



Ancient Beliefs in the Primordial Forces of Sacred Waters and their Religious Implications in an *Aladura* Church in Nigeria

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Abstract. Water has a central place in ancient myths of creation and mythologies and it has never been viewed as an ordinary element but as having both spiritual and physical potentials and properties in religious circles as well as an elemental force in nature. It has symbolically represented many things in religions, humanity and waters were given mythological veneration in many stories of the ancient Mesopotamian world. The gap filled in this study was the nexus of primordial waters and its implications in the liturgy of a foremost Aladura church, Christ Apostolic Church, which has not been given scholarly considerations and presented. The goal of the paper is to espouse the ancient beliefs in the primordial forces of waters and their cosmic significance to the humans and their implications in the liturgy of the this Aladura church. As a result, this paper is premised on the relevance of water to religions as the ancient people viewed it and its roles in the liturgy of CAC. It used the historical-traditional methods of approach to unravel the mysteries believed to be associated with waters in religions. The study espoused the marriage of water and creation, living entity and procreation force in water and as a cogent healing instrument in the liturgy of the church. The forces and properties of water and its significance in religions are brought into focus in this piece, the crux of this paper is the religious significance of water in this Aladura Church, Christ Apostolic Church, Nigeria and Overseas in her healing ministrations. Findings showed that water is a living entity in many religions and prominently featured in the liturgy of this Aladura denomination thereby buttressing contextualization of Christian religion in African context.

Keywords: Primordial Waters, Forces, Implications, Liturgy, *Aladura* Church

1. Introduction

Water occupies a central place in the ancient myths and mythology. This is noticeable in the myth of the creation of the earth and man in the ancient near eastern world, especially the Sumerian and Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. It is also significant in the practices and beliefs of many living religions in the world today. Scientifically, water is a common chemical substance or liquid. It plays significant roles in the existence of the world. It is an essential elemental force for the survival of all known forms of life. Water exists in three states. The first is the liquid form, which is common to humans; the second is the solid or ice form and the third is the vapour form in the atmosphere. It could be argued that water covers over 71% of planet earth and it covers the oceans and bodies of human beings. It is submitted by the hydrologists that out of 71% of the earth's water, the oceans contain 97.2% of the Earth water (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water>).

In the ancient myths and mythology, water was regarded as a living entity and it was common to nearly all the notable myths and mythology of the Mesopotamian world. It should be noted that water was given a prominent place in the practices and beliefs of many ancient religions in the ancient near east. It could be argued that there has been veneration of water in the ancient myths and mythology. There are many reasons for the prominence given to water. In a region where there was drought and scarcity of water, it could not but be regarded as vital to the survival of mankind. Water was also treated as a primary building block of life.

It is believed that without water, there is no life or existence. Man is inevitably dependent on water

because of its life-giving nature as believed by the ancient people just as he is dependent on God for other means of survivals. In a dry land and season, water could not but be crucial to the existence of humans. The primordial forces of waters manifest in many ways; in the existence of man, religions and beliefs or practices in the ancient and modern world.

In the liturgical practices of many living religions especially in Africa waters still play certain role ranging from ritual baths, healing baths, propitiations, ritual cleansing, during the Holy Communion service, cleaning of the sanctuaries, watering the life flowers and gardens around the church premises and others. In particular, the liturgy of the Christ Apostolic Church Nigeria and Overseas, a foremost classical Pentecostal church in African, water features in her practices and ministry, which is our focus in this study.

1.1 Water in Sumerian Epic

The creators of civilization in lower Mesopotamia in modern Southern Iraq were the Sumerians as Bright (1980:30) rightly observes. And it was acclaimed that it was the Sumerians who introduced the art of writing (1980:31). The Sumerians were pantheistic in religion and the head of their gods was *Enlil*, lord of the storm. Different cults existed for various gods and purposes among the Sumerians. According to the Sumerian Creation Epic or myth, it was *Nammu*, the Sea mother or goddess who gave birth to heaven and earth. This is to show that the creation of the earth was not without the forces of waters. The sea goddess, *Nammu* and *Enki* the god of wisdom were responsible for the creation of humans with the germinating powers of the clay and water of the abyss. The creative force of water was displayed during the creation of man. Human beings were not created without the forces of waters applied (SOURCES). One wonders because over seventy percent of the body of human beings consists of water.

According to Wolkstein and Kramer (1983:139), the Sumerian word for water means *semen*. This was to show the belief of the antiquities in the reproductive property of water that men witnessed in plants and vegetation when they are watered during the agricultural exercises and the resurgence of aquatic mammals according to their belief during rainy season. It was believed among the Sumerians that water has power to create, give life and in actual fact, water is life (SOURCES).. This was displayed in the production power of water in seed, fruits, plants, trees, fishes and other aquatic creatures. When you give water to your plants and other agricultural seeds, it gives them power to produce. After all, water is equal

to *semen* in Sumerian language to show its reproductive properties. The Sumerian epic demonstrated and celebrated the generative power of river water in the creation of man and plants.

In the Epic of the Sumerians, *Enuma Elish* here was the existence of paradise—a pure and clean place, a land of the living, which knows no sickness, death or strife (SOURCES).. As peaceful as this place was, it lacked one thing, fresh water. It was *Enki*, the clever water god who brought water to this garden (<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/enuma.html>). This may be argued to be a mythology for the crucial place of water in the existence of man. With reference to the accounts of the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis and the mountain of God in Ezekiel, there are pointers to waters in the garden (cf. Gen. 2:8-14; Eze. 47:1-12; cf. Zech. 13:8; Joel. 4:18). There is a similarity here between the Sumerian Epic of creation on a Garden and the Genesis account of the creation and Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:12-14), even though one was mythological while the other was historicized.

Water was regarded as a *creator* in its own right. It was regarded as co-creator of heaven and earth with other gods according to the ancient myth. Water also has other properties other than creative and reproductive properties. It has both punitive and destructive powers according to the Sumerians (Krama, 1961:93-138). This was demonstrated when the gods were annoyed with the sons of men because they disturbed the serenity of the gods and were unruly. The gods decided to destroy the seed of mankind through a flood and this was the Sumerian record of the Flood. (SOURCES). A cross-reference to the Genesis account of the Deluge points to the similarity in this area between the Sumerian epic and Mosaic account in Genesis 6-9 on the Flood in the time of Noah. In the Sumerian mythology, water is also personified as a god who can create. It was regarded to be in existence before the creation of mankind or gods. It was cosmic water according to the Sumerian epic, which has influence over the existence of mankind and hence the universe was portrayed as created out of the chaotic seas. In a dry and desert climate like that of the Sumerians, without modern technology on hydrology, water could not but be seen as essential to life and existence of man. It was seen as a source of life and giver of life.

1.2 Water Cult in Canaanite Religion

Canaanite religions revolved around water cult and fertility due to their topography and agrarian lifestyles. Water cult in Canaanite religion could be linked with the cult of *El*, *Baal*, *Anat*, a consort of Baal as well as

god of fecundity and war, *Asherahs* and *Ashteroths*. This was as a result of the agricultural life of the Canaanites, which surrounded the giving of water by *Baal* who was also believed to be responsible for fertility in the land. The Canaanites were agrarian and the need for water surrounded the cult of *Baal*. *Baal* was believed to be the storm god of the Canaanites and god of fertility who gave water and productivity to their agricultural produce. The cult of *El*, the head of the Canaanite pantheons also existed in the Canaanite religion. According to Pope, as quoted by Clifford, *El's* abode was localized in aqueous and subterranean environs, the place of the subterranean waters.

The waters of *El's* River are life-giving because the abode of *El* was placed in paradise, the source of life-giving waters (Clifford:1972:50-51). The Canaanite gods were personified nature. *El*, the father of all pantheons and *Baal*, god of storm and fertility gave waters for fruitfulness and abundance in their agricultural life. In one of the monuments of the Phoenicians, as illustrated by Clifford, the mountain of *El* joined the heaven. On this mountain is concentrated the mysterious powers of life, the source of life-giving water (Clifford, 51). It could be argued therefore that the Ugaritic mythology about the abode of *El* was connected with the water cult. The dwelling of *El* is the source of the cosmic waters because it is life-giving water (Clifford, 96). It sustains the soul and body of man and keeps the plants growing and the water cult in Canaanite religion or belief revolved around their gods who gave the water for survival. With this religious belief in mind, water cult played significant roles in the lives of the Canaanites.

1.3 The Babylonian Epic of Creation and Water

The Babylonian epic of creation was composed in order to give an epic of creation and the roles played by primordial waters of the sea. Water was believed to be in existence before the creation of heaven and earth. It was believed that when the heaven was not yet above and no earth beneath, there had been water. The water goddess, *Tiamat* gave birth to the earth, heaven, gods, and other planets. When *Apsu* and *Tiamat* mixed their waters together, the creation was produced. The Assyrio-Babylonian mythology states that the gods and subsequently, all beings arose from the fusion of salt water personified in *Tiamat* and sweet water personified in *Apsu* (SOURCES). *Apsu*, according to Babylon mythology, is the embodiment of the fresh water abyss that lies beneath the Earth. From *Tiamat's* water came forth the clouds and her tears became the source of Tigris and the Euphrates (Krammer, 1961). *Tiamat* is familiar as the primordial sea in the Babylonian creation epic. It was regarded as unruly water; its equivalent was Unruly Sea, personified in

Mot, the water goddess. The Babylonian epic describes the creation as a result of the victory of *Marduk*, the head of the Babylonian pantheon, over *Tiamat*, the unruly sea. We can submit that water is the creative force behind the planet earth and human beings, according to this epic, once again demonstrates the primordial forces of waters in the ancient beliefs in water.

1.4 Genesis Creation Story and Primordial Waters

The Jewish cosmological narration about the creation of the world includes the primordial water and its forces. The author of Genesis admits that before heaven and earth came into existence, there has been the presence of primordial water. In the Jewish narration, at the outset we have a primordial sea lying in darkness, while the *wind* or *Spirit* (ru'ach) of Yahweh blew over it. There are heavenly waters and earthly waters in the Jewish conception of creation. This may be reference to the ancient world belief that heavenly water in form of rain comes from the heavenly ocean (Riggren: 1966:106) in order to water and fertilize the earth. So, the author of Genesis chapter one and two also supports the water myths but in its historicized manner in his creation narration. The Jews also hold the mythological view of punitive and destructive forces of waters not as the Sumer and Babylonians hold it but in the historical senses of forces of waters. The Jews considered waters as instrument of punishment in the hands of Yahweh and not part of the creation or co-creator with Him.

The author of Genesis creation story admits the primordial forces of waters. The water at the creation was chaotic water. Perhaps, it was viewed as an impediment which the creating activities of Yahweh later overcame. The great sea creatures in Israelite liturgy were waters personified; they were regarded as living creatures that *entered in to battles* with Yahweh. These water creatures are mentioned on the pages of biblical texts such as Sea Dragon, Rahab, Leviathan and the like. Ringgren points out that the Hebrew word for primordial water is *ʾhom* and shows that it is etymologically identical with the Babylonian *Tiamat* (1966:107). In the Jewish Psalter, this was sung later on by the Psalmist on the victory of Yahweh over a sea Dragon or Leviathan (cf. Ps.104:9; 148:6; 74:13; Job 26:12). Psalm 109 could be regarded as a composition on the victory of Yahweh over the unruly waters in Jewish historicized account of the Babylonian mythological waters. Nevertheless, it was demonstrated that they were controlled or conquered by the mighty demonstrations of Yahweh and His creative word (cf. Psa. 33:5-6). A comparative analysis of the Babylonian Epic of Creation and

Canaanite mythology with the Israelite story of Creation would show a similitude. Moreover, Canaanite influence on Jewish idea of creation was betrayed on the biblical text of the Judeo-Christian creation traditions.

In a nutshell, it was admitted that water was present at the outset of creation in the Jewish story of creation and played significant roles in controlling the universe and sustaining mankind on the planet. The reproductive power of water was also demonstrated in the Creation story as we see aquatic mammals and other creatures coming out of water during the creation (cf. Gen. 1:20-21) after Yahweh gave the command. The writer of Genesis has also presented to us both the peaceful and life-giving force of water incorporated into the Garden of Eden story. The elemental punitive property of water was not hidden from us as well. The first he did by presenting waters in the Garden of Eden created by God. The second he demonstrated by the Deluge that came upon mankind as a result of their sins. The reason for the Flood according to the Sumerian myth was as a result of the disturbance of the gods by mankind but the Jewish reason borders on moral failure and wickedness of mankind. This marks the difference between the Jewish history and others; it was historicized in the Jewish account while it was mythologized in others. Hence we see primordial water as ancient, present in creation, controlled, curtailed and “conquered” by Yahweh, peaceful, life-giving and punitive according to the Genesis account. However, the primordial waters are destructive and inimical to God in the creation. As defeated enemies of God, the primordial waters are now under check (cf. Psalm 104). They are also tools in the hands of God. We can see that water was primal, chaotic, in two major divisions—male and female— and productive, comforting, punitive and destructive in nature.

1.5 Mosaic Periods and Primordial Force of Water

It was certain that Moses was born in Egypt. Egypt according to Herodotus as quoted by Kitchen (1982:302-) is regarded as “gift of the Nile” based on the fact that the agricultural survival of the nation depended on the Nile. For life-giving water, Egypt depended on the Nile, wherever the Nile waters reached, vegetation could grow, aquatic animals could exist and agricultural produce could be splendidous. Moses as a great leader and prophet in Israel had contact with waters right from the cradle. Noth’s criticism (1972:172-177) among other scholars about the historicity of Moses has long been discarded and we maintain a traditional view about the historicity of Moses as he was presented to us in the Pentateuchal traditions. Moses belonged to the tribe of Levi in the

clan of Kohath and to the house or family of Amram (Ex. 2:1-2; 6:16ff). Exodus 2:10 gives us a glimpse of his name, Moses, “*she called his name Moseh; and she said, ‘Because I drew him (mesitihu) out of the water’*”. Thus it is glaring that Moses was linked with water and his being taken from the waterside.

The roles played by water, especially the Nile in the history of Moses and the Israelites during their enslavement could be divided into two: *destruction and safety*. The midwives were instructed by Pharaoh to destroy the male children inside the Nile, which they refused to carry out. To Moses, it was safety because he was saved through the intervention of Pharaoh’s daughter. To the Israelites, water was a means of Yahweh’s intervention and deliverance for them as they crossed the Red Sea which also submerged and drowned the Egyptians. To the Egyptians, it was destruction when Moses commanded the water to turn to blood. One of the plagues performed by Moses was centered on the Nile, which was turned into blood like other water resources in Egypt (cf. Ex. 2:16-19; Ex. 7:14-21). The reason for this was to attack the source of life of the Egyptians. All humans and aquatic creatures were affected by the plague in the water. So, if there was no water, there was no life. This shows the significance of waters to humankind.

2. The Red Sea Episode

The Red Sea encounter was very significant in Jewish history because it was a miraculous intervention from Yahweh. God of Israel enabled Israelites to escape from the Egyptian pursuit in the wilderness after their Exodus from Egypt by parting the Red Sea. In Israelite poetic expressions and their liturgy, the Red Sea was regarded as a contending power and an obstruction to the salvific activities of Yahweh but which eventually gave way as a result of His instruction to Moses. Here Yahweh was presented as demonstrating His omnipotence over the elemental forces of waters in nature. The parting and crossing of the Red Sea shows that Yahweh, God of Israel has power over nature, even the mighty oceans and that He could determine their fullness or recession. Here again water was portrayed to be powerful and as well as instrumental in the salvation of Israel. It was an instrument of punishment from God against the Egyptians because they were drowned and all died in the water (Ex. 14; 15:1-21). It was a blessing for the Israelites because Yahweh used it to give them a passage to the Promised Land. The theological import of this episode to the Israelites was that the Red Sea was an obstruction to the fulfillment of the promise of Yahweh but was overcome by Yahweh for His people. This was later on interpreted metaphorically in the history of Israel as

water baptism for Israel (1 Cor. 10:1-2). It was believed that the spiritual dirt of Egypt was washed away through the passage of the Red Sea. It was later on metaphorically interpreted as baptism for the Israelites under Moses, their Shepherd. Also, the origin of Christian water baptism was traced to this episode in the Exodus Tradition.

3. Monarchical Periods and Water

The monarchical period in Israel also witnessed the battle for waters. The major battle of Elijah against the prophets of *Baal* was centered on the provision of rainwater and its source. The contention was who gave water, Yahweh or *Baal*? The Canaanites were agrarian and their source of living depended on agricultural produce. As a result, they revered water and had water cults, which revolved around the cults of *El* and *Baal*. The Israelites who were nomads and whose major occupation was animal husbandry fell into this religious error when they got to the land of Canaan (Akao,). They forsook pure Yahwism and pitched their tents with *Baal* and syncretic Yahwism. Elijah pronounced drought that there would be neither rain nor dew for some periods in order to determine the Giver of water between Yahweh and *Baal* in the land. After his victory on Mount Carmel over the prophets of *Baal*, he prayed to Yahweh as the true Giver of water and not Canaanite *Baal* and there was water down pour (cf. 1 Kgs. 16-18).

The first miracle that Elisha performed was on water at Jericho. As Yahweh divided River Jordan before the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land, Yahweh also proved the double power of His Spirit on Elisha by dividing the same River Jordan. On the other side of Jordan at Jericho, the people could not drink the water because it was producing death and sickness. The prophetic decree of Elisha with the power in the salt was employed in order to bring healing to the water (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:19-22). The water was crucial, scarce and impure during the time of Elisha and there was a need for cleansing which Elisha did. During the monarchical period, the armies of Israel and Judah could not fight in the battlefield as a result of thirst for water. They had to seek the help of a Prophet in person of Elisha who prophesied the provision of water in the valley (cf. 2 Kgs. 3). Elisha also demonstrated the healing properties of water when he asked Namaan, the Syrian to go and bathe for the healing of his leprosy. Having carried out this prophetic exercise, he achieved the desired result. All these show the importance of water to the living and its crucial role in all seasons in human life.

4. Water in Judaism

It should be noted that there is no water cult, god or goddess in Judaism. So also, there is no water worship in Judaism. This was to avoid the veneration of the various elements of nature, contrary to the Canaanite socio-cultural and religious lifestyles. However, some rivers or waters were regarded to be of higher value than others in Judaism due to the miracles and prophetic contacts of certain personages in Israel who had encounters with them such as River Jordan. It was seen as a means of survival or else, there is no life. God gave Israelites water from the rock in the wilderness lest they die of dehydration. Water marked the last gate of escape from Egyptian enslavement, the Red (Reed) Sea episode. Water marked the first gate or a means of entrance to the Promised Land through River Jordan. The symbolic meaning of which was to display the victory of Yahweh over the unruly Sea, personified in the Sea creatures.

There was a belief in the cleansing properties of water as an elemental force in nature in Judaism. Judaism gives room for the use of water in its religious liturgies. Religious washing was allowed and it was believed to restore or maintain a state of ritual purity. The *Torah* stipulated the washing of hands, the hands and feet; and/or total immersion which must be done in living water that is, the sea, a river, a spring or in a *mikveh*. A *mikveh* is a Jewish ritual bath used for cleansing after contact with a dead body or after menstruation. This was to show the power of the water to remove ceremonial stains, cleanse biological impurity and make the priests fit for Temple Worship in their liturgy.

During the Temple times, ablutions were practised by three categories of people: The first category were Priests during offertory, the second were the new converts to Judaism as part of the condition or initiation rites and lastly, women on the seventh day after their menstrual period.

In a nutshell, water in Judaism is important for its cleansing properties. It is believed to be capable of washing away ritual impurities and pollutants. The cleansing properties, purifying forces and washing effects of water also call for this. It is a rite that must be performed by the Priests before any sacrifice to Yahweh. During inter-testamental period, water baptism or immersion in water was carried out. The Essenes and the Qumran community both practised ablution and baptism for the proselytes (McCain, 2005:40). The Essenes were a sect of Judaism located at Qumran community in the Judean desert (Kafan, 2001:113). They practised the *Torah* to its strictest

extent and we can say that the Essenes shunned every external impurity. After one has applied to be a member, he would be baptized as a way of washing and cleansing from pollutants. The Proselytes too who were Gentile converts to Judaism were necessarily expected to pass through the rituals of circumcision and water baptism in Judaism (Kafan, 2001:121).

It may be argued that the multidimensional properties and qualities of waters make the elemental forces appear to be living or animated also in Jewish religious-cultural treatment of waters. The religious psychology in man makes waters, be it rainwater, lakes, ponds, streams, rivers, falls, lagoons, and sea and so on to receive vital religious attentions. Water is always in motion, hence we say “running water”; in Judaism it is a “living water”, meaning any water used for purification must be flowing and running. Water has power to dissolve dirt from objects and, as a result, it is the most suitable physical elemental force for purifying the soul from moral dirt and religious sins. It is glaring that one major usage of water is as an instrument of the religious purification and expiation (cf. Mat. 3:1-4; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:1-3).

5. Water in the New Testament

The first contact of the New Testament with water is on the baptism of John the Baptist to repentance at River Jordan. It should be said that the miracle of crossing River Jordan in the time of Joshua (cf. Jos. 3-4) and the miracle of washing, cleansing and healing of Naman, the Syrian (cf. 2 Kg. 5:5) would have made this River miraculous to the early Christians. Thus, it assumed purification and expiation properties in the time of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. John the Baptist interpreted water baptism as a symbol of purification and as a mark of cleansing from sin after repentance. The ministry of Jesus Christ has many bearings on the forces of waters. The miracles of Jesus Christ also involved the usage of waters which played major roles. In Johannine account of the miracles of Jesus Christ, the first one was on water, turning it to wine (cf. Jn. 5:2-7) in order to save the bridegroom from social embarrassment during his marriage ceremony. Jesus employed the force of water in His mouth-saliva to bring about a miracle of regaining the sight of the man born blind. In actual fact, the miracle was not complete until there was water contact from the Pool of Siloam (cf. 9:6-7). Jesus Christ also walked on water to show His power over nature and He stilled the storm on the sea, a replica of God’s victory over the sea Dragon in the Old Testament according to the Psalmist (cf. Ps.104:9; 148:6; 74:13; Mt. 14:22-33; Mk. 5:35-41).

The salvation of whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ also involves the forces of waters. The salvation is not complete until he or she is washed and purified through water baptism (cf. Mk. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:18-19). Water baptism seals his or her salvation in Jesus Christ. So, the disciples of Jesus Christ were commanded to go and baptize the converts in the water. The climax of New Testament on water comes out when Jesus Christ declares He is the living Water (cf. Jn. 4:1-42) who can quench the thirst of mankind forever. Jesus promised His disciples a new heaven and earth. In this new place, water is shown to be there for healing of nations and quenching the thirst of everyone forever (cf. Rev. 22:12).

6. Water in African Traditional Religion

African concepts of the activities of God in nature and among human beings extend to area of giving and use of waters. Africans also believe in the fertility power of water just like the ancient Sumerians and Canaanites. Mbiti (1969:65) submits that Banyarwanda women of a child-bearing age are careful to leave water ready, before they go to bed, so that God may use it to create children for them. This is known or popularly called, “God’s water” (Mbiti, 65). This, once again, points to the belief in the fertility power or property of water. Africans do not view waters as ordinary elements in nature. Rather it is spiritually and religiously viewed as potent, symbolic and powerful. Water is personified, animated, potent and powerful from the African cosmological view.

There is water worship in Africa especially in Yoruba land. People living in certain watersides personify waters in these areas especially the riverside areas. There are sacred days and weeks ear-marked for the worship of these waters. There are also certain taboos that are associated with the water cults in Yoruba land. There selected waters which are regarded as sacred and as a result, they are not used for domestic purposes such as cooking, washing and for agricultural reasons. The waters are used for spiritual, liturgical and ritualistic purposes. They make offerings and sacrifices to rivers in order to gain their favour. People who worship certain waters also have water priests and priestesses who mediate between them, the water divinities and goddesses. Also, certain divinities and spirits are attributed to waters, rivers, oceans, ponds, streams and lakes in traditional African settings. According to Mbiti they are often thought to be inhabited by spirits or divinities who generally must be propitiated when people use the water in one way or the other (Mbiti, 1969:126). Awolalu (1979:46) supports this notion when he makes a remark that certain goddesses such as Malokun with waters in

river side areas in Ondo state and *Yemoja*, associated with river *Ògún*; being worshipped by people in Abeokuta. *Oya* who was a wife of *Sàngó* is the goddess of the River Niger, commonly referred to as *Odò Oya*; *Òsun* is the tutelary goddess believed to be the divinity of *Òsun* River in Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. It is believed that these gods and/or goddesses provide for man's needs, control the abundant supply of fish and give fertility to barren women when propitiated and patronized. Some water goddesses such as *Oya* can be associated with natural water disaster such as heavy storm, sea surging, flood or the uprooting of trees and house roofs (Awolalu, 1979:47-48).

In African settings, water also plays major roles in rituals and sacrifices performed by the traditionalists. Elements of such sacrifices in Africa include foodstuffs such as fruits, maize, pap, rice, beans, grains, vegetables, and some liquid substances such as milk, beer, gin, wine and water. Another person of higher religious or social status could sprinkle water on the recipient during prayers for healing or blessing in African settings (Mbiti: 1969:22). The forces of waters could be applied for medical and therapeutic reasons in African settings. The healing property of water has been highlighted by Anselm Adodo (2004:63-66) to show its indispensability to mankind. Also, Adamo, (2005: 51) opines that African hydrotherapy involves the use of cold or hot water in their healing cultural practices.

7. Christianity and Water in the Liturgy of an *Aladura* Church: CAC

Nearly all the Christian sects have the initiation ritual commonly called *baptism* or *water baptism*. The Christian baptism has its origins in the symbolism of the Israelites being led by Moses out of slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea. It also originated from the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in River Jordan in the New Testament. The practice of water baptism within Christianity could be traced to the command of Jesus Christ commonly referred to as the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk.16:15-16). It should be noted that water baptism is not believed to be capable of cleansing one from sin but is rather a symbolism of inner purification. It is also a public declaration of a person's belief and faith in Jesus Christ within the Christian fold.

In Christianity, water serves as a purifying elemental force. Water baptism is a crucial rite that one must undergo before he is welcomed to the Church within the Christian fold. The Church also uses water in her liturgical ministry such as the Holy Communion for

washing of hands before the service. The cultic acts through water are purposely for purification, sprinkling and immersion in Christianity. Here again in Christianity, it is obvious that religion cannot do without the elemental force of water even though there is no veneration of water or water cult in it but the influence of water as a purifying force cannot not be ignored. Water symbolizes life. It gives life and its coming during winter is a symbol of life to the vegetation and humans.

This may responsible for its use in the healing ministry of the ancients and the indigenous *Aladura* Churches in Africa. The healing ministry of this *Aladura* Church is greatly tied to the apron of the belief in the forces of living water (Alabi, 2016:vii; Olusheye, 2009,12). This started with the epochal ministry of Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola in 1928 theophany he had and the great 1930 revival at Oke-Ooye, Ilesa, in the present Osun state, Nigeria (Ademakinwa, 1971:78-103). The first person to use water in the church at her embryonic stage was Sophia Odunlami, later Sophia Ajayi in the year 1918 through rain water for healing from influenza and smallpox (Ademakinwa). God called Joseph Ayo Babalola in 9th, 10th, 11th October, 1928 and he was a great instrument in the global acclaimed revival in 1930. One of the spiritual armaments that Babalola claimed that God gave him was a bottle of water, to be sanctified through prayers and application of the same for powerful healings and miraculous deliverance (Alabi, 2016; AGBARA NLA NINU AAWE, Alokun, 2017:161; Babalola, n.d. 1-12; Oludele, 2007:53). The specific purpose was for faith healing of all kinds and exorcism.

Many streams and rivers were sanctified and dedicated for healing purposes within the denomination such as *Omi-Aayo* (River *Aayo*) at Oke-Ooye, Ilesa (Adebayo, 2017:12; Oludele, 2001: 2008), River Ariran in Ikeji-Arakeji (Olowe, 2007:59) on the spot where God called Babalola, *Omi-Oni* in Efon-Alaaye (Alabi, 2013:164-165), the prominent residence of Babalola during his lifetime, *Omi-Babalola* at Mount of Miracles at Ido-Ile, a prominent Prayer Mount that Babalola frequently patronized (Adediran, 2009:53-54), *Omi-Kosehunti* (River of All Is Possible) at Erio-Ekiti (Alabi, 2013:164-173) among others. It is ardently believed in the church that having prayed into a bottle of waters with selected biblical texts especially from the Book of Psalms and by faith, solutions are bound to come to pass for healing. Many souls have been won to the fold of Christian faith through the healing ministry of the church. A great medium of contact for healing is water as Babalola was instructed to use.

The method of the use of water is for every participant to bring his bottle of water during any of the prayer service, specially organized revival hours, early in the morning or evening prayer meetings, prophetic gathering as a result of the receipt of divine vision, revelation, audible voice, prophetic utterances and/or from any other super sensible message delivered. In the course of the prayers, the prophet or any leader guiding the congregation would give instruction to everyone to raise his/her prayer water bottles for prayers and sanctification. All the selected biblical could be read by an individual or repeated after the leader. After the recitation, potent and prophetic prayer utterances would be offered with thunderous and resounding echoes of Amen to show their believe that having prayed into the water for any Christian adherents there would be healing and solution to any difficulty he is passing through. This bother on the revelation, teaching and practices of Joseph Ayo Babalola as he claimed that he was instructed from God.

The above-mentioned streams and rivers sanctified by Joseph Ayo Babalola during his earthly ministry serves various purposes and functions according the beliefs and traditions of the adherents within the denomination. For example, the River *Ariran* is multipurpose in functions. Various barren women have patronized the water and received their fertility. A case of a lady diagnosed of fibroid and billed for surgical operation came all the way from Lagos in pains. Due to lack of fund of fund, she trusted God for divine intervention and began to pure the water upon her body, to the surprise of many she delivered the fibroid in the clinic of Joseph Ayo Babalola University without any injection or medication. The photograph of the fibroid was kept in the office of the Vice-Chancellor. Various forms of ailments, spirit related sicknesses, diseases and challenges have been taken care of through the patronage of River *Ariran*. A case of one lady who had been insane for thirty-three years got healed when she through divine providence came to drink from River *Ariran* (Olowe, 2007:59-69).

River Kosehunti (All Is Possible Sacred Water) in Erio-Ekiti, Omi Babalola at Mount of Miracles in Ido-Ile and Omi Oni in Efon-Alaaye are believed to serve various spiritual empowerment, fertility, healing, destruction of evil poisons, spiritual manipulations and victory over evil forces and so on (Alabi, 2013:164-172). The belief in and patronage of sacred waters in the liturgy of this denomination flowed the biblical examples Elisha and Naman saga, healing of the water in Jericho, water baptism of John the Baptist and the healing ministry of Jesus Christ (Alabi, 2013). However, certain abuses of such patronage of these

sacred waters could not be denied as people have the tendencies to shift their attention from the Author of faith to the use of elements of nature. This could easily make mankind to shift his attention from the Maker to the made and from Object of worship to instrument of worship.

8. Religious Implications of Ancient Beliefs in the Force of Primordial Waters

Undoubtedly, water is an elemental force in nature that has registered its recognition in history among mankind. Man has come to do many things with water both in the industrial and religious circles today. Even though it covers at least 70% of the planet, it is not sufficient for both domestic and industrial uses on earth. The daily need of water by man makes water to be his friend, although the havocs that water has done in human history are untold. Man has suffered many shipwrecks, floods with many tolls of death of both human and live stock, property and the like. It could be argued that based on the various ways that man has had encounters with water and the myths associated with water; it has become an object of worship.

All the ancient mythologies and creation stories of the Sumerian, Babylonian and Jewish origins agree that water existed before the creation of man and the earth. By implication, water is older than all the creation and creatures. Water has been there before the existence of man. Also, water is viewed as a creative force in the universe. This is displayed through the creation stories of the Sumerians and the Genesis account. Water is believed to give power to plants, herbs and seed in order to germinate. Yahweh commanded the water to bring forth the living creature:

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that has life...and every living creature that moves which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind...(Gen. 1:20-21).

Sumerian mythological views water as biological elements or having procreative powers to give birth to something and to give life to animate or inanimate things. This may be as a result of dry climate that they found themselves in the ancient world. The *semen* power of water was also shown when seed, fruits, plants, trees and aquatic mammals like fishes and other creatures would come alive again during the rainy season when there is water.

Another implication of water is that there are other numinous or beings apart from biological beings that constitute and fill the creation or the universe. There

were gods and goddesses living inside water sources like fountains, wells, springs, brooks, rivers, marshes, ponds and lagoons and they have bearing on the existence of man. In African Traditional Religion, there is a belief in water spirits. These spirits can be appeased through sacrifices and rituals and show favour to the person approaching and seeking their favour. Water is cosmic and it is a forceful element in nature. The ancient people have never viewed it as an ordinary entity. It affects the Nature and the whole universe. It is powerful and man experiences its power in seasons and daily. It is also cosmic in the sense that it played major roles during creation and affected the course of mankind. Its cosmic power is also extended to man's sustenance on earth. Without water, man would die of dehydration, and there will be no food for him.

In addition to this, almost every religion has significant roles associated with water; in other words, water plays major roles in almost all earthly and living religions. Every religion in one way or the other depends on water in order to carry out its ritualistic activities. Judaism has a long prescription on ritual washing and bathing in order to remove what were considered to be ritualistic uncleanness. The rite of baptism in Christianity cannot do without water. The common ablution in Islam is observed with water. Libation is poured to the ancestors in African traditional religion. Initiation into cults or some other sects of religion is carried out through ritualistic bathing with water. All these show the value of water in all religions.

Furthermore, to people living in a dry climate, water cannot but be precious and symbolic. Genetically, the rain that comes from heaven is regarded by the ancient people as the *semen of heaven*, personified as male coming to fertilize the mother earth for fruition in the cosmological views of early Mesopotamian civilization.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Water is seen as an essential element of purification nearly in all religions. The myth of the great flood in both Sumerian and Babylonian Epics was religiously and theologically viewed as a purification of the old world after which a new world was created. Water removes dirt and stains from objects. This power is believed to be capable of washing and cleansing the soul in a symbolic manner. Water is viewed to be a symbol of purification of the soul especially after someone is regarded to be a sinner, when he has violated the taboo of the society or traditional religion. Both Judaism and Christianity and some other

religions engage the cleansing power of water through baptism, ablution and washing to remove what is considered to be religiously and ceremonially dirty or unclean. Not only is water viewed as having a purifying power, it is viewed as a destructive force also.

Nearly all religions have the idea that water can be *annoyed* and man can incur its wrath. That is to say, water has destructive powers. These are manifested through flood, storm, sea surging, seaquakes, water disasters and the like. The Genesis account of the flood story is not regarded as purifying the old world alone in order to give way for a new world, but it is viewed as demonstration of the destructive force of water or water annoyance. These are demonstrated through the seaquakes, ocean surging, floods and storms that rise against vegetation and human society. In fact, in areas where these are experienced, water cults and rituals are carried out in order to appease the water goddess. It is recommended therefore, that modern development of the cities should take into cognizance the effects of flood in urban areas. There are water disasters in the cities because of poor drainage. The gutters are filled with refuse of the urban dwellers and the environmental habits of many are still primitive. This should be taken care of in order to avoid further disasters.

The challenge this belief poses to the church in particular is how to adapt her faith healing to the modern realities of complex sickness such as Ebola, AIDS/HIV, Covid-19 and other pandemic disease and ultra-advanced technology in the medical sector. Will the members of the church prefer faith healing by water in the face of biological sickness that requires medical tests in advanced country or they will be free to act on the extent their faith could carry them? Individuals should be left to his or her decision and this should be forced on them as the doctrine of the faith healing remains steadfast within the denomination.

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