many Ibo and south-south people were there for prayers. In actual fact, it was reported to us that some Ibo and south-south people are renovating the third mountain top used by Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola. This is thrilling that people from such areas are doing something on a land that is far from their native countries. Various tribes meet and interact with people they did not know before on these sacred places. This promotes peace, cordiality and cohesion among people in prayers. It also promotes peace and unity among adherents of Christian faiths. On the sacred places, there is no denominationalism but oneness among the believers during prayer sessions.

The patronage of sacred places has cultural values in Africa as well as in the indigenous churches. Africans were used to the patronage of shrines, mountain cult shrines, riverine cult shrines, groves, forests or nearby shrines. But with the advent of Christianity and the conversions of many people that took place, they found replacements or alternatives in the sacred places patronized by the adherents of indigenous churches. The courage of the indigenous church leadership to adopt this African culture into their worship and liturgy earned them positive result of souls conversion en mass to their assemblies and denomination contrary to what obtained in the mainline churches they left. On the side of the indigenous church leaders, it was an appreciation of African culture in contextualized garments. On the side of the followers or adherents, it was an alternative to traditional places they had been used to, where they could "see" and "speak" to God. The shrines have been replaced by sacred places in Christianity as alternatives where they could derive certain relieves in prayers.

Psychologically, the patronage of sacred places in the church has positive effects on the people in need who have found solace and succour in the patronage of the sacred places. Mere going to the places tagged to be religiously sacred have meaningful and religious impacts on their psychological state of mind and they would have received certain relieves from the agonies of their problems. Before the advent of Christianity, the Yoruba used to go to sacred water sides, mountain plains, groves, forests and other nearby shrines and presented their requests. The annual festivals of major gods, divinities and ancestors in the town usually attract all and sundry from towns, cities and even from overseas countries like *Oloke* Mountain cult in Ikole Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria and others. People see this as an avenue to come home and interact with the villagers, townsmen and identify with their people and their "common" religion. But now that most of the traditional places had been taken over by the *Aladura* and the Pentecostals especially through Babalola revival, they now worship the God of the Bible.

The groves, hills and mountain tops which constituted great threats to a common man in African traditional religion have now become places where they could freely go to. For instance, the shrine of *Egule* in Ifira Akoko, Ondo State was on a mountain top. Odunayo describes the idol better by submitting that “when this god (*Egule*) was arrayed during its festive days, it was a forbidden thing for anybody to call people’s attention to it by pointing a finger at it”.²⁰ No powerful hunter would go there for hunting expedition and make any success, provided he returns back alive to tell the story himself. At times, the python on the mountain in the bush could be brutal to any intruder. That was why Babalola was strongly persuaded by the Ifira people not to dare to go there. According to Odunayo “the then Oba of Isua, Onishua of Isua sent a high delegate to Babalola, including his brother, Mr. Daniel, Mr. B. Solomon, a court clerk, some policemen and host of others”²¹ to watch if Babalola would go to the hill and if the dreaded python would allow him to come near the idol, *Egule*. All this was to show how people feared shrines and some other sacred places in African religion then. The priest could only worship the idol once in a year. But now the mountain is a tourist centre and a prayer mountain at Ifira Akoko.

The religious functions of sacred places in the church are efficacious, powerful and real. Prominent among the religious functions of this place is proffering solution to the infertility of the barren women. According to Olushey, the last secretary of Joseph Ayo Babalola is of the view that Mount of Victory at Ido-Ile is prominent for fertility. Also, Caleb Oluwadare Alo, an over eighty eight years old man, an eye witness of the ministry of Apostle Joseph Babalola and Michael O. Ekundayo, through the sacred place at Efon Alaaye, God has solved the problems of barrenness of many families on the mountain.²² Another religious function is spiritual empowerment. Ministers of the Gospel from many denominations have been patronizing the sacred places of the church in view of the experience of Ayo Babalola’s anointing and spiritual endowment for endowment of power from on high. When we checked through the attendance register of the mountain we discovered that many members of various denominations and the ministers of the gospel are coming to these places in order to seek the power of God. The spiritual rationale for this could be traced to the prayer life of Babalola and his patronage of these sacred places while he was alive.

The sacred places also serve as a refuge place for many who are facing realities of life. As a result, many who are in problem and needs like swallowing poison, attacks by diabolical powers, marital crises, unemployment, various forms of sickness and diseases, failure to travel abroad, family attacks, gynaecological problems, prolonged bachelorhood, prolonged spinsterhood, prolonged standing pregnancies, desire to build a house, own a car, get promotion on one’s jobs and do good in all life endeavours and pursuits are brought to this mountain for answers and divine grants from God. The sacred places have been tagged and treated as “prayer answering sacred place” as they meet God in their prayers. The religious notion and belief are that if only they would get to the sacred place, there would be solutions to their crises. One may ask: why this age long religious belief and practice that “if I go to the sacred place there will be solutions like the Psalmist who says, “until I went into the sanctuary (sacred place) of God, then, I understood their end” (Ps 73:16-17)? Mountains and hills have been associated with house of God, where He dispenses power, governance and controls all the human affairs in ancient Israel. He gives the Law from the mountain (Ex. 19-26). His throne is in heaven but He dwells in the temple at the same time (Ps. 11:4) and He fights from the mountains (Jud. 4:6); 1 Kgs. 8:20-40).

The persistence of this religious belief seems to us to localize God. It cages God inside a box and makes Him accessible to only those who know where the box is placed or situated. It shows that God is for certain people who know where He lives within their vicinity or locality. However, this may not be so to the adherents of the denomination and those who patronize this sacred place. To them, it is a sacred place where they have contact with God and receive solutions to their problems and not the dwelling place of God in the true sense of it since He is omnipresent. However, those who hold the belief in the patronage of sacred places do not at the same hold the religious view those places are the abode of god but rather places where they can have spiritual encounters with Him

Our further investigation reveals that religious function of the prayer mountain at Erio Ekiti as the name of the mountain connotes, is the religious belief that God showers mercy to all and sundry who patronize the mountain. Corroborating this, Oba Benjamin Adesoba Adetoyinbo, Afinbiokin Okinbaloye II, Elerio of Erio Ekiti and Ikudayisi submit that “more or less the mountain is the mercy seat, where God dwells all the times”.²³ It is believed that whoever goes there for prayers would definitely receive the mercy of God. This mountain has been religiously viewed as “abode of mercy” of God when you get there. Like the ancient Israel, the temple was constructed with a mercy seat where God showed mercy to His people, this mountain is equated with the receipt of the mercy of God when one patronizes it. It should be said that the mercy of God can be found everywhere without necessarily patronizing the mountain of mercy. The covenant of mercy operating on the mountain may be peculiar to Christ Apostolic Church members and those who align themselves with faith to the covenant on the mountain. Those who are not accessible to the mountain or those who do not believe in the patronage of Prayer Mountain can still receive the mercy of God without necessarily being on this mountain.

Another function of these sacred places is receiving of solutions to human problems. A For instance, major problems that are being solved on this mountain are barrenness and various forms of diseases and sickness. God has given fruit of the womb to the long awaiting women who are once barren. Various problems like infanticide, marital crises, prolonged single life, divorce, enmity in the family, sickness, headaches, financial crises, debt, bankruptcy, dissolution of companies, madness, epilepsy, leprosy, deafness, lameness, malaria, fever of various types, lack of progress in one's pursuits, swallowed poison, nightmares, spirit husbands and wives' attacks, premature deaths and the likes are being brought to the mountain for solutions. The testimonies of people during the prayer sessions on the mountain and afterward indicate the wonders of God on the mountain and solutions received.²⁴ In actual fact, they have become a spiritual clinic for solutions to diverse problems of the people who patronise the sacred prayer mountain.

The social impacts of the patronage of the sacred places on the communities that host them are surprising and many. The communities that host the sacred places in indigenous church were once small towns with little significance to themselves and states than where the people originated from. One of the social effects of the patronage of the sacred places in these towns is the face uplift of these towns. Due to the patronage of sacred places, the citizens have seen the towns worthy of upliftments. The social effect has elevated some to local government headquarters status. Take for instance, Efon Alaaye Ekiti in Ekiti State; Efon Alaaye has become the headquarters of Efon Local Government. The effects of Christ Apostolic Church presence in the town in terms of local assemblies, residence of Babalola from September 1931-1959, the establishment of a sacred Prayer Mountain, *Ori-Oke-Isegun*, establishment of primary and secondary schools, grammar schools and Teachers' Training College in the town contributed to this. The inspiration received from all these contributed to the upliftments of the town. Corroborating this, Nabofa is of the view that "people are keenly interested in religion because of its significance in the human society" and "religion is also regarded as a civilizing element."²⁵

The sacred places on their own have also received social changes. Then, they used to be "primitive" in outward looking, with small bungalows constructed with mud bricks at the sites. But now, when we visited the *Ori Oke Aanu*, we saw new constructions going on there. There has been a modern church auditorium of one thousand to two thousand capacities. There are modern chalets being constructed there for accommodation purposes. Olu Alo, a care taker and evangelist on the prayer mountain remarks that "the environment (at *Ori Oke-Isegun* at Efon Alaaye) is equally developing; apart from the church auditorium, Apostles J.A. Babalola's house, men and women hostels inherited by the current workers and others have been developed."²⁶ There is another magnificent church auditorium that is under construction on the prayer mountain at Erio Ekiti. Administrative blocks are under construction too and prominent members of the society are building houses there too. There is one Madam Erelu who is embarking on a number of rooms on the sacred place, *Ori Oke Aanu* for accommodation reasons for people who patronise the place.

At Ido-Ile on *Ori Oke Iyanu*, there are social changes too. To climb the mount was tedious task in the foretime. But according to Adediran, "there is now a flight of steps constructed through a pledge by a young lady at the cost of over six hundred thousand naira

(N600,000.00)."²⁷ People can now climb the stairs of over five hundred steps gradually to the top of the mountain. During our visit to the mountain, there is a new and modern auditorium for worship on the mount. Then it was a small mud brick constructed auditorium the people used for worship with two small bungalows for accommodation. *Ori Oke Isegun* at Efon Alaaye as another sacred place under our focus too had received a total change. New accommodations have been built and a big auditorium of one thousand capacities has also been built there. According to Olu Aromibose, a man made a pledge of one million naira for the construction of road to the *Ori Oke Isegun* at Efon Alaaye.²⁸ During our visit to the place, the road had been bulldozed and motorists can now drive straight to the mountain top with ease, unlike before when it used to take sweating and gasping for air while climbing the mountain. Also, *Ori-Oke Ajaye* as a sacred place has a road access from the federal road that links Ilesa. Ado Ekiti. Though not tarred but the adherents of the denomination with little aids from people were able to construct a road to the sacred site.

The religious effect of the patronage of these sacred places includes the conversion of many people from other faiths like Islam and traditional religions. When people are in serious dangers, sickness, attacks and problems, they normally put their religion or denominations on one part. On invitation basis, special programme organized on these sacred places and through friends and relatives, many adherents of other faiths have patronized these sacred places and got converted to Christian faith. The attendance register placed on these sacred places show that people of other religions through their names patronize these sacred places. Many have been converted and renounced their formal religion for Christianity. Supporting this, Adediran observes that the town, Ido-Ile has benefited greatly in several ways through the establishment of Christ Apostolic Church and the sacred places in the town. "The effects are mostly on the traditional religion which has now been completely wiped out in Ido Ajhinare."²⁹ All the divinities that were once worshipped in the town like *Ogun*, god of Iron, *Olookun*, divinity in charge of new maize, *onimejo*, a divinity in charge of new yams production and its festival,

Ifa divinity which was peculiar to the King of the town, *Osun*, a water goddess in charge of fertility and caring for the small children, *Esu*, a diabolical divinity in charge of chaos and calamities, *Sango*, god of thunder, secret cultism and even Islamic religion have been totally wiped out in Ido Ile till date due to the influence of Christ Apostolic Church and the patronage of sacred places at Ido Ile.

The effective power of prayers has been proven to people without any aid of traditional means. People now depend on power of prayer as a means of receiving from God whatever they want. Prayer programmes have now increased in the towns that host these sacred places. Adediran testifying to these religious effects, submits that “many people now believe in the efficacy of prayers... everybody now even the missionary churches attend morning and evening prayers for God’s guidance and protection.”³⁰

A major religious effect of the patronage of the sacred places in these communities is their resultant effect on the lives of the kings of these communities. We were fortunate to meet HRM Oba Benjamin A. Adetoyinbo (JP), Afinbiokin Okinbaloye II, the Elerio of Erio Ekiti, one on one in the course of this research. He professed to be a Christian and rejoiced that Christianity is gaining more ground in his town, Erio Ekiti. He remarks “that once you have close relationship with God, He make(s) things for you for your greatest surprise. I tell you that it is a good thing to serve the Lord and worship the King of kings and the Lord of lords. In Erio, we worship no idols but Jehovah El-Shaddai.”³¹ These were his remarks during a spiritual event on the sacred place, *Ori Oke Aanu* at Erio Ekiti. Ido-Ajinare now Ido-Ile has been a lucky town since the advent of Babalola revival, in the town. Oba Orisatola Arojojoye was the reigning king of Ido Ajinare during Babalola’s revival. He was the one who gave out pieces of land to the church for building construction. The incumbent king HRM Oba Augustine Aderemi Obaleye Otutubiosun II is a Catholic member who is also a committed Christian. Adediran submits that “he regularly carries the entire populace to *Ori Oke Iyanu* (CAC prayer mountain) every quarter for special prayers for the people and for the progress of the town”.³² However, this is not to say that all things went on well for Christ Apostolic Church and the patronage of sacred places in the town. Adediran site an instance that it was in the town that Babalola was first arrested and taken to the District Officer at Ado Ekiti in October, 1931.³³

Due to the patronage of these sacred places in these environs, Christian religious activities have increased. In the recent past, few programmes were being conducted on these sacred places. But now that economic hardship is biting hard on the populace, many are jobless and some are abruptly disengaged from various parastatals yet they must survive. The religious instinct in man teaches him to seek solutions from the Divine. There are many broken marriages and many youth especially the spinsters who are tired of prolonged single life. Spirit-related sickness, attacks, nightmares, witch-hunting, mysterious insanity, broken contracts, lack of contract for contractors, failure in political and career pursuits and the likes are prevalent in the country. All these factors have driven many to seek refuge and solace in God. The places where they believe to meet Him urgently and receive answers to their prayers are these sacred places. The prophets and ministers of the gospel in charge of these places who had been expecting great patronage of their sacred places find the people coming to the sacred places as answers to their prayers. Either genuine or not, they have looked for various prayers activities on the sacred places in order to enhance the religious activities on these places. Occasional vigils or fasting are strategically displayed to tie the people to the sacred places. Some of these prayer events are clothed with the prophetic garments. Africans being religious as they are would not resist the prophetic voice, calling people for prayers and means to their solutions. These factors have increased the religious activities on the sacred sites in these communities.

Babalola spiritual life styles were imbedded in fasting, prayers and mountaineering. The mountain tops were his second home for rest after a long journey and as hide outs. Through divine inspiration, revelation and guidance, Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola of CAC, Prophets Emmanuel Omoniyi Omotunde, Michael Ajagunigbala, Joshua Adeyemi, Aiyegunle, Obisesan and Alademomi of African Apostolic Church denomination established several sacred places like *Ori-Oke Adura*, *Ori-Oke Iyanu*, *Ori-Oke Aanu*, *Ori-Oke Isegun*, *Ori-Oke Ajaye* and sacred waters. People are patronizing all these till date. Olusheyey submits that “several other CAC ministers later established more prayer mounts, including *Akinkemi* hill by late President/Pastor/Oba Isaac Babalola Akinyele, Ede Hill, popularly called *Ori Oke Baba Abiye*, by late prophet S.O. Akande, *Baba Abiye*), *Ikoyi Hill*, by Pastor/Evang. D.O. Babajide”.³⁴ Other ministers of the gospel from various denominations have copied this and have established prayer camps, prayer mountains, prayer retreat centre and dedicated certain wells dug around their church premises. This is so as a result of the spiritual benefits, effects and advantages they have received through the patronage of the sacred places.

Unfortunately, the proliferation of Prayer Mountains, sacred prayer centres and dedicated sacred waters have shown some elements of abuses which are foreign to the biblical traditions. become a shame to the Christian religion to an extent. Olusheyey notices this while he remarks, “the proliferation of prayer mountains in Nigerian, while not totally denounced or derided, requires a note of caution here, to all operators of these prayer mounts, not to pollute them with unscriptural and sinful behaviours...”³⁵

Socio-Religious Significance of Patronage of Sacred Places for Transnational and Diaspora Ministries

Sensitivity to the Environment and Cultural Values

It should be appreciated that African church leaders, especially the indigenous church leaders did not see Christianity from Eurocentric lens alone without being sensitive to their immediate environment like most of the white missionaries did when they came to evangelize Africa. African cosmological views and topography were incorporated into Christianity where applicable. This enhanced the preaching as well as served as a pivotal factor for winning souls especially the natives for Christ. Transnational and diasporan ministries on missions to other race will do well if they look into the environment of people they want to evangelize and incorporate what is biblical and of interest to them into Christianity. Not everything in Africa is evil nor fetish as early investigators had reported. Religion cannot express itself fully without the aids of culture. Cultural values that are biblical could be incorporated and contextualized in order to bring the message closer to people. After all, Christ is for all nations by persons, environment and culture. Incorporating cultural values into the Gospel will quickly make the gospel “native” that is, personal, down rooted and for the people even their own land.

“The Earth is of the Lord” Theology

The universe belongs to God of the Bible and Father of our Lord Jesus who is the Owner all things. A particular situation where Christianity is restricted in some nations especially in the cities, there should be no fear to go and possess mountains, hills and valleys for the Lord. Babalola in particular was anointed to take dominion of all forests, rivers, lands and mountains for God. When he would not be allowed in the convenient places nearby, he was given special places like evil forests and mountains. Now those places have turned to be sacred places that attract crowds from nooks and crannies and all walks of life. Transnational and diasporan ministries should possess all these places for God without any fear of their remoteness. Sooner or later, they will become cities for God.

The Brotherhood of Believers

Through the establishment and patronage of sacred places, the progenitors of Christ Apostolic Church have provided avenues for believers to interact beyond their local confined religious boundaries. Coming together on sacred places during worship and corporate prayers at sacred places, the brotherhood of believers have been promoted. Many Christians have seen themselves as one in the presence of God. Colour or not, different tribal origins or not, the transnational ministries still have a lot to do when it comes to diasporan ministries. Most of the African originated ministries in the diasporan are still patronized by the ethnic groups that the leaders come from, especially in Europe and America. If racist theory of anthropology is still maintained in the Church and some ethnic groups are seen as inferior to others, evangelization of non Christians is still limited and hindered. Christians should see themselves as one and equal in the presence of God as people do on sacred places.

The Power of Cohesion and Need to promote Unity among Believers

One of the functions of religion is the power of cohesion and unity. Sacred places bring about cohesion among the believers. This is evident in prayers and worship on sacred places. No one comes there with the notion of his denomination. The crowds that these sacred places attract to themselves everyday and during special religious events cut across denominations. Unity is strong force to employ in order to promote the course of the gospel at global level in the transnational and diasporan ministries. The barriers of denominationalism are broken at sacred places as a result of the Christians from many denominations coming to these places to pray. After all, these sacred places do not belong to them to Christ Apostolic Church yet they patronize them and come for prayers there.

Influence on Other Christian Missions

Most of the liturgical practices of Christ Apostolic Church and doctrine were passed to other denominations through her patronage of sacred places. For instance, the issue of prayer and long fasting and marathon fasting in Christ Apostolic Church got to others through this avenue. As a result, it altered their prayer habit and teaching. Diasporan ministries will do well to influence others as they mix with other denominations through their liturgical practices. Sacred Places beside the conventional places of worship could be venues for picnics, retreats, seminars, conferences and camping. Many changes could be brought to others and heavenly visions shared with others.

II. Conclusion:

Diasporan ministries are expected to dominate the land for the Lord through the gospel. Forests, valleys, hills and mountains are parts of nature that the Psalmist says should praise God (cf. Ps. 66:1-4; 67; 104; 148). God can be worshipped outside the well decorated auditoria and the worship still accepted to him. He made heavens and the earth and his glory fills all the earth. The purely Eurocentric approaches to the evangelization of virgin land may not totally work where people see their environment and cultural values as very dear to them. We should be common-sensical, Holy Spirit filled, sensitive and armed with the authority of the Scripture as we try to take the gospel other lands. God sends us on global mission and it is encompassing and total. The environment must be dominated for the living God. Strange gods and spirits must be dislodged and God enthroned. As people have the religious notion that their gods and ancestors live in their environment, they must be replaced with immanence of God who created the environment. Christianizing their souls and leaving their environment for the evil spirits to remain can still portend dangerous trends to them in certain conditions. These places can be Christianized and sacralised for the Lord. The diasporan ministries should bear this in mind.

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