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### The Ministry of Christ Embassy, Lagos. Nigeria

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#### Abstract

The ministry of Christ Embassy is one of the fastest growing indigenous churches in Nigeria. The Church is quite attractive to the youths and has grown in bounds all over the country, especially in the Southern part of Nigeria. On the strength of its wide spread coverage, and the age group that the church attracts, the writer is of the opinion that highlighting her activities would be of benefit to church historians and others in church ministry. The writer employed both historical and sociological methodology in his article. It is recommended that the founder of the church should make attempt to translate his sermons and other materials to main languages in Nigeria. The advantage is that the church would be able to reach out to several others. In addition, there is the need for openness especially in the area of financial management in the church. The financial aspect is said to be locked-in between the leadership. It is noted by the writer that such transparency would build greater confidence in others who may desire to join the church in future.

**Keywords:** Christ Embassy; Lagos; Ministry; Nigeria.

#### Introduction

African Indigenous Churches (AICs), also known as African Independent Churches are the Churches founded in Africa, by Africans and primarily for Africans (Ayegboyin, D. & Ishola, S. 1997, 19). This new category of Churches is quite different from the one the American and the European missionaries planted in Africa. They started evolving from 1888 with the founding of a Native Baptist Church in Lagos which broke away from First Baptist Church Lagos (a mission Church planted and led by American missionaries). Many others followed what that Native Baptist Church did and later some individuals started establishing churches as founder.

Since then, the emergence of these new Churches has ever since become rampant in other countries particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, with a large number of followers. In fact, today, the African Independent Churches have grown up to the extent that some identify themselves as Pentecostal Churches, Praying Churches, Prophetic Movements Churches, etc. They have become a force to reckon with in terms of propagating the holistic gospel

of Jesus Christ in Africa and in the whole world. One of these churches that have great impact on the society more than two decades ago is Christ Embassy, which is the focus of this research paper.

### **A. The History of the Founder**

Christian Oyakhilome, popularly called Pastor Chris is the founding president of Believers' LoveWorld Incorporated also known as Christ Embassy, which is a Bible-based Christian ministry headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria.

According to his official Biography, he was born on December 7, 1961 and is the eldest son of the family of elder and Mrs T. E. Oyakhilome. Pastor Chris was brought up in a strict Christian home and he got born again at the age of 9. He attended primary and secondary school. He was later admitted for his tertiary education, into the then Bendel State University (now "Ambrose Alli University") Ekpoma in Edo State, where he studied Architecture. It was there he got his calling from God to go into the ministry and be a servant of the Lord. His grand father was also a minister.

Pastor Chris started preaching from his youth, holding large miracle meetings during his secondary and tertiary school days. It was in the university that he came up with Believers Loveworld Fellowship, which has become Believers Loveworld Incorporated that has Millions of members and associates around the world and it is one of the biggest ministry in the world today. Pastor Chris is a holder of a PhD; he is married to Reverend Anita Oyakhilome and they are blessed with two female children (Chinedu, 2014).

Through an anointed ministry spanning over 25 years, Pastor, teacher, healing minister, television host and bestselling author, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (PhD) has helped millions experience a victorious and purposeful life in God's word. He is the author of the bestseller Rhapsody of Realities that some people believe to be the number one daily devotional around the world, which he co-authored with his wife Reverend Anita Oyakhilome.

Several millions of copies of the best-selling daily devotional and Bible-study guide have been distributed in over 160 countries in more than 148 languages of the world including Afrikaans, Arabic, Cantonese, Croatian, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hindi, Icelandic, Italian, Mandarin, Myanmar, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili ... and still counting! New languages are added regularly, making the devotional accessible to many more in different parts of the globe, thus bringing the richness of God's Word into their lives. Little wonder the devotional, oftentimes, is referred to as the Messenger Angel.

Presiding over an ever-widening network of Christ Embassy Churches and campus fellowships on all five continents, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome also pastors one of the largest congregations in Africa. He holds massive teachings and healing crusades like the Higher Life Conference and Night of Bliss with crowds of over 3.5 million in a single night's event.

The world renowned Healing School is a ministry of Pastor Chris, which manifest the healing works of Jesus Christ today, and has helped many receive healings and miracles through the gifts of the Spirit in operation.

Pastor Chris in the year 2003, pioneered the first 24-hour Christian Network from Africa to the rest of the world, and this has given rise to three satellite stations. Through this medium, millions of people have been reached with the beautiful message of salvation and many lives have been transformed. These stations are also available on the mobile platform.

This servant of God is the host of Atmosphere for Miracles, a programme airing on major television networks in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Asia, Europe and around the world, with a burning desire to bring God's word to all men in simplicity and with the power of the Spirit. The man of God, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (PhD), established the International School of Ministry, specifically to train and equip ministers of the gospel of Christ, building in them the realities of God's word and empowering them to carry the message of eternal life in Christ Jesus to their world, with great demonstration of the miraculous power of God (Chinedu, 2014).

Pastor Chris also pioneered the establishment of the Inner City Mission of Christ Embassy, a ministry to children living in the innercities of our world, to give them a hope and a future. His wife Pastor Anita, an anointed minister of God, whose passion for the gospel of Christ, coupled with several years of experience in ministry, has resulted in worldwide expansion of Believers' LoveWorld. Her dynamic way of communicating the gospel has brought to many the vital experience of God's love in its freshness and helped them experience a victorious and purposeful life in the Word. She heads the International Ministry of Believers' LoveWorld and her bestselling

book, *Don't Pack Your Bags Yet*, amongst many others is a continuous blessing to many around the world.

Pastor Chris Oyakhilome is one of the most influential preachers in Africa and as a result has been the target of the Nigerian government's scrutiny for his meetings and miracles. He has also been a subject of criticism by the Treatment Action Campaign for his support of faith healing to cure HIV.

His book "How to receive your miracle and retain it?" promotes Word of Faith theology. His teachings are strongly based on the prosperity gospel, advising Christians that God intends to make them healthy and wealthy, and that poverty and sickness is contrary to God's plan for their lives (Rom. 5:3-4).

## **B. The History of the Church**

Christ Embassy Church is the product of the ministry that Pastor Chris Oyakhilome started as a young undergraduate at the then Bendel State University (now "Ambrose Alli University") in the late 80s, where he studied architecture.

Pastor Chris started preaching from his youth, holding large miracle meetings during his secondary and tertiary school days. Believers LoveWorld Incorporated, (a.k.a Christ Embassy) is a global ministry with a vision of taking God's divine presence to the nations of the world and to demonstrate the character of the Holy Spirit. This is achieved through every available means, as the Ministry is driven by a passion to see men and women all over the world, come to the knowledge of the divine life made available in Christ Jesus.

Through the years, various arms of the Ministry have been birthed to effectively proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Ministry has a vibrant TV Ministry, Internet Ministry, the Healing School, Rhapsody of Realities, and an Inner-city mission; where children without hope of a future are fed, housed, clothed, educated and given a chance to live out their dreams. The Ministry also hosts various crusades in the largest arenas in various countries where millions have been brought into the kingdom of God, and mighty miraculous works have been demonstrated. The venues of such meetings are constantly filled to capacity.

This global mission has led to the establishment of an ever-widening network of hundreds of churches and fellowships worldwide in all continents, affecting millions of people with a unique and timely revelation of the new creation in Christ Jesus.

This ministry will stop at nothing in ensuring that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is preached in all the nations of the world as it is expected by the Lord. The ministry has expanded rapidly beyond the coasts of Nigeria and South Africa, and it now holds large meetings in the United States and has Healing school sessions in Canada, and United Kingdom.

Pastor Chris' ministry has a large number of followers especially among youths and is notable for organizing the Night of Bliss South Africa at the FBN Stadium in Johannesburg and Higher Life Conferences in Canada, United States of America and the United Kingdom. It runs a global prayer network using social network platforms to send messages to Christians around the world regularly. Its account is @PastorChristLive. On these platforms, the ministry currently has over 1.2 million followers on Tweeter, as well as on its own social networking website called Yookos. Pastor Chris' ministry runs several arms including the Healing School, Rhapsody of Realities (a daily devotional with global reach), and an N.G.O called the innercity Missions as well as three Christian television channels: LoveWorld TV, LoveWorld SAT and LoveWorld Plus. Its television programs feature its faith healings, miracles and large meetings which the ministry organises around the world, with gatherings that are over 2.5 million people in only one programme.

## **C. The Doctrines of the Church**

The doctrines of Christ Embassy Church are found in their statement of faith which the ministry has listed as follow:

This is the statement of Bible doctrine as believed and taught by the Believers' LoveWorld Inc. aka Christ Embassy. This statement of faith has its source in the Bible and is in total agreement with the foundational principles of the doctrines of Christ.

We believe that the Bible contains the inspired and infallible Word of God. (*2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1: 20-21*)

We believe that there is only one God eternally existent in three persons; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. (*Ephesians 4:5-6, Gen. 1:26, Matthew 3:16-17*).

We believe in the deity of Christ. (*John 1: 1-4; John 10:30; Hebrews 1:1-5*)

a. He was born of a virgin (*Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:30-35*)

b. He was conceived of the Holy Ghost (*Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:30-35*)

c. He died (*John 19:30-35*)

d. He rose again from the dead bodily (*John 20:25-29, Luke 24:36-40*)

e. He ascended into heaven bodily (*1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Matthew 29:30*)

We believe in the rapture of the church and the Second coming of Christ. (*1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Matthew 24:29-30*)

We believe that the only means of being cleansed from sin is repentance and faith in the precious blood of Jesus (*Acts 3:19, Luke 24:47; Ephesians 1:7*)

We believe in regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, which is essential for personal salvation (*Titus 2:5, John 3:3-5, Ephesians 5:25-27*)

We believe that the redemptive work of Christ on the cross provides divine healing for the body, salvation for the soul of everyone that believes. (*1 Peter 2: 24; Acts 3: 16, Acts 9: 32 – 35*)

We believe that when an individual receives the Holy Ghost, he receives divine enablement for Christian service and witness. (*Acts 1: 8; 2:4; 3:1 – 26; 4:5 - 12*)

We believe in the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. (*Romans 15: 16; 1 Corinthians 6:11*)

We believe in the final resurrection of both the saved and the lost; the former to eternal life and the latter to eternal judgement. (*Revelations 20: 11 – 15; 1 Corinthians 15: 12 - 23*)

It is important to note in the light of the above listed doctrines, the following statement loaded with meaning that the founder of the Church uses to lay emphasis on:

*Being in Christ Embassy is more than being in a church; it's more than a church. It's a vision, and when you worship at Christ Embassy, you learn more than just the letters; it's the spirit of the word. The Spirit of God gets a hold of your life, and then His Vision becomes real, not only to you, but He makes that vision real in such a way that others get to know what the word of God really is by watching the word of God manifested in your life every day. That is the reason we like people to come to Christ Embassy, that's the reason they are invited. They are being a part of something that is more than a church; it's a vision, God's Vision.*

For Oluwasesan Moses, a critic of Pastor Chris' ministry, this latter declaration of the man of God is nothing but pride, as he sees himself as the head of something that is more than a church. To buttress his submission, he said, knowing that Jesus died for the church, for which he shed his precious blood, what can a worthy servant of his do that should be greater than the CHURCH?

#### **D. The Administration of the Church**

To know about the administration of Christ Embassy, I went to the headquarters of the church in Oregon (Lagos) in order to buy some books on Pastor Christ and his ministry and interview some prominent members of the administrative arm of the ministry. But unfortunately, to my amazement, I found no book related to the subject matter. Moreover, all my effort to get someone interviewed proved abortive because I was categorically told that: The church authorities do not grant any interview whatsoever to anyone. Therefore, go to the internet and be satisfied with whatever you see there (Receptionist at the Headquarters of the ministry in Oregon 2014). On the internet also, nothing is said about the administration of Christ Embassy, if not that Reverend Anita Oyakhilome who is the wife of the founder of the church is the fore-runner of the UK agency. She is also the Director of the Christ Embassy International Office and pastors Christ Embassy Churches in the United Kingdom, including her own chapter, Christ Embassy Docklands, in North Woolwich, London and Co- Director of Loveworld Christian Network Ministry. This description made me to understand that the wife of the founder of Christ Embassy is the second in command of the ministry. But as touching the real organogram of the church, the different committees, leaders and probably the Board of Trustees or the National Governing Council members, all seems to be kept secret. According to Oluwasesan Moses, these men of God do not want anybody to know what is going on about the administration of their church, as if they have a skeleton in their cupboard.

### **E. The Finance of the Church**

Just as knowing how the church is administered was virtually impossible, the finance of the church (income and expenditure) is more difficult. Notwithstanding, even though figures cannot be supplied, one can say that the means whereby money comes into the coffers of Christ Embassy are mainly through the tithes and offerings that the members of the church give as this is the case in virtually all the churches. Coupled with that is the huge amount of free donations that members as well as non members give to sponsor the different outreach ministry of the church. To buttress the latter submission, for instance some years back, it was reported and later confirmed by the church Pastor that someone gave seventeen millions Naira to Pastor Christ to do ministry. Though what brought that issue to the limelight is the source from which the donor got the money that was litigious, yet this is just one of the numerous people that sow seed into the ministry of Christ Embassy. There is no doubt that with all the advertisement of their different programmes on television and on the internet, many kingdom's expansion minded persons will be willing to financially support the ministry. Once again, it is important to lay emphasis on the fact that one cannot lay hands on the record of how much is collected in the church on weekly, monthly or yearly basis and how the resources are spent. To justify that polity of Christ Embassy of not being too transparent about the finances, a member of that church who I interviewed said summarily: We contribute money for God's work, and do not want to enquire how it is spent. The Pastor as God's representative is free to do what he deems fit with the money collected (Chinedu, 2014).

### **F. The Problems of the Church**

Though many things are kept secret in the ministry of Christ Embassy, yet right now there is a serious problem about the leadership of the Church. It has to do with a widely reported news on the internet about the probable separation of Pastor Chris with his wife Anita. Matters got to a head on Sunday, July 13, 2014, when some relatives of Anita locked up the London branch of the church to protest against the humiliation being meted out to their sister who had not overseen services at the branch since November 2013.

It should be recalled that some members of the church had sometime in May 10, 2014 launched facebook campaign, asking: Where is Rev. Anita Oyakhilome? Pastor Chris and Anita Oyakhilome are undergoing divorce proceedings, and the dissolution of the marriage between both of them has entered the final phase.

The wife is seeking divorce on the grounds of unreasonable behaviour and adultery. She outlined several allegations against the Pastor which cannot be published for legal reasons. The divorce case was filed on April 9, 2014. Efforts to reconcile the couple have failed. The Pastor, according to an elder of the church, has denied allegations of adultery and believes his wife was being influenced by bad friends who were intent on destroying their home. He had therefore been making efforts to avoid divorce in the hope that the wife would eventually have a change of mind. Church insiders said Pastor Chris had been hoping for rapprochement, but he was left with no option than to receive the papers of the divorce case, when the lawyers met with him at his hotel in London. The decree absolute, which will effectively end the marriage, is expected to be issued soon while terms of the divorce will be worked out by the lawyers on both sides. All attempts to reach the headquarters of the church in Lagos for better clarification on the matter prove abortive. Pastor Sylvester Egbodaghe, Editor-in-Chief of the ministry's newspaper, National Daily, did not answer calls or reply text messages sent to him. Moreover, to confirm this matter of separation, at the back page of Rhapsody of Realities that Pastor Chris authors with his wife, the photograph of Rev. Anita is conspicuously missing for the October's edition.

Another issue is the opinion of Pastor Chris concerning some Christian's moral values, which is seen as a problem of his church by many believers' folds. These Christians have therefore frowned to some of Pastor Chris' teachings including his permitting people to smoke and drink alcohol. Coupled with that, is his public declaration that masturbation is not a sin against God. An instance is quoted whereby a viewer of his television programme wrote to Pastor Christ to enquire if it was wrong for a Christian to work in cigarettes producing company. Pastor Christ responded: There is nothing wrong with cigarettes; the Bible doesn't say anything was wrong with it. I know a lot of people do complain about it because of the relationship attached to it with some sicknesses like cancer. But if they really believe it is wrong, why not ban it totally? The Pastor also added that it is the same thing when you have Christians working in the breweries. The Bible

doesn't condemn alcohol. The only reference made to alcohol in the Bible is ①do not take too much of wine①. So you see, these things have to do with the individual state. If they are convinced something is not good, they should just ban it.

On issue of masturbation, Pastor Chris says, the persons who hide to use their hands to stimulate their genitals for sexual pleasure in an act known as masturbation or solo- sex, may now stop hiding and rather be proud of what they do because masturbation is a normal habit that is not a sin against God.

The allegation of the association of Pastor Chris with homosexuals is another serious issue that tarnishes the image of his ministry. It was widely reported that the founder of Christ Embassy is friend to people known as homosexuals and is very close to them. This is the reason why his detractors accuse him of being an homosexual. They corroborate their stand with the fact that the Pastor uses to be alone, away from his wife for a long period; and during that time, he is in company of his homosexual partners. On this issue, one of the persons interviewed who happened to be a critic of Pastor Chris summarised his position in saying: All the Pastors of these new generation churches are cheat. They exploit their congregation and their secret will soon be exposed like that of Pastor Chris (Oluwasesan, 2014).

### **G. The Relevance of the Church in the Society**

The ministry of Christ Embassy has a great impact on the people in the society. But it is very important to note that Pastor Chris Oyakhilome has not affected all the spheres of the society in his ministerial assignment. This is due to how the man of God always appears and presents himself, his mode of dressing and most especially the language he speaks to pass across his messages.

Going by these three reasons stated above, the founder of Christ Embassy has the majority of his members and admires among the elites, the literates and the youths. Mr Eze John, a member of one of the mainland churches said:

Looking at Pastor Chris on stage, he is more like a European or American than an African preacher. He is always in English dress (suit), I never saw him Ministering in native African dress. The colour of his skin, the language he speaks to minister and his intonation are indications that he is more of the Western world.

His churches are English speaking, principally located in popular areas in the cities and virtually none in the village. Therefore, the villagers and even people who are living in big towns but illiterate do not benefit in any way in the ministry of Christ Embassy. It at all, some people in the cities have the privilege of seeing Pastor Christ on television, since the servant of God cannot communicate to them in the language they understand, their encounter with him remains fruitless.

From what is said so far, it is clear that only the literate class of people and most especially the youth among them are the ones benefiting from the ministry of Christ Embassy. These young men and women, students in their majority have access to cable satellite stations, from where Pastor Chris reaches the world. They operate at ease smart phones, internet facilities and know how to use the various applications therein to get the maximum from Pastor Chris Oyakhilome's ministrations.

In a nutshell, the ministry of Christ Embassy has a positive impact on the lives of the youths and is relevant only to them to a great extent. This is so because they identify with him in his mode of dressing, his charismatic style of ministering and his messages that go along with their philosophy of life. They long to pattern their lives after that of Pastor Chris, as they welcome and apply his teachings into their lives (Eze, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

The content of this research paper establishes that Christ Embassy is one of the fastest growing indigenous churches in Nigeria. This ministry initiated by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome has branches all over the world with a large number of followers. Though the people who are really affected by this ministry are the literate youthful generation (who seem to be the target of the minister of God), yet Pastor Chris ministry has positively impacted on the society. This church is a welcome development in our society to catch the youthful generation and make them instruments in God's hands. They are given the opportunity to express themselves in the church setting based on their world view, influenced by western civilisation, which privilege they cannot have in the mainland churches.

### **Recommendation**

Having looked into the ministry and got a general view of what is going on there, I am of the opinion that in order for this church to be truly relevant to a greater number of people in the society, Pastor Chris should look for means to get his messages interpreted into the language the majority of people understand. Coupled with that are the programmes of the church and the content of the message which should not only be for the consumption of the youth, but that which will be beneficial to everybody.

Moreover, many things that are kept secret about the administration and the finance of the church need to be handled with transparency to some extent, in order to carry along the members of the congregation and possibly outsiders. The financial contributors and donors of the church should at least know how their resources invested in that ministry are managed and spent.

I believe if the above mentioned remarks are properly taken into consideration and implemented, Christ Embassy will be more viable in expanding the kingdom of God.

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