

## EVALUATION OF THE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE ISLES OF PATMOS HOLINESS CHURCH, UJEVWU, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This research is a study on the Isles of Patmos Holiness Church (IPHC) in Ujevwu town, near Warri, Nigeria. Before now, issues have been raised about the activities of the above mentioned church. Such issues include whether this church could be called a Christian congregation or one of the syncretistic African Indigenous Churches? Experience has shown that in an attempt to make Christianity African, some African Indigenous Churches (AICs) have fallen into the error of syncretism. In the light of this, the study is investigating into the above general presuppositions, whether the church under discussion also falls within or in between the above category. The research will focus on investigation and the examination the beliefs and practices of IPHC to ascertain whether the beliefs and practices were compatible with truly historical Christian doctrines. This enabled the researcher to classify the church into an appropriate typology of AICs. Furthermore, the secret of the long period of survival of the church and the attraction of mass adherents calls attention to this study. Interviews were conducted with some of the spiritual leaders, members of the church, as well as the “sister churches” around the IPHC. The research demonstrated that the IPHC future prospect can only be realized if she deliberately embraces formal education, theological training for her spiritual leaders and a rethink on some non-Christian traditions which are already entrenched in the church polity.*

### Background

Elder Okoro reveals that the church which came into prominence in 1970 was founded by Prophet James Konoriode Idjedeki. The name, “Idjedeki Healing Home” was a local native name given to an indigenous church, which originates from Delta State of Nigeria. Her headquarters is at Udjewu in Ughelli South Local Government Area of the above state. The name, “Idjedeki” is the surname of the founding Bishop hence it is called “Idjedeki Healing Home.” However, for the purpose of national and international recognition outside the local environment, the name metamorphosed from the above local trade marks to “the Isles of Patmos Holiness Church.”

He was born into a princely family of Avwoture Idjedeki of Ujevwu in Ughwewwe clan in the year 1932. Prior to his birth no male among his parent’s children survived except the females. Therefore, his birth was by divine revelation through a prophet with special instructions on what the future of the child would be. In one of his father’s fishing trip, he was benighted at Arun–Owun in Sapele Local Government Area. In an attempt to look for a place to pass the night, he went to the only community church called “the Holy Messiah Church of Cherubim and Seraphim.” The Founding Prophet, (Most Rev. AP.R.M. Ukawa D.D.) , prophesied to him that he was going to have a male child whose influence will be greater than his. As fate would have it, the prophecy came to pass as predicted.

Prince James Konoriode Idjedeki Jnr. had no formal education except his father’s fishing and farming skills. The reasons were very obvious. Apart from the remoteness of his community to the urban, their fore-fathers attitude towards the early missionaries and erroneous beliefs towards

Western education stood as obstacles. James Onoriode Idjedeki had Helen as his legal wife. The latter was given to him by the spiritual leader of the church at Arun–Owun. She had seven children for James of which four were males while the rest three were females. Among the boys, it was only the senior boy (Messiah O.K. Idjedeki) that survived. The latter eventually succeeded his father after the former passed on, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 1999.

### **Doctrinal Features of the Isles of Patmos Holiness Church**

Having discussed the biographical sketch of the founder of IPHC, there is the need to give the details of her doctrinal features. This will enable us deduced accurately the typological classification(s) within AICs that she falls into. The above task initially proved unachievable, but interviews with prominent members of the church, others who left to join other Christian denominations and those who left to found their own churches, had helped to proffered solutions. Below are the doctrinal features of the IPHC.

#### **Belief in Salvation**

The IPHC affirmed on the finishing work of Christ on the Cross of Calvary as an immediate work of salvation to mankind. The Holy Spirit was sent by God as instrument in completing man's salvation experience. More so, his chosen prophet (the Willy of Ujevwu), is empowered by the Holy Spirit to make pronouncement of God's forgiveness of sin and assurance of His saving grace upon the believers.

#### **Belief in the Scripture**

The Holy Bible is God's constitution to mankind particularly to those who have decided to follow Christ as their main source of salvation. The IPHC member's moral and spiritual conducts are to be patterned after the Bible. It formed the bases upon which worship services and disciplinary actions were drawn. However, the church's traditions also form her basic beliefs which are also binding to all IPHC members. Sample of such include burial, marital status and the application of the Holy Water.

#### **Belief in God, Christ and the Holy Spirit**

According to evangelist Okoro, a one time member and a leader in Oto-Udu branch, the IPHC believes in the Trinity. However, they identify the Trinity as one but acted in three different dispensations. That God the Father created the heavens and the earth. He is the sustainer and the provider for all mankind. He dwells above the earth and constitutes order in governing the earth. He has no beginning and no ending. He was the chief actor in the Old Testament time.

Jesus Christ is the visible son of God; whose chief duty was to save mankind from sin through his sacrificial death on the cross. After He had completed the assignment, he resurrected and returned to the father. His reward was to sit by God's right hand, until He will judge the world. The Holy Spirit came after Christ to complete the unfinished work of salvation. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ's salvation to mankind and the keeper of the church from sin. It is through the Holy Spirit, the power of God is revealed to the church and salvation is perfected. However, his prophet (The Willy of Ujevwu) has been empowered in his time to share this salvation abroad.

#### **Belief in Miracle and Healing**

The IPHC was founded upon the miraculous. The key of miracles was given to "the father of salvation" by God through revelation. His ordination into the prophetic ministry was a public acknowledgment of his miraculous healing abilities. This power is not transferable as long as the

father of salvation is alive. However, he may choose to impact little of his miraculous and healing powers on his ordained prophets and pastors who are leaders of IPHC. Besides, the key of miraculous healing power is an automatic transfer to whoever the spirit chooses to be the successor of the father of salvation.

The father of salvation does not charge clients for healing. But it is an offense not to show appreciation to him after God has healed a client. Consequently, the illness may likely resurface and it will become worse than the first. In consonance to the above, Teri, confirmed that “there were testimonies of insane patients who had their healings and decided to runaway from the Healing Home Compound unnoticed. The aftermaths were alarming and disastrous.”

#### **Belief in Prophecy, Dream and Vision**

The power house of the IPHC is built around the school of prophecy, dream and vision. Nobody can ascend to the rank of a prophet, prophetess or a church pastor without the ability to prophecy, to dream dreams and to see visions; coupled with the capability of interpreting processes.

The church does not choose her leaders based on academic qualification; but rather on the above three criteria. A prospective prophet has to be trained by “the father of salvation” at the headquarters. The prophetic school could last three months or more depending on how fast the student can cope. The training process is as follows:

All prospective dreamers and visionaries are kept in a dark room and made to sleep on a mat covered with a white cloth. Usually, the sleeping hours is around 3a.m. to 5a.m. in the morning. After they had woken up, they would be asked to narrate their dreams and also tell its meaning. It is only the father of salvation who can ascertain whether the dream and its interpretations are correct or not. The process will be repeated thrice. Any one among the students who is able to satisfy the prophet would be promoted as a dreamer and a visional. However, those who were not able to stay for a longer period were disqualified.

In the case of the office of a prophet, it is quite different. Those that have been schooled in dreams and visions are the only suitable candidates to join the prophetic school if they are so convinced. In the prophetic school, prospective prophets are made to do two significant things before they can become prophets and prophetesses. Firstly, they will be taken to a counselee without the latter disclosing his or her problem. The would-be prophet would be made to tell the client’s problem without a prior knowledge of the latter history. After he has been made to do this successfully for about one week, he or she will graduate to the second stage.

In the second stage, the would-be prophet will be taken into a dark room where there are three covered broken pots. One among the three covered pots would have something in it, whereas the remaining two have nothing. The would-be prophet is expected to carry the one with a substance into the open. If anyone among them is able to do it three consecutive times successfully, then he would be qualified for ordination into the prophetic ministry. It is from the ordained prophets and prophetesses that pastors / leaders are chosen to lead the IPHC parishes.

The followers of Patmos church believe that the prophets and prophetesses see their problems ahead and make sure that all necessary things are done in order to prevent disasters. The emphasis on prophecy, dream and vision are priced above the efficacy and the validity of the scriptures. Sermoning in the church is built around the three essential beliefs. There is a special time of prophecy in the worship service. Before the sermon, the father of salvation leads the congregation into a “hot” singing and dancing. At the climax, one among the prophets or

prophetesses will enter into the realm of ecstasies, and will begin to prophesy. At the end of the prophecy, the leader will have the inspiration to preach, based on the prophecy.

#### **Belief in Special Festivals**

The IPHC has three significant and symbolic feasts in her system. These include the feast of fire which has metamorphosed into the feast of victory. Others include the feasts of Easter and Christmas. The feast of victory is restricted to each local church. Easter feast is done in the headquarters but meant for baptized members and prospective candidates for baptism. Christmas feast is fully done in the headquarters and all IPHC members are involved.

#### **The Feast of Victory**

After two weeks fast, each local branch of IPHC will converge at its local congregation every first day of October to feast and celebrate the victory they have gotten from God through the labour of their founding prophet. This was especially after the successful completion of the stipulated years of the feast of fire.

The celebration is characterized with a brief service on the victory day, whereby the virtues of the founding Bishop is been enumerated with biblical support. "Just as the blood of an animal on the door steps of the Israelites in Egypt saved them from the hands of king Pharaoh, so also, the father of salvation entered the fire to save his generation. The service is climaxed with a special offering to be sent to the headquarters. Thereafter a special prayer is said by the leader for God's protection and victory for the church members.

After the divine service, all worshippers will resign to the reception. Each branch is expected to slaughter a cow or cows for the celebration. Food will be served according to ones choice. After eating and drinking, every member will be given a holy water before departure.

#### **The Feast at Easter**

The Easter festival of the IPHC coincides with the Christian Easter period. It is usually celebrated in IPHC headquarters. The most significant events are the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

A week, prior to the Easter Sundays, prospective candidates for baptism are to converge at the IPHC headquarters for revision and examination. Those who pass the examination will be baptized on Easter Friday, while those who failed will have to wait for the next year. The baptism is by immersion. Prior to the baptism on Good Friday, every baptized member in other branches would come to the headquarters on Thursday night for vigil. At exact 8a.m. on Good Friday the baptism will begin. The duration of the baptism is determined by the number of candidates involved. The baptism is done in the name of the Trinity.

On Easter Sunday the celebration of the Lord's Supper will follow. The Supper meal precedes a worship service whereby the newly baptized members will have a special thanksgiving to God and appreciation offering for the father of salvation for counting them worthy to be baptized. The used substances for the Supper included non-fermented local palm wine and un-ripped roasted plantain.

While the former represents the blood of Christ the latter his broken body on the cross. Each person has a container to serve in the palm wine. One can take as much as one container can carry. One is not allowed to take home the roasted plantain except the palm wine. Each person is entitled to three roasted plantain, which represents the trinities as well. Meat eating is forbidden by IPHC during Easter period.

### The Feast at Christmas

The Christmas festival is a combined service at the headquarters. The researcher witnessed the one held in December, 2002. The celebration begins from Christmas- eve and terminates on Boxing Day. The major features include financial reports by each local church leader to the General Overseer, vigil, services and Galilee day. Usually, Christmas- eve is meant for vigil, while Christmas day for service whereby the virtues of Christ's birth is explained. After the service merriment follows.

Became of the magnitude of the festival, some members do come to rent an apartment in the city (Ujevwu) for the sake of convenience. Heads of churches meeting is exclusively for the purpose of finance reports. Each of the branches is expected to bring all the tithes to the headquarters. The latter in turn will remit a certain percentage of the money to the branches. The amount remitted back to the local church by the headquarters will depend on what the former is able to bring at the end of the year. The church that is able to bring much will be highly honoured among the other churches. Boxing Day is meant for Galilee celebration. On Easter Friday, Sunday and Galilee days, worshippers put on different cassocks. Easter Friday garments are black except the candidates for baptism that do put on white. On Sunday and Galilee days everybody puts on white cassocks.

### Belief in Prayer and Fasting

The IPHC believes in prayer and fasting. Her prayers are centered on the Trinity. Besides praying during services and festival periods, fasting is declared for the individuals and communities in the time of calamities. Whenever there is a revelation of death concerning the individuals or an expectant disaster coming upon a community, the church will declare a fast.

Members are encouraged to bring their pictures to the parish so that the prophet leader can pray on them through the pictures. Ladies and men who are looking for suitors to marry can bring the pictures of such men and ladies they like to marry so that the prophet could pray for such pictures in order to subject their spirits to the wish and desires of his members. It is also revealed that members who wanted to undo their enemies, such person pictures could be brought to the church for prayers.

Destiny can also be changed. Somebody that is destined to be killed, his or her spirit can be exchanged for another person through direct prayer by using the person's name or his or her photograph. Examination success' prayers can also be made for student members. Those who are involved in court cases, land disputes can consult the prophet for prayers so that the case can favour them. Alternatively, if possible their opponents can be eliminated for them. Business successes, travelling mercies and business rivalry prayers are also made for members. In fact, the theology of prayer in the IPHC is centered on eliminating human enemies instead of a spiritual one.

### Belief in Holy Water

The IPHC Holy Water is taken from the altar. The altars are of different standards. The higher the branches are the greater the altars. The highest altar is in the headquarters. In every altar, there are three big pots which contain the following:

- i. Natural rain water
- ii. Water from the stream or a well
- iii. Blood. (The secret of which is not known).

It is also unknown whether it is human or an animal's blood. However, research reveals that it is human blood. Ordinary people are not allowed to visit the altar, which is usually situated at the back of the church auditorium. The above three substances are usually mixed with palm wine which they refer to as "Holy Water."

The only occasion whereby members can be given Holy Water is when one is newly baptized. It is taken before the general palm wine is consumed by all. Secondly, when a member is involved in a criminal act that can lead to his or her arrest and consequently to his or her execution, he or she drinks it in order to ward off the sentence passed on the person and possibly a release from imprisonment. Thirdly, when a member is at the point of death, it could be taken for the forgiveness of sin, so that the person could make heaven. Fourthly, pregnant women who have difficulties in delivery could also be given the Holy Water. It is only the General Overseer and local church leaders who are eligible to administer the Holy Water.

### **Belief in Angels and Sacrifice**

The IPHC believes that angels are messengers of God to his prophets. That God could send his angels to the prophet for two purposes. Firstly, an angel could be sent by God to his prophets when disaster is about to occur as it were in Genesis chapter 18 when God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Secondly, an angel could be sent to God's prophets when God is about to reveal secret things which they may not understand in our normal human minds. Evangelist Peter Prince Ogidigbo asserts that:

In 1972, an angel visited our father of salvation, who automatically turned an old man, the angel told him that they were companions in heaven, he asked our father to entertain him with just five kobo denomination, our father then took 5 kobo from the thanksgiving box and gave to him; then he said: really you have come, that we were altogether when the Lord was looking for somebody he would send, but so many disagreed but our father of salvation agreed to come and sacrifice himself as salvation lamb for all, he told him that he came to ask and see how he had been going over his missionary activities in order to show that he was an angel...

The above assertion of angelic ministry of the IPHC seems contradictory and conflicting with biblical accounts. It is ambiguous and unclear to the researcher. Sacrifices are made when a member commits a sacrilegious sin. Sacrilegious sins include putting dirty money in the offering plate, giving less than a fixed stipulated minimum amount and failure to attend church services for about three consecutive months. Others include a woman in her period. Women who are menstruating have designated seats in the church auditorium going beyond it is sacrilegious in the IPHC and the act of adultery. The above unholy behaviours are sacrilegious offenses in the IPHC.

The church auditorium is always full on Sunday whenever sacrifices are made. This is because the one making the sacrifice will always provide sufficient snacks and food for all. However, a day prior to an open sacrifice Sunday, secret sacrifices might have been performed for the offender by the prophet for cleansing. The detail of the above secret sacrifice is not known to the researcher.

### **Belief in the Founding Bishop and Church Hierarchy**

The IPHC believes in church hierarchy. The founding Bishop occupies the highest office in the church life. He has many titles which reflect his own personality. Also, the general perception of his followers about his titles is also an eye opener to the understanding of her

teaching for leadership position. For instance, the founding Bishop is addressed as the Willy (prophet) of Ujevwu, and Ose re sivworho (the father of salvation).

By the above titles, coupled with the ability of the miraculous, the prophet is seen by his followers as an extraordinary man and some how considered as a messiah. In one of her unwritten creed citation during Sunday morning worship, members do say:

We believe in God, the creator of the heavens and the earth; we believe in Jesus Christ who died for our sins. We believe in the Holy Spirit who has come to perfect our faith in God. And we believe in his prophet (the father of salvation) who is also God's messenger to us.

The prophet that is seen as "the father of salvation" who is also God's messenger could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, that the Willy of Ujevwu is Christ's representative in his saving grace in our time without a salvific power. Secondly, that the above prophet is the true Christ who brought salvation to his generation by taking a new name as the Willy of Ujevwu. It is difficult to make conclusion on the above two alternatives since the researcher is not presenting his findings yet.

There is no doubt the founding Bishop occupies a very prestigious position. He was the only one to be addressed as a Bishop and general overseer; while the next in rank is to be addressed as a reverend. Prophets, prophetesses, visionaries, dreamers, deacons, deaconesses, Cherubim's and other hierarchy followed accordingly. There is a Board of Trustees and decision making council for the church. The General Overseer is not a part of the latter council, but their decision is like advisory role to the Bishop which is subject to his approval or rejection.

Succession procedure of IPHC was not thought about until after the death of the pioneering founder. And there was nothing in place as a general guide or principles in selecting a successor. However, the choice of successor according to an insider was motivated by the following conditions. In the first place, it was purely motivated by the spirit and not by academic qualifications. Secondly, "just as it was with the Apostles of Jesus Christ when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas so also it was with our church."

A divine service was held. The Bishop of the church at Arun-Owun and overseas branch representatives came for the process of appointing a new Bishop. And the spirit chose the most eldest son of our founding Bishop as our next Bishop. "And since he assumed the office, God has proved to us that we made the right choice because of the way God has been using him to move the church forward."

### Belief in Heaven and Hell

Based on the founding prophet's own experience, there is a strong belief in heaven and hell in IPHC. The prophet teaches that heaven is a place meant for the righteous ones who have no desire for snatching other person's wife or husband. Those who live good lives, seeking for their neighbours' progress and are not envious of the evil doers are the candidates for heaven.

However, hell according to IPHC is meant for the witches and wizards who are the enemies of progress. Evil leaders and idol worshippers who fail to repent will go to hell. A matured woman who failed to be married to a man will also go to hell. Parents who are deceased and not properly buried according to traditional rites before or after Christian burial, such deceased persons and their families will face the consequence of hell. This is because the spirit of the dead will be hanging between heaven and hell. The only way of escape is to go back to fulfil the traditional rites.

Furthermore, wealthy citizens who got their riches by fraudulent means will go to hell; and those who genuinely acquired their wealth but refused to use it to help the poor and invest it in the work of God, are also liable to hell. Anyone who speaks evil against the prophet and his church has blasphemed against God and he is liable to hell. He can only be forgiven if he comes to confess before the prophet.

On the doctrine of heaven and hell, IPHC stresses more on ethical and moral gospel to the detriment of the cross of Christ as an antidote for human problem. Second, in some areas, IPHC married traditional concepts into Christianity most especially when those traditional concepts were made as part of the conditions for entry heaven. Some of the above doctrine will be very difficult for contemporary orthodox Christians to swallow.

#### **Belief in Church and Society**

The IPHC believes in isolation of the church from the society. This concept is borrowed from her parent church at Arun-Owun. The latter community is maintaining a communal life without aside influence. The company that drilled her oil has made life very easy for the community by providing her essential amenities of life. Although, the village is isolated from other surrounding communities, yet she possesses what it takes to be in the city.

Initially, the IPHC occupied the extreme, isolated and a land dedicated to the ancestral spirits; but right now, the community has developed beyond the isolated area. In order to maintain a partial communal life, each time they come together they do ask for forgiveness from God for mixing up with the society. Others include occasional feasting and sacrifice services whereby they do eat together. Aside the above, IPHC has not fully experienced church isolation from the society as practiced by her parent church.

#### **Beliefs in Death and Funeral Procedure for a Member**

Each member of IPHC was initially regarded as a property of Christ as well as of the church. This also included a member's properties. Once you become a member of IPHC, you have automatically willed yourself and property to the church. When you become deceased, the first thing to be done by your family is to report to the church. The latter in return go to inspect the deceased belongings. After that, the deceased removable poverty will be ordered to be brought to the church premises before the issue of burial will be discussed.

More so, if the deceased person has not being paying his or her tithe, and a contributor to the advancement of the church, it is expected that his or her family will have to pay the outstanding tithes and contributions before the funeral and interment services can be conducted by the church. Alternatively, a deceased person whose family cooperated with the will, tithe and contribution principles will be buried in the church cemetery. The family which refuses the will but cooperated in the other areas, the deceased will be buried by the church in his residence. However, a deceased member who faulted in all the above, the IPHC will not have anything to do with the corpse.

The above understanding is a recent development. Initially, the church had used force to confiscate the deceased members' properties, which eventually resulted to court litigations. Some of these cases had caused the church a great deal by exposing her strengths and her weaknesses before the public. Consequently, she decided to relax her previous principles on funeral and interment rites. The will of personal property became voluntary, whereas tithing and contribution principle still stands.



Attention must be given to the fact that the difficulty of having family consent to a deceased member's will from being implemented is because of partial communal life of the IPHC. Where a true isolated communal church life is been practiced, such obstacles of family intruders are completely absent.

#### **Belief in Church Liturgy**

The liturgical expression of the IPHC has no definite formula. Her worship service is spontaneous in nature. It is as the spirit leads. Her system of operation is close to the generation of the Quakers in church history. The difference is that while the latter received the inspiration to pray and preach through dead silence, the former is inspired through drumming, singing and dancing.

The IPHC is a typical African Indigenous Church in her liturgical outlook. She has some common features which could be identified in all her branches. Her musicological tonal beats and drumming reflects the Urhobo's Igbe society (the worship of water spirits). This is also true of the way they sing and dance except in the words of the song whereby the name of Christ and God are occasionally mentioned. Her dancing sometimes gets to a height of ecstasy whereby the spirit of prophecy will surface. The prophet or prophetess that is carried away into the realm of the ecstasy will begin to prophesy. Usually, that particular prophecy forms the sermon of the worship service of that day.

The following is a summary of order of worship observed by the researcher in various branches where he personally visited during their worship services.

- i. Choruses and Dancing: Choir and congregation
- ii. Pastoral Prayer: Led by church leader
- iii. Choruses and Dancing: Led by the leader
- iv. Prophecy: Any prophet/ prophetess led by God.
- v. Sermon: Based on the prophecy – Church leader.
- vi. Choruses and Dancing: Church leader
- vii. Tithes and Offertory: Leaders and the church leader
- viii. Greetings and News: Assigned prophet
- ix. Prayer for sick persons: Church leader
- x. Thanksgiving Session: Prayer by leader
- xi. Closing Prayer and Benediction: Church leader
- xii. Pastoral Final Blessing: Church leader (Presiding Bishop)

At the end of the sermon, the prophet will lead the congregation into dancing and singing again. He will dance from the altar to the entrance of the church where he will be given a chair to sit on. An offertory box will be in front of him. Each row will be led to give their offerings and tithes at different times, by different leaders leading the worshippers to give their offerings. Whatever amount each worshipper puts in the box will be properly exposed for the prophet leader to see it. The offering could be taken as much as four different times for different purposes in one service. At the end of the collections, the prophet would dance to the altar again to pronounce blessings of God upon the offering and the congregation.

#### **Evaluation of the IPHC**

Falk (1921:456) had accused some Messianic Groups and some Zionist Churches as being syncretistic in nature. While the former is accused of excessively arrogating special powers to her prophets by elevating them to the position of Christ; the latter also is guilty for retaining some traditional practices such as reverence for ancestral spirits, ritual purification and polygamous life. Contrary to the above positions, Sanneh (1983:245) reacted thus:

Christianity itself is one of the most syncretistic of religions. If by that we mean the amalgamation of ideals and realities, of principles and mundane practice, for it is a pre-eminent theological teaching that through the incarnation the transcendent and the terrestrial merged in human focus.

From the above divergent views of Falk and Sanneh the researcher will evaluate the IPHC on the basis of its strengths and weaknesses. It is possible that the strengths and weaknesses may have risen from the inception of the church. Others may have developed as the church continued to expand into maturity. It is on the above we shall turn to as follows:

#### **Its Strengths**

The Urhobonization of Christianity has made IPHC realize that Christianity is not a foreign religion but it could also be practiced according to the details of ones traditions. She used the Urhobo language to preach directly without an interpreter. This is unlike the mainline churches where English is used to preach before an interpreter could translate it into the local language. Secondly, the church had helped to unsettle prostitutes and widows whose husbands were victims of the Nigerian Civil War. Even though some of them got married into polygamous homes, others were lucky to have married to men who were still singles. Thirdly, some patients who had chronic ailments, possessions and especially mental crises, were cured by the church and rehabilitated again into normal societal life.

Fourthly, the IPHC renders at no cost social services for pregnant women for both within and aside the church membership. The above services were always done by the church trained midwives. This was one among the greatest strength of the church. Especially in those days when the services of midwifery was solely depended on traditionalists because the medical trained ones were very few. In fact, children delivered by the IPHC were made to be dedicated in the church. By that they stand initiated into the church membership.

Fifthly, another great strength of the church is the great concern the founding prophet had for community development. This led him to wage war against the anti-progressive elements in the society. The prayers and fasting the prophet had made for the construction of the Udu-Bridge and the electrification of Ujevwu community are living witnesses. Some witches and wizards repented, while community evil leaders turned a new leave. This turn of events led to rapid development and conversion of souls into the IPHC possible.

Finally, the close communal live among members of the IPHC coupled with some ethical teachings have helped to sharpened the followers' characters towards God and their fellowmen. There is no doubt the IPHC has brought a new dimension of an African Indigenous Church into the Urhoboland which for over a half a century ago, has remained relevant to the people.

#### **Its Weaknesses**

However, with a critical evaluation of the above relevance, the researcher has come to discover many flaws within it. This is because, placing the so called relevance with historical Christianity, coupled with the modern trend of Christianity, she has fallen below expectations. In many ways, the IPHC beliefs and practices fall below the Christian Biblical standards. Most times, the scriptures are used out of context. This only leaves the average Christian in a state of confusion. Bamigboye's assertion is relevant here; when he said: "However, any Christian church which interprets the Bible far from the theological and biblical point of view could be classified

under the term “Syncretistic.” It is from the above understanding the researcher will evaluate the weakness of the above church.

Firstly, the IPHC holds a lot of unbiblical views. These include the concept of salvation. The Bible makes it clear that there is no other way and other name God has provided for humankind to be saved except in Jesus Christ of Nazareth (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Contrary to the above biblical assertion, the IPHC sees his founder as the father of salvation and co-equal with the trinities in salvation experience.

Secondly, the symbolic elements of three pieces of roasted plantain which stands for the substance of the bread in the Lord’s Supper is also over spiritualized as a representative of the trinities. This again is another fallacy and has no bearing to the gospel truth. Thirdly, the festival of fire which was interpreted thus: “as the blood of the animal on the door steps saved Israel from the hands of the king (Pharaoh), so also the father of salvation entered the fire to save his generation.” This is what the biblical scholars call eixegesis. It means an imposition of an idea into the scripture wrongly. The scripture testifies that Christ was the only atonement made for cleansing of mankind. Any other one before and after Him should be disregarded.

Fourthly, the IPHC theology of prayers is faulty. Her prayer is against human enemies instead of spiritual ones. A member can take the name or a photograph of a human enemy to his prophet to pray for such a person to die. This is against Christ’s teachings on forgiveness and love. Christ said that Christians should forgive those who hate them and love their enemies. This is the only evidence to prove that they are the children of God.

Closely related is the doctrine of the Holy Water in the IPHC. She teaches that taking the Holy Water can set a criminal free from the prison. Also, taking it can save someone who is destined for hell fire to be saved. The implications of this teaching is that somebody will continue to engage in evil and criminal acts because he believes taking some holy water can serve as protection. Secondly, somebody who goes to church can still continue in evil believing that at the point of death holy water will work out the magic of salvation. All these beliefs are mere fallacies and deceptions. It is like taking us back to the Sixteenth century whereby the sales and purchased of indulgences were made as vehicles for salvation. Fifthly, the process of becoming a dreamer, a visional and a prophet or a prophetess, has no biblical foundation. Sixthly, the elevation of the above so called spiritual gifts over and above the use of the scriptures can lead to a serious spiritual constipation. The Bible is only used as a mere cover up, when it is convenient and not compulsory.

Seventhly, the church is mostly consists of uneducated persons. Lack of education can affect the way people behave, act and think. Most of the IPHC traditional practices are traceable to the level of her members’ formal educational background. The founding Bishop was an illiterate; his first son who succeeded him is just a secondary school leaver. The researcher believes that if the leaders were averagely or above averagely educated, the physical structures, doctrines and numerical growth would have been more than what it is today. However, the problem of illiteracy is a common phenomenon with most of AICs.

Finally, most of the conversion experiences into the IPHC were as a result of clients with diverse problems who had them solved by the church. It is not necessarily because they need salvation for their souls through Christ. As soon as such problems are solved, the clients now become members of the church. The implication of this is that somebody can become a member of the church, be loyal to the prophet; and believes in all the church traditions without knowing

Christ. With the above flaws put together and evaluated by scriptural standards, it is not difficult to conclude that the IPHC is more an occultist sets than the living church of Christ.

### **The Future Prospect of the Church**

All hope is not lost. The IPHC will continue to wax strong as long as human beings are faced with the realities of life. Man's quest for his existential needs from time immemorial, are still the same to the present. Because of human inexhaustible needs, there is hope for the IPHC to continue to flourish now and in the near future. This presupposition becomes very relevant because the church itself and her practices are amenable to the traditions and customs of the people. However, if the above presupposition will stand the sand of time, the following must be taken very seriously. Firstly, the need for formal education for the church pastors is necessary for the survival of the church. This becomes very relevant if she has a vision in reaching the enlightened members of the society where she lives. Closely related is the need of the IPHC pastors to be theologically trained. She can set up her own theological institution for the training of her pastors, or send them to be trained in any other theological colleges of her choice.

The advantages and dividends in the near future will be great. This is because the status of the church and the quality of her leaders will be raised. More also, the prophet ability in the use of scriptures will be enhanced and as well accurate. It will also aid the church in her administrative capability and possible obtain a recognition from other denominations around her.

However, if the above submissions are ignored, it is very likely the church will continue to be retarded and consequently eclipse into oblivion. At best, she will continue and gradually graduate into traditional medical center with a brink future. If this happens, her national and international status will eventually become a dream of the past.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher wish to conclude that the IPHC came to Urhoboland and beyond it at a time she was needed most and thus mission accomplished. Any other mission the church has for now seems not to be relevant, especially when weighed with Christian Biblical standards. Therefore, if she must exist and remain relevant to the environment in which she belongs to, she needs to deliberately take a full stock of her packaging.

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