

## Divination in Ancient Israel and African Traditional Religion: A Resurgence in Modern Pentecostalism

Uzuegbunam, Emmanuel Nwachukwu, Ph.D

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

E-Mail: ne.uzuegbunam@unizik.edu.ng

### Abstract

Divination, the art of inquiring into the will of a deity, or investigating into the unknown mysteries surrounding life, is a vital feature of the religion of the ancient Israelite society. This practice may have come from the Ancient Near Eastern background. A number of instruments and devices, mentioned in the Old Testament, were employed for this purpose. The approved procedure through which Yahweh revealed his mind to his people in the Old Testament seems to be enshrouded in mystery for a number of reasons. For instance, while the priests wore the linen ephod to enquire from Yahweh, the prophets did not seem to need such devices. Besides, the preponderance of false prophets in ancient Israel raises further doubt as to the credibility of the means of discerning the mind of Yahweh. What may be evident is that the occult practices of the Near Eastern background had filtered into some religious activities in the ancient Israelite society. Divination, the art of enquiry into the unknown, is a major feature of African traditional religious orientation. The African would inquire into the past to know how errors of the past are affecting the fortunes of the present; while also looking into the future to ascertain the implications of actions being undertaken at present. Although the Euro-Christian missionaries discredited every aspect of African indigenous religion as fetish and occultic, yet, the desire of the African worshipper to inquire into the past and the future has not changed, and Christianity does not seem to be fulfilling this aspect of the African religious aspiration. To satisfy this aspiration, elements of the African inquiry into the past and future are beginning to emerge in the modern Pentecostal prophetic movement, drawing heavy patronage from the African audience. This paper examines divination or spiritual inquiry practices in the ancient Israelite society and African Traditional Religion, using the phenomenological approach, and appraises the modern Pentecostal prophetic movement as a possible vehicle for satisfying the indigenous African religious aspiration of inquiring into the past and the future.

**Keywords:** Divination, Prophecy, Pentecostalism, Israelite religion, African traditional religion

### Background to the Prophetic Movement in Israel

The prophetic movement in Israel, no doubt, has its primitive, formative stages in the role of a seer (Hebrew, רֹאֵה , from the verb, רָאָה , meaning to see). A redactional interjection in the narrative in 1 Samuel 9:9ff explains that in time past, when a man went to inquire (Hebrew, שָׁאַל ) of God, he would say; “ let us go to a seer, (Hebrew רֹאֵה ), for he that is called a prophet (Hebrew נְבִיא ) today, was aforesaid called a seer (Hebrew רֹאֵה )”. A number of facts are clear from this redactional interpretative interjection. One, it has always been a practice in Israel for people to “inquire of the Lord”, meaning to probe into diverse mysteries surrounding their personal, community and family lives and well being. These inquiries were directed to designated persons who, from that interpretative interjection, were called the “seer”. Samuel who became the leading figure in the evolution of the prophetic movement in the land of Israel is named in this text as the one who was being consulted as the seer. Although the text presents the role of the seer as being the primitive stage of the role of the prophet, it is important to realise that even at the time of that narrative, both features of the prophetic movement were clearly operational. For purposes of delineating the two roles, for the purpose of our discussion, we need to note that the seer (Hebrew, רֹאֵה ) refers to the person who was quite often consulted over a wide range of mysterious and seemingly intractable difficulties, for obtaining a direction; while the prophet (Hebrew, נְבִיא ) was one who declared God’s mind to the people, individually and collectively, in order to exclusively sustain or restore them to the path of divine righteousness. Growing from the primitive role of the seer, the prophet became a public spokesman, oracle and defender of the cult of Yahweh, declaring the course of Yahweh’s righteousness to the people and warning them intensely of the

impending wrath of Yahweh, if they dared to deviate from his ways. Thus, Harrison (1969) had pointed out that;

The nature of the ecstatic prophetism that appeared suddenly on the scene in the days of Samuel has been a matter for considerable discussion by scholars, based to no small extent upon the meaning of the expression, *בְּנֵי-הַנְּבִיאִים* or “sons of the prophets”, that is to say, the members of the prophetic guild. The word, *נְבִיא*, is used consistently in the Old Testament of individuals who stood in a special relationship to God, in a situation that was in general accord with ancient Near Eastern religious traditions. (p. 711).

Albright (1925) had added that that the term, *נְבִיא* ;

related as it is to the Akkadian word, *naba'um*, should be interpreted as “the one who is called” or “the one who has a vocation”, and not as “speaker” or “announcer”. (Konig, 1936, p. 206).

Harrison (1969) stated further that;

The basic sense of vocation enshrined in the Hebrew term has been reinforced by lists of northwest Semitic names from eighteenth century B.C. Mari archives, in which there appeared several names formed with the same verb and carrying the same meaning. (p. 711).

For Albright (1961);

The *נְבִיא* was thus an individual who had been favoured with a special call from God, and the term designated a charismatic religious figure, a person without hereditary right or political appointment, who was authorized to speak or act on behalf of God. (p. 6).

It is important to note here that, to begin with, the glaring similarity between the prophetic operation in the ancient Israelite community and that in the Ancient Near Eastern background is well attested to. Also, the roles stand out clearly in manifestation of divine call.

### **The Seer in Ancient Israel**

According to Vawter (1990);

From the earliest recorded time, a common pattern of seers and diviners existed throughout the Near East who were employed in ascertaining the mind of the protective deity. The explicit reference to seers and diviners clarifies the statement of Mesha, the King of Moab, made on the 9<sup>th</sup> century Moabite stone; “Chemosh said to me, Go down, fight against Hauronen”. The biblical parallel is in such passages as: “David inquired of Yahweh; shall I go and attack these Philistines?” And Yahweh said to David; “Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah” (1 Sam. 23:2). David was accompanied by his prophet, Gad (1 Sam. 22:5), whose duty it was to make such enquires of Yahweh. Even more explicitly, 1 Sam. 23:6-12 exemplifies the pattern: Abiether the priest of Nob who had joined David’s band, brought with him the ephod, a divining instrument by which David obtained yes-or-no answer to such questions as “Will Saul come down?” and “Will the men of Keilah surrender me to Saul”. (p. 187).

The profound similarity of the work of the seer in Ancient Israelite religion with what obtained in the Ancient Near Eastern background attests to the fluidity of religion. No religion is an island unto itself. Every religion is influencing and, at the same time, being influenced by the religious practices of its environment. The text above attests to the evident institutionalization of the role and the office of the seer in the administrative (often monarchical) framework of the Ancient Near Eastern nations. These seers were often consulted for spiritual insight and foresight prior to all critical decisions. The kings in the Ancient Near Eastern societies greatly relied on these seers for direction on matters of state policy. Essentially, these seers were diviners who employed divination methods and devices to enquire into the realms of the spirit in order to ascertain the implications and possible outcomes of the action about to be embarked on.

The situation in the Ancient Israelite society was not any different from what obtained in the Near Eastern societies. The text in 1 Sam. 9 attests to the fact that it was common knowledge that the seer was consulted on a wide range of issues requiring deeper spiritual inquiry. It was even to the extent that a seemingly mundane issue such as missing asses could be taken to the seer for spiritual inquiry.

That the role and office of the seer also became institutionalized in the Israelite monarchy is also attested to in the Old Testament. Thus, in 2 Sam. 24:11, we read that the word of the Lord came unto David (the

king) through Gad, David's seer. This, no doubt, confirms the fact that in the monarchical period, the kings had accredited official seers through whom they inquired of the Lord, and from whom they received divine direction.

A common feature in the operation of these seers in Ancient Israelite religion, which seems to bring them at par with the diviners or fortune tellers of the Ancient Near Eastern background, is the use of devices in this process of inquiry. Thus, in 1 Samuel 30, from verse 7, David commands Abiathar the priest (his companion and apparently, his seer also) to bring him the linen ephod so that he could inquire of the Lord regarding the steps he could take in relation to the plunder carried out by the Amalekites at his dwelling camp in Ziklag. The use of the linen ephod and other items of spiritual enquiry or divination, such as the Urim and Thummin, were probably features of the Ancient Israelite religion which were not sustained. Braun (1698) described "ephod" as:

A sacred vestment originally designed for the High priest (Exod. 28:4ff; 39:2ff) and made "of gold, blue and purple and scarlet and fine tinned linen" held together by two shoulder pieces and a skilfully woven band which serves as girdle for the ephod. On the shoulder pieces were two onyx stones on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is not known whether the ephod extended below the hips or only to the waist. Attached to the ephod by the chains of the pure gold was a breastplate containing the precious stones in four rows. Underneath the ephod was the blue robe of the ephod extending to the feet of the priest. The robe of ephod was thus a garment comprising, in addition to the long robe proper, the ephod with its shoulder pieces and breastplate of judgement. From historical books, we learn that the ephod was worn by persons other than the high priest. Thus, the boy, Samuel was girded with a linen ephod while assisting aged high priest (1 Sam. 2:18); the priests at Nob, 85 in number, are described as men wearing linen ephod (1 Sam. 22:18); and David was girded with a linen ephod when he danced in the procession that brought back the ark into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:14). The ephod mentioned in Judg. 17:5; 18:4f, Hos. 3:4 is associated with teraphim and other idolatrous images. We may frankly confess that we do not know the shape, size, and use of the ephod in these cases, though even here also, the ephod may well have been a priestly garment. The same remark holds good of the ephod made by Gideon, and which became an object of idolatrous worship in Israel (Judg. 8:27) (p. 462).

Quite obviously, a lot of mystery surrounds the use of these devices in the religion of ancient Israel. The suspicion that these are components of the idolatrous environment that found their way into the Hebrew religion remains strong. That such practice was not sustained possibly attests to, and substantiates this impression.

Clifford (1990) wrote further on the ephod;

The ephod seems to be a close-fitting waist coat with shoulder straps, with a decorated band (v.8) around the waist to hold it. On each shoulder piece were onyx stones with the names of the sons of Jacob, the tribes, according to the order of their birth. Thus, the high priest brought Israel into the divine presence. The material of the ephod matched the material of the Holy of Holies, emphasizing the special nature of the high priest, who alone went into the Holy of Holies. (p. 57).

A very curious passage appeared in Judges 17:1ff in which the ephod was named among the graven images and teraphim which a certain man of Ephraim, named Micah, had in his house of gods (v.5). What is worrisome was that a young Levite sojourned in the land and "was content to dwell with the man" (v.11) in spite of the seeming religious aberration. And the Ephraimite, Micah, lured the Levite to be his father and priest for a price of ten shekels of silver (perhaps as annual salary). And Micah consecrated him as a priest for his altar (or house of gods). And for Micah, that was a proof that the Lord's approval was upon his household for, according to him, "seeing that I have a Levite as my priest".

O'Connor (1990) commented on this incident thus;

The text refers to pesel and massēkâ, usually taken as two separate images, one graven or sculptured and the other molten, but it may be that only one object is described by the phrase,

which is simplified later to *pesel*, (18:17,20,30). This image is of Yahweh, perhaps the only such image in the Bible; the ephod is an object associated with it (cf 6 : 27) and the teraphim are other idols (small in Gen 31; large in I Sam 19:13,16), (p. 143).

Teraphim, according to Boadt (1990), “are usually understood to be small household images of gods that may be consulted through some means we do not presently understand”. (p. 320). Boadt went ahead to show that teraphim are named among devices used in divination, the art of making spiritual inquiries. The other devices also commonly employed in this enterprise are:

arrows that are marked with names, shaken in a quiver, and then are pulled forth, a practice well-known in pre-Islamic Arabia...(and) livers of sheep, which are sacrificed and the configurations of modes and blood vessels “read” by an expert to reveal God’s will. (p. 320).

Ironically, these three methods of divination are mentioned in Ezekiel 21:21ff as means of divination employed by the king of Babylon to determine the best (or spiritually approved) pathway for attacking the nation of Judah. This is therefore a confirmation that these methods of spiritual inquiry (divination) belong to the pagan culture. Thus, even their infiltration into the Israelite religious cult should be appreciated for what they are - a mere infiltration.

On the use of Urim and Thummim for ascertaining the will of Yahweh, also found variously in the religious practices of Israel, Clifford (1990) stated that, “The Urim and Thummim were sacred lots, each apparently assigned a designation, yes or no; these lots were cast when an oracle was sought” (Num. 27:21)(p. 57).

Faley (1990) added that the Urim and Thummim,

Given only passing mention in the P tradition, serve at most as a symbolic relic of the past, although perhaps the reference to them is no more than an archaic one made long after they became obsolete. (p. 66).

Although it is not very clear the form which the casting of lots among Jesus’ disciples in Acts chapter one took, however, it must be realised that even the early Church which had its religious roots quite deep in Ancient Judaism, was a society in transition from the ancient to the modern.

### **Divination: A Definition**

According to Wright (1982),

Divination is roughly the attempt to discern events that are distant in time and space, and consequently cannot be perceived by normal means. A similar definition could be given for the seership aspect of prophecy as exercised in, e.g. 1 Sam. 9:6-10. Hence, the term could be used occasionally in a good sense, as we might speak of a prophet having clairvoyant gifts without thereby approving all forms of clairvoyance. Thus, Balaam is a diviner as well as being inspired of God (Num. 22:7; 24:1). The divination condemned in Ezek. 13:6-7 is specified as “lying”. In Mc. 3:6-7,11, divining is a function of the prophets, though here also, they have prostituted their gifts; cf Zc. 10:2. In Pr. 16:10, *gesem* (inspired decisions) is used of the divine guidance given through the king. Apart from these general uses, divination is condemned, except for two passages noted below. God’s people are forbidden to use divination or enchantments as the pagan world did (Lv. 19:26; Dt. 18:9-14) and 2 Kings 17:17; 21:6 record their disobedience. Pagan diviners are mentioned in 1 Sam. 6:2; Is. 44:25; Ezk.21:22. (p. 287).

A number of facts stand out in the above definitive explanation. One, in the remote times of ancient Israelite religion, the infiltration of pagan culture in spiritual enquiry had been identified. Yet, no clear modalities had been outlined on the basis of which the pure, undefiled practice could be distinguished from the pagan practice, except, perhaps for the reference to “lying” (as in Ezek. 13:6-7) in which case, perhaps, the distinguishing factor could be identified from the outcome of the inquiry, whether it was ultimately vindicated (or authenticated) or not. Two, because of the realisation of the infiltration of pagan practices into the Israelite religion, some of the divining were approved while some were condemned. Again, there was no clear basis for the approval and condemnation. We have already seen that these seers and priests in ancient Israelite religion freely used all kinds of instruments such as the

linen ephod and Urim and Thummim for the purposes of spiritual inquiry. However, the fact that these instruments gradually fizzled away from the accepted religious practice in Israelite religion, perhaps, attests to their disapproval, or at least, that they belonged to the primitive segment of Israelite religion, and were therefore discarded as a result of the contemporary refining of the religious practices.

### **Divination in African Traditional Religion**

O'Donovan (1996) had gone to great lengths to explain that;

In Africa, divination is a practice commonly used to discover the person who supposedly caused someone's sickness, difficulties or death. It is used to get advice or to make decisions, such as whom one should marry, when to plant certain crops, or when to make a particular journey. It is used to learn how the ancestors have been offended and how that situation may be corrected. People use divination to find out which ritual or sacrifice will solve a particular problem. Sometimes, they want to get a revenge on an enemy. Divination can also be used in foretelling the future. (p. 242).

Divination in African religion borders exclusively on the African religious worldview, which basically defines the sole human objective for living. Fuller (2001) explains that the sole purpose of life for the indigenous African is "seeking all their lives for well-being both physical and spiritual" (p. 21).

Maxey and Danfulani (2019), in concurring the point of African worldview, added that, in the African indigenous religious society;

The focus of life is overwhelmingly this worldly and self-focused. The physical and emotional and material prosperity and the longevity of humankind sum up the ultimate purpose for human existence. There is within ATR thus, a preoccupation with life, wealth, health and well-being. (p. 80).

To ensure that these purposes are not in any way compromised or trivialized, African Traditional Religion has a legion of diviners who are constantly engaged in spiritual inquiries into the past and the future, in order to discover past errors that need to be corrected, and future mishaps that have to be averted. In many cases, the spiritual inquiries of the diviners are followed by sacrifices to be made in order to correct the errors of the past and avert the mishaps of the future.

Thus, Gleason (1973) asserted that;

Sacrifice for longevity, that's what the diviner is doing. Sacrifice for well-being, sacrifice for continuity, that is what O Orumila the diviner is doing... May there be no more death, may there be no betrayal; my affair concerns my creator, sacrifice for longevity, that is what the diviner is doing. Sacrifice for immortality, that is what the diviner is doing. (p. 47).

Maxey and Danfulani (2019) further explained that;

Concerning these good things in life, the Yoruba depend on the divination powers of the babalawo diviner because life is simply for abundance. The tendency for abundance is sanctioned through Ifa divination corpus, which expresses itself in the desire for long life and good things in life, lots of money, many wives and children, and several titles. (p. 81).

Gehman (2013) admitted then that;

African Traditional Religion centres on man. The whole emphasis is upon man gaining power needed to live a good life... African philosophy is anthropocentric: man is the very centre of existence, and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man. (p. 35).

Essentially, therefore, for the purpose of ensuring the ultimate well-being of human beings, divination is the nerve centre of African Traditional Religion. The need to inquire into the past and into the future to ascertain the ultimate well-being of human persons, forms the fulcrum of African Traditional Religion. For this purpose, the diviner is an indispensable companion of the average African religious person. In fact, the inquiring orientation became so firmly entrenched in the indigenous African that even at the point of accepting Christianity from the missionaries, the African looked out for the avenue to satisfy that religious objective in the Christian faith. And sadly, when the indigenous African worshippers could not locate in Christianity the avenue for satisfying their spiritual inquiry, aspiration,

the Africans, so soon after the establishment of the Euro-Christian churches, set up their own version of Christianity called the African Indigenous Churches. These African Indigenous Churches became the African version of Christianity, containing avenues for satisfying the indigenous African religious aspirations. One of those indigenous African religious aspirations is the need to spiritually inquire into the past and the future in order to discover and carry out such religious activities, especially sacrifices, to ensure the ultimate well-being of the human persons.

### **Religion and Magic**

Maxey and Danfulani (2019) have already shown that from the African worldview, human well-being is uppermost and the pursuit of this well-being is the sole desire of mankind. In fact, the African worldview, properly understood, posits that all spirits and deities exist for the service of mankind, and the duty of every worshipper is to discover, through the avalanche of diviners, the exact demands of the spirit world, and to fulfil such demands for the ultimate service of mankind. Human beings therefore, pursue such objectives, albeit, in limited knowledge, to understand and to do the will of the spirits and deities, for the good of mankind. In pursuing these objectives, therefore, as a result of honest limitations in knowledge, the tendency to slip occasionally beyond the bounds of true religion is always there. Idowu (1973) took up this issue rather succinctly:

It is clear that since the dawn of consciousness, man has been confronted with a sense of need with which he knows that his own unaided power cannot cope. The complications and riddles of life have been such as urge upon him the need for succour, for deliverance and for mastery over environmental circumstances. He recognises that behind phenomena is a power “wholly other” than himself. His approach to this power depends on his conception of the power and the way which he believes would lead to the goal of his soul’s sincere desire. There are two principal ways in which he has tried to avail himself of the resources of this power for the fulfilment of his needs. Where he recognises the power as a divine being with whom he may have communion and communication, his approach has been one of submission and appeal; where he conceives of the power only as the reservoir of elemental forces, he has sought to tap and harness it and make it subserve his own end. The principle upon which he works in this case is one of technique, seeking to secure the proper means to the end that have control over elemental forces. Magic is the second course by which man seeks to reach the goal of achievements of self-effort and his own independent devices. It will, however, be deluding ourselves that, anywhere in the world, man always makes a clear distinction in practice between these two courses. (p. 189).

At the crux of the matter we are involved with here lies the capacity, in all sincerity, to determine where the line is to be drawn between the true religious practice and the false, in the art of meeting human needs (real or perceived). Even in the ancient and present Israelite societies, the true religious and magical practices existed and do exist side by side, attracting heavy clientele on either side. On the matter of the relation between religion and magic, Idowu (1973) admitted that;

They both arise out of man’s sense of need and it is very probably on this that some scholars have based the theory that religion and magic have a common origin. (p. 190-191).

Pratt (1946) further explained that;

The felt relation of the individual to the cosmic power and responses to which it led developed ...into two interlocking though distinguishable phenomena which may be called private magic and private worship. (p. 310).

### **Resurgence of Divination in Modern Pentecostal Prophetic Movement**

It is not very clear if, in embracing the Christian faith, the African changed his fundamental indigenous worldview to suit that of the new faith. Thus, Maxey and Danfulani (2019) asserted that;

The gulf between Bible-based Christianity and African Traditional Religion is demonstrated by their basic understanding of the purpose of life... From the Bible perspective, real meaning in life can only be found in the restoration of fellowship with God that was lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed in the Garden of Eden. That restoration is possible only through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). For African Traditional Religion... The purpose of life is

seeking for (human) well-being, both physical and spiritual. The focus of life is overwhelmingly this- worldly and self-focused. The physical and emotional and material prosperity and the longevity of humankind sums up the ultimate purposes of human existence. (pp. 77-80).

Thus, for the African, embracing Christianity was not just as simple as converting to a new faith. The major difficulty was that of changing his worldview from a well-being-centred orientation to a divine-relationship-centred orientation. The African Christian convert has remained in this transition on a back and forth motion, caught up between two irreconcilable worldviews. Indeed, in the 1930s, the Africans formulated their own version of Christianity, called African Indigenous Churches, where there was a strong effort to reflect the African indigenous religious aspirations in the Christian faith.

A number of features of African indigenous religious orientation became dominant in the African indigenous churches. These features include:

- a. Imprecation: Using God's word , especially the Old Testament, to raise the typical traditional African curses against one's enemies (real or perceived); and
- b. Divination, Prophecy, Revelation: Inquiring into the past and the future, to know what past errors need to be corrected or atoned for (with sacrifices) and what mishaps in the future need to be averted (also with sacrifices).

What is very clear, therefore, is that the African, in embracing the Christian faith, did not witness a substantial change in intrinsic religious orientation, but remained in his fundamental resolve. What has happened therefore is that as far back as the time of formation of the African indigenous Churches, the African had only sought a new definition of his fundamental religious orientation in the context of the new faith. It is therefore not surprising that the fundamental African religious aspiration such as divination has found expression in new forms in the Christian faith.

Of course, the Christian worldview properly understood would actually have no place for divination for the purpose for which it exists in the African religious orientation. This is because, for the Christian, life is basically about building a relationship with God and living a life of absolute trust in, and dependence upon his will, in the understanding that whatever he allows is ultimately for the good of the person. For that reason, the fact of probing into the past to seek to correct what has been wrongly done, and peeping into the future to ensure that it has no incident mishaps, does not arise, *ab initio*.

### **The Pentecostal Prophetic Movement**

The history of modern Pentecostalism can be traced, according to Ward (1988), to January 1901; when Miss Agnes Ozman, a student at Bethel College Topeka, Kansas, spoke in tongues after the Principal, Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929) laid hands on her and prayed for her to receive the Holy Spirit. Henceforth, for Pentecostals, the supreme sign of being baptised in the Spirit would be speaking in tongues. This is considered to be the gateway to vivid experience of God, lively worship, the gifts of the Spirit, especially divine healing and power for Christian witness and service. (p. 503).

The Pentecostal movement evoked a fresh fervour and emphasis on the operation and gifts of the Holy Spirit, prominent among which became the prophetic utterance. Uttering prophetic mysteries, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, revelation of mysteries, became a spectacular feature of the Pentecostal movement. These features became a vital component of the Pentecostal Movement, as it came to be called.

For the African Christian audience, this new Pentecostal prophetic movement became an answer to the age-long desire for spiritual inquiry or divination. A vast array of issues feature in the new Pentecostal prophetic ministrations, ranging from assuaging the anger of dead relatives over non-fulfilment of burial rites, believed to be causing setbacks in the family; the cause of affliction or death of a family member, often traceable to an evil person in or outside the family, the burial of an evil material underground in the family being responsible for disasters; a visitation upon the present family of an evil meted out on someone in the past, such as a native doctor who buried a human being alive to establish his altar, and

so on. These prophetic ministrations, like their African divination counterpart, are not complete without a mention of the sacrifice to be performed to remedy the situation. That is actually the root of all the seed sowing and sacrifice now popular in modern Pentecostal churches.

For Maxey and Danfulani (2019), what is happening is simply an act of syncretism, mixing the Christian gospel with non-Christian religious practices. They asserted that;

As the Christian Church continues to dabble in its own confusion and lingering syncretism, there can be no question that it provides an ever-open door for the growth of such religion, including this kind of revival of the ATR that has been here for hundreds of years. Also, with the rise in popularity of open expressions of ATR, there is parallel continuing growth of overt and covert animistic practices within the four walls of many of our Christian churches. (p. 199).

While in some of the cases, it is an importation and adaptation of unchristian practices into the Christian framework, in some others, it is a total backsliding from the Christian faith to other faiths. In some other cases, it is an attempt at a liturgical hybridization of two or more faiths.

Maxey and Danfulani expressed it thus;

At the same time, it seems clear that African Traditional Religion is not going to disappear any time in the near future. There is evidence it is growing stronger. In view of the disastrous failure of the African Church to resist the seduction of several false gospels in recent decades, it is no wonder that there are a number of people abandoning Christianity altogether. Some are returning to Islam. In Yoruba, for example, there has been a modernization of ATR Ifa worship going on for thirty years. It has attracted many followers, including many dropping out of Christian churches. A liturgical “holy book” imitating the Christian Holy Bible and Muslim Glorious Qur’an has been produced. Buildings similar to Christian churches have been constructed, each of them led by their own babalawo. In the Benue trough of Central Nigeria, Adzov New Religious Movements have emerged and built church-like buildings with their own liturgy, doctrines and retinue of clergy. In those liturgical centres, theological training is going on based on the worldview and myths that have been passed down for generations within the Ifa system. (pp. 198, 199).

Quite clearly, the world is caught up in an irrefutable spate of religious confusion, borne out of strange irrepressible pressures of modern development. Curiosity is on the increase. People are looking for something that is working, whatever it is. Exactly as Dr. Henry Spark, one-time Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO, put it, many years ago;

What we need is a man of sufficient stature to pull our allegiance together and bring us out of the economic morass in which we have been steeped. Give us such a man; whether he be God or the devil, we shall receive him.

The world couldn't care less anymore what is liturgically correct or not. What the world needs now is whatever that brings result, whatever it is, and whatever is the source of power by which it works. The world is growing evidently impatient with the endless strings of fruitless verbal theorizing that produces little or no result to cushion the effects of escalating developmental pressures. That is, in fact, the explanation behind the growing trends of secularism on one hand, and escalating syncretism on the other. The one extreme is the hopeless impatience leading to the outright repudiation of religion altogether, so called secularism. On the other extreme is the concerted desperation to beef up on religion with the active components of the other or others, in the desperate bid to achieve result, so called syncretism. In all, it all stems from one and the same objective which is the human desire to meet ends and achieve set goals.

## **Conclusion**

Divination is visibly a vital religious operation of the ancient Israelite society. Even in the ancient times, some of the divination operations seemed to be approved while some were described as “lying”. The ancient Israelite performance of that religious role required the use of some devices such as the linen ephod and the Urim and Thummim. Those devices, nonetheless, fizzled out with time. Divination is an



essential feature of the indigenous religious aspirations of the African. It was a prominent feature of the African Traditional Religion. It has remained a major aspect of the African religious orientation such that even at the point of embracing Christianity with its different worldview, this religious characteristic of the African did not change. It is clear that this divination, indigenous to the African religious roots, is reinventing itself in various forms in the modern Pentecostal operations in Africa. Elements of non-Christian practices may be subtly filtering into this prophetic movement, so called, because the modern world is under such severe pressure and in such a desperate haste for something that produces desired result, whether it fits into the definition of true religion or not. On one hand, there is the growing impatience with religion, leading to its outright repudiation, so called secularism. On the other hand there is the desire to beef up one's religion with the active components of other religions in the desperate search for desired result. All told, Christian leaders must however rise up to defend the faith from the enormity of false religions infiltrating, and seeking to infiltrate and corrupt it.

### References

- Abimbola, W. (1977). *Ifa divination poetry*. Lagos: Nok.
- Adeyemo, T. (1979). *Salvation in African tradition*. Nairobi: Evangel.
- Albright, W. F. (1961). *Samuel and the beginnings of the prophetic movement*.
- Amadiume, I. (1997). *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, religion and culture*. London: Zed.
- Anderson, A.H. (2013). *An introduction to Pentecostalism: Global charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Bediako, K. (2000). *Jesus in Africa: the Christian Gospel in African history and experience*. Carlisle, CA.
- Boadt, L. (1990). Ezekiel. In R.E. Brown et al (Eds). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: The Tower Building.
- Braun, J. (1698). *De Vistitu Sacerdotum*. Ugolini.
- Busia, K.A.B. (1955). *The African worldview in Christianity and culture*. Accra: Christian Council of Gold Coast.
- Chambers, O. (1992). *My utmost for his highest, an updated edition in today's language*. New Jersey: Oswald Chambers.
- Clifford, R.J. (1990). Exodus. In R.E. Brown et. al (Eds.) ). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: The Tower Building.
- Danfulani, U.H.D. (2012). African culture, Christ and the academia: The need to Christainize the African cultural matrix. In *Ogbomosh Journal of Theology*. Volume XVII (1).
- Dolamo, R.T.H. (2008). Crucial aspects of an authentic relevant African Christian Theology. In *Missionalia- Southern African Journal of Missiology*, 36, 2/3 August November 2008.
- Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge.
- Faley, R.J. Leviticus. In R.E. Brown et. al (Eds.) ). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: The Tower Building.
- Fashole, E.W. (2004). What is the African Christian Theology? In *Communio Viatorum*, 17:97f
- Fleming, D. (2005). *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and mission*. England: Inter-Varsity.
- Fuller, L. (2001). *A missionary handbook on African traditional religion*. Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks.
- Gehman, R. (2013). *African traditional religion in the light of the Bible*. Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks.
- Gehman, R. (1987). *Doing African Christian Theology: An evangelical perspective*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing.
- Gleason, J. (1973). *A recitation of Ifa Oracle of the Yoruba*. New York: Grossman.
- Hallgren, R. (1988). *The good things in life: A study of the traditional religious culture of the Yoruba people*. Loberod: Plus-Lustra.
- Harrison, R. K. (1969). *Introduction to the Old Testament*. London: Inter-Varsity.
- Idowu, E.B. (1973). *African traditional religion: A definition*. London: SCM.

- Maxey, G.S. & Danfulani, U.H.D (2019). *Juju vs. Christianity: An African dilemma*. Lagos: WATS.
- O'Connor, M. (1990). Judges. In R.E. Brown et. al (Eds.) ). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: The Tower Building.
- Onunwa, U.R. (1984). *The study of the West African traditional religion in time perspective*. Nsukka University. (Ph.D Thesis).
- Parrinder, E.G. (1962). *African traditional religion*. London: SPCK.
- Vawter, B. (1990). Introduction to Prophetic Literature. .In R.E. Brown et. al (Eds.) ). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: The Tower Building.
- Ward, J.W. (1988). Pentecostalist Theology. In S.B. Ferguson et. al (Eds.) *New Dictionary of Theology*. England: Inter-Varsity.
- Wright, J.S. (1982). Divination. In J.D. Douglas et. al (Eds.). *New Bible Dictionary*. England: Inter-Varsity.