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ABSTRACT

The Church of Christ (COC), established in South-western Nigeria in 1959 as an offshoot of the 19th century sectarian American Restoration Movement, claims to be the only true church to restore primitive Christianity in both teachings and practices. Contrariwise, evidence from Early Church history contradicts this claim, which necessitates an investigation into the true position; existing studies having focused on the history of the church and the biographies of its leaders to the neglect of the appraisal of the claims of the church in terms of conformity with the teachings and practices of the Early Church. This study, therefore, makes a comparative appraisal of selected tenets of COC in South-western Nigeria against the backdrop of the Early Church with a view to examining the validity of its claims.

The study adopted the descriptive research design. In-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected clergy (36; six from each state of South-western Nigeria) and laity (36; six from each state). Church records were consulted in six (one from each state) congregations of the church to complement the interviews. Published Early Church records were also consulted. Data were subjected to historical and comparative analyses.

There were three teachings of COC: exclusive claim to being the true church; the belief in theology, but non-celebration of Christmas and Easter which were believed to be absent in the Early Church era; and non-belief in miracles after the apostolic age. Three practices were also distinguished: non-use of musical instruments in worship, absolute congregational autonomy and alienation from other Christian denominations. Attestations from Early Church writings revealed that COC has no antecedent in post-apostolic Christianity; but archival sources showed that the church emerged from the 19th century religious aftermath of American independence premised on democratic theology. The COC's teachings on non-celebration of Christmas and Easter were nullified by evidence from Early Church writings confirming Easter as the oldest Christian festival and that Christmas celebration had its origin in the Early Church. The teaching that miracles ceased with the apostolic age was negated by evidence from the *Didache* (A.D. 110) and testimony of St. Augustine (A. D. 354-430). Conversely, COC's *A cappella* practice was confirmed from the writings of Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) and Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) that musical instruments were seen as corruptive influence of the Roman culture. On absolute congregational autonomy, Ignatius (A.D. 50-110) and Eusebius confirmed that Episcopacy was in practice from the second century. Contrary to its anti-ecumenical disposition, Early Church records confirmed that ecumenical councils were convened starting from Nicea (A.D. 325) to define the substance of the Christian faith and defend it against heresy.

All the teachings of the Church of Christ are at variance with those of the Early Church; one out of the three practices aligned with that of the Early Church. Thus, there is a wide disparity between the tenets of the two churches, which invalidates the church's exclusive historical connection with the Early Church. Therefore, the church needs to own up to history and reappraise her hermeneutical presuppositions.

Key words: Church of Christ, Early Church, Christian Teachings and Practices, South-western Nigeria.

Word count: 499

Bro Owolabi's Ph.D Abstract (left) & his message on a mutual WhatsApp group (below)

[13/01, 20:57] Owolabi wncc:

Greetings brethren.

My attention was recently called to the subject of my thesis being the subject of discussion on this platform. I have taken time to scan through the discussions. It has been very interesting.

Let me start by repeating the obvious that this academic work in Church History was based on the attestations of church fathers not apostles evidences, which could have made it exegetical. No one seems to have acknowledged this fact. Everyone is talking about the abstract. *Didache* was mentioned in the abstract, was it a first century document? The work was neither on OT nor the NT. Perhaps, I was expected to have posited that everyone else is going hell. It is not like that in academics. From the discussions, most people seem not to see anything that is apologetic of the church.

Did I believe in the attestation of the church fathers? No, because we all know that departure from the faith started towards the end of the first century.

Why did I embark on the project knowing the likely effects like the bashing I have been receiving? In the course of my research, I stumbled on items that I think could help us improve our capacity and change our orientation in certain areas. This I have gone ahead to document in my latest book. Before you crucify me, I plead with you to take your time to read the book. I will be happy to answer questions on any aspect of it.

It is unfortunate that my brothers are not looking at my antecedent but bent on destroying me and everything I represent. We've caught a 'thief', we must stone him to death. Haba! Regardless of the pontifications we can make here, we shall all either rise or fall before the absolute judgement of God.

Good evening.

Introduction

This is a brief review of the Ph.D thesis of Bro. 'Biodun Owolabi (henceforth designated by initials SAO), the long-standing and incumbent Director of Western Nigeria Christian College & School of Biblical Studies (WNCC & SBS – an educational institution that has religious focus). The 320-paged thesis is titled “**AN APPRAISAL OF SELECTED TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA.**” The thesis is available in the UI Library and the softcopy has recently gone viral online. I undertake this review as an academic and as a Christian who is a teacher of the scripture in the Lord’s church. Surprisingly, some opine that the body of SAO’s work may be substantially different from the Abstract hence I decided to peruse the **entire** thesis. This is “*hoping against hope*” since by definition, an Abstract is a brief summary that represents an essay, article, book, thesis or any in-depth analysis of a particular subject and used to help the reader quickly ascertain the material’s purpose. Abstracts are indexed in libraries and online services; freely available even when a literary material is for purchase hence is what most people read. It is a *modest snippet* of a literary volume, reading the entire work afterwards is to obtain *surplus details*.

(Download the thesis from <http://80.240.30.238:8080/handle/123456789/3734>)

SAO is not a babe in Christ, he knew what he was doing when he enrolled for Ph.D, formulated his topic, agreed to work under his ‘Reverend Dr.’ supervisor, designed/conducted his study, wrote and submitted his thesis. His actions were by freewill in a quest to bag the doctoral degree and title. He could have used the opportunity to dig out and present the truth to his supervisor, internal & external examiners and other scholars. I have always maintained that the scriptures are not only inspired but are also historical.

Bro. Owolabi’s excuse that his study is non-Biblical thus he could posit what he does not preach, is unacceptable and tantamount to hypocrisy. Besides, he would not have to go that route if he actually did a thorough research; he opted to use selected ‘historical documents of some church-fathers’ to the exclusion of others that negate his hypotheses. **Well-educated Christians cannot be fooled by any claim that he does not really believe the findings, conclusions and recommendations of his own thesis** or that its Abstract is “the product of many hands.” This is because in doctoral studies, a candidate’s final work contains newfound convictions presented to instruct others. Typically, a candidate is ready to graduate when he begins to teach the supervisor & examiners in his dedicated area of study instead of them teaching him. Indeed, at that level, one does not rehash textbooks or regurgitate lecture notes in order to pass (as undergraduates may) but propose his own “observations or model and explanations” which constitute original contributions in a specific field of knowledge. Ultimately, a Ph.D researcher is solely responsible for his thesis not those who assisted or suggested corrections during manuscript development/production. Inasmuch as a candidate has defined a good problem statement, surveyed disparate relevant literature, used the appropriate methodology, properly interpreted results obtained and is sure of his conclusion, he can via polite explanation, decline anyone’s advice to rework or rephrase any statement in his thesis. Aside heeding guidance on layout, formatting and correction of typographical errors, it behooves one to precisely convey his research findings and recommendations. I did all that nearly two decades ago during *Viva* and my graduating doctoral students are doing likewise since 2012. For the award of Ph.D in religious studies, Bro. Owolabi voluntarily defended his thesis before the departmental and postgraduate panels. Who knows if those examiners constituted by non-members of the Lord’s church were pleasantly surprised with his submission?

I have not bothered about listing typos, wrong/missing references, etc. I focused on analyzing SAO’s research design, some of his definitions/claims and some questions he posed as rhetoric. This is to highlight the implications/ramifications of the thesis, help us understand what is at stake and assist SAO appreciate the lapses therein begging for resolution.

Asaolu's Observations on Sections of SAO's Thesis

Title Page

+The title page is well laid out and the imprimatur of the University of Ibadan is printed across the library softcopy to authenticate the material.

-The year of submission/award is missing but I gathered elsewhere that it could be 2014. [The filename is (23)ui_thesis_owolabi_s.a._appraisal_2014_full_work.pdf] If the file is renamed, that bit of information would be lost!

Certification Page

+This page names the supervisor and lists his academic qualifications

-It lists a religious title of the supervisor as "Reverend" which is an unscriptural religious designation since it is a divine appellation (Psalms 111:9). The page contains no (signed) attestation of the research candidate himself as being original work solely carried out by him.

Dedication Page

+This page shows the study is dedicated to God, Christ and His universal church.

Acknowledgement

+His academic mentors and many who facilitated his doctoral research study were appreciated.

-No mention of the subject; COC congregations of Southwestern Nigeria and their members used for the study were not thanked though the local churches were later listed in the Appendix

Abstract

Owolabi's statement	Asaolu's remark (-)
The Church of Christ (COC), established in South-western Nigeria in 1959 as an offshoot of the 19th century sectarian American Restoration Movement, claims to be the only true church to restore primitive Christianity in both teachings and practices.	Was the COC established in South-western Nigeria (SWN) really an offshoot of 19th century sectarian (denominational) American Restoration Movement or planted by Nigerian ministers and supported by certain 20th century American COC congregations? In SWN, is the COC the only group that claims to be the true church that advances primitive (original or biblical) teachings? If No, why is it the subject of this study ...could it be partly because it might be easy to get data from her to do a doctorate compared to if another religious group with similar claim was chosen?
Contrariwise, evidence from Early Church history contradicts this claim, which necessitates an investigation into the true position;	Ordinarily, a scholar views the "Early Church" as either the earliest/NT church associated with the apostles or as the initial generations after the apostles. Curiously, Owolabi defines "Early Church" on pg. 13 as " the first five centuries of Christianity ," lumping both views together yet in the thesis, "early church" is used in ways contrary to his own definition. Does SAO equate post apostolic writings by only his favorite scholars as "Early Church history?" An objective look at the work of the 'church fathers' shows that uninspired history is varied with purported evidences showcased by various schools of thought on divers subjects . Thus, the true history and position on religious matters can only be that which aligns with the New Testament (NT) scriptures. There were false teachers even during the lifetimes of the apostles so conforming to apostolic teachings is vital -1 Jn 2:18-21; 4:6

<p>existing studies having focused on the history of the church and the biographies of its leaders to the neglect of the appraisal of the claims of the church in terms of conformity with the teachings and practices of the Early Church.</p>	<p>This is not accurate. Numerous volumes have been written by brethren like Guy Caskey, which examines the claims and practices of the church with those of the apostles and that of the so-called church fathers. Be it on use of instruments during singing, Lord's Supper, Church organization, etc. there are numerous books and pamphlets. It is doubtful that Bro. Owolabi does NOT have some of these materials in his personal library or reach for we usually give such to <i>prospects</i>!</p>	
<p>This study, therefore, makes a comparative appraisal of selected tenets of COC in South-western Nigeria against the backdrop of the Early Church with a view to examining the validity of its claims.</p>	<p>The tenets selected are not peculiar to COC in Southwestern Nigeria but to virtually all congregations of the Lord's church world-wide. The thesis is invariably a probe of the COC globally. With Owolabi having initially affirmed "<i>the evidence of Early Church history contradicts</i>" the church's claim to being the true body of Christ, 'the study' might inadvertently be an effort embarked upon to justify pre-conceived judgment masked as hypothesis!</p>	
<p>The study adopted the descriptive research design. In-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected clergy (36; six from each state of Southwestern Nigeria) and laity (36; six from each state). Church records were consulted in six (one from each state) congregations of the church to complement the interviews. Published Early Church records were also consulted. Data were subjected to historical and comparative analyses.</p>	<p>+Noted</p>	
<p>There were three teachings of COC: exclusive claim to being the true church; the belief in theology, but non-celebration of Christmas and Easter which were believed to be absent in the Early Church era; and non-belief in miracles after the apostolic age.</p>	<p>It seems the author indirectly examines the COC stand on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One body being a real assembly of disciples with one faith rather than an association of denominations. 2. Belief in the <i>incarnation and sola scriptura</i> (theology is broad/vague in this context) for the Lord's Supper rather than Christmas/Easter to commemorate Christ. 3. Cessation of miracles after the apostles and those they personally 'laid hands upon' have slept in the Lord. <p>Should COC teaching as regards 'if/when/how' Christmas/Easter should be celebrated by based on apostolic or post-apostolic teaching?</p>	
<p>Three practices were also distinguished: non-use of musical instruments in worship, absolute congregational autonomy and alienation from other Christian denominations.</p>	<p>Practices as regards worship, structure and fellowship are rooted in teachings too. After all, it would be hypocritical or absurd for the church to teach one thing on a matter only to practice another.</p>	
<p>Attestations from Early Church writings revealed that COC has no antecedent in post-apostolic Christianity;</p>	<p>This is an assertion purporting that the COC and its doctrinal position/practices with respect to the issues under investigation cannot be found or traced in any post-apostolic writing of the first few centuries.</p>	
<p>but archival sources showed that the church emerged from the 19th century religious aftermath of</p>	<p>Attributing COC's emergence to 19th century American restoration movement is disingenuous. SAO's thesis actually noted that some of the pioneers of the American restoration movement had their roots in England</p>	

<p>American independence premised on democratic theology.</p>	<p>and were influenced by groups that pursued primitive Christianity. He choose to ignore publications that highlight evolution of the church through the ages as foretold in Eph 3:20-21. For instance, Traces of the Kingdom by Keith Sisman is a popular book available for purchase online. It identified worshippers who over a millennia in England, called themselves churches of Christ and hold our tenets as inherent in the NT.</p>
<p>The COC's teachings on non-celebration of Christmas and Easter were nullified by evidence from Early Church writings confirming Easter as the oldest Christian festival and that Christmas celebration had its origin in the Early Church.</p>	<p>Easter has its origin in the deviating church; history records it commenced after mid-second century well after the demise of the apostles who were led into all religious truth.</p>
<p>The teaching that miracles ceased with the apostolic age was negated by evidence from the <i>Didache</i> (A.D. 110) and testimony of St. Augustine (A. D. 354-430).</p>	<p>The Didache is “a brief anonymous early Christian treatise written in Koine Greek, dated by most modern scholars to the first century.” It is generally held that John the beloved apostle died naturally in the late first century i.e. close to AD 100. It is plausible that Christian youths whom he laid hands upon around old age, would be able to perform miracles after his demise though such could not impart the Spirit to empower others with miraculous gifts/abilities. St. Augustine lived way off that period and his testimony was ambivalent on whether miracles/tongues have ended but Irenaeus (A.D. 202), Origen (A.D. 253/4) and Chrysostom (A.D. 407) testified miracles had ceased, see https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism_vs_continuationism Thus, it is unfathomable how Owolabi's thesis could adopt a view <u>without recourse to the NT scriptures and the divine purpose of miracles</u>. Is Bro. Owolabi ready to promote continuation of miracles or perform miracles now having concluded that COC stand thereon is negated? I made a yet-to-be-refuted case for cessationism in a book titled 'A Reply to a Pentecostal.'</p>
<p>Conversely, COC's <i>A cappella</i> practice was confirmed from the writings of Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) and Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) that musical instruments were seen as corruptive influence of the Roman culture. On absolute congregational autonomy, Ignatius (A.D. 50-110) and Eusebius confirmed that Episcopacy was in practice from the second century.</p>	<p>The premise of Owolabi's thesis is faulty. That COC is the true church or not is not dependent on what Augustine or Tertulian or Eusebius, etc. says since none can prove whether those men were inspired. The claims and veracity of a church are fundamentally to be measured with God's word not by other human experience or testimony.</p>
<p>Contrary to its anti-ecumenical disposition, Early Church records confirmed that ecumenical councils were convened starting from Nicea (A.D. 325) to define the substance of the Christian faith and defend it against heresy.</p>	<p>Postulating COC is not true because it neither endorse nor emulate the Nicean Council is amusing. Every diligent Bible student knows that by the 4th century the apostasy (foretold in Acts 20:28-30) had commenced though God kept a remnant for Himself in the background as in the days of Elijah, just as He did even after it progresses on to fulfill 1 Tim 4:1-4</p>
<p>All the teachings of the Church of Christ are at variance with those of</p>	<p>His inconsistent application of the phrase “Early Church” makes it inevitable for SAO's thesis to <u>unambiguously, implicitly accuse</u> COC of</p>

<p>the Early Church; one out of the three practices aligned with that of the Early Church.</p>	<p>errors, as a church that <i>departed from the faith</i>. Owolabi could if he wanted to, <i>have clearly stated that the COC differs from the second-century mainstream church, which had begun its transmutation into the official religious body of Rome.</i></p>
<p>Thus, there is a wide disparity between the tenets of the two churches, which invalidates the church's exclusive historical connection with the Early Church.</p>	<p>Averring that the COC's claims are invalidated and that it lacks historical connection <i>to the first five centuries of Christianity</i> is SAO's research result! Since his supposedly 'honest and well executed' research submits that the COC is a recent human-denomination, which peddles tenets contrary to the original beliefs and practices in Christianity, does he realize this is a testimony unto the public for which he will give account to Christ?</p>
<p>Therefore, the church needs to own up to history and reappraise her hermeneutical presuppositions.</p>	<p>This emphatic charge is the core recommendation of the thesis. It implies the COC has been denying historical truth, is presumptuous and uses faulty interpretation approach to teach error. Should the church own up to history according to the NT or according to ambivalent St. Augustine <i>et al.</i>? SAO's recommendation will surely serve as a latch unto denominations to disparage the Lord's church. It could injure the faith of weak brethren and is a somersault of the efforts expended on prospects and new converts.</p> <p>That Owolabi retains his membership in the COC after his research suggests he plans to reform the church. As the presiding officer of what many consider a preacher-training institution, <i>is Bro. Owolabi not well poised for the implementation of his charge to the church by incrementally influencing the curriculum, delivery of courses, teachers' recruitment, etc. at his workplace?</i> From his vintage position, he could attempt to mold prospective ministers in line with his research recommendation and through them impart many congregations.</p>

List of Abbreviations

+This page lists ACRONYMNS used for phrases stated in the thesis

List of Tables

-This list does not indicate the pages corresponding to the titled Tables

Table of Contents

+This outline is informative

-It lacks a list of Figures. In addition, certain sections reflect bias in the way they are named or labeled e.g. 2.2, 4.2, 5.3, 6.2.1

Chapter 1 - GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The introduction begins with the claim of the COC to being the only true church and a narrative of how restorers emerged from the renowned denominations.

In the last paragraph of pg. 1, it was stated "It should however be noted that neither the Restoration Movement nor Churches of Christ could claim to have made the first move for a return of Christianity to

primitive practice. Ecclesiastical history is replete with earlier attempts by Christians or Christian groups who sought to restore and maintain the church of the New Testament. As early as the fourth century Priscillian and his followers known as the Priscillians urged a return to apostolic practice.”

If the Early Church is defined as **the church during the initial five centuries of Christianity** (pg. 13), were the Priscillians part of the Early Church or not and unto what did they seek to be restored?

On pg. 7 of the thesis two questions are posed:

“How valid is the church’s particularistic claim as the only true church with roots deep in the early church, dismissing other churches as man-made denominations without direct link with the church founded by Christ? Secondly, how consistent with the early church’s teachings and practices¹⁷ are the so-called distinctive teachings and practices of the church which are claimed to be superior and more authentic than what other churches uphold?”

A response to SAO’s queries are as follows:

1. How do you mean “**direct link with the church founded by Christ**”? Must it be via a physical link of succession of biological members or of physical training of church officers by preceding generation of preachers/pastors or would a link via continual obedience of the apostles writings suffice? The validity of COC’s apostolic heritage can best be established via the scriptures not necessarily from human records though that is plausible and could be available someday if it is not now. Recall that in ancient Israel there were occasions when genealogical records were missing. Besides, when during Elijah’s persecution and flight from Jezebel, he thought he was the only remaining prophet of God; Jehovah informed him that he had seven thousand others. Similar scenarios abound today in countries like China and even Ananias and many early disciples did not initially believe that Saul of Tarsus had been converted. Thus even if COC does not know or establish ties with another group that share the same *one faith* and practices (e.g. *one baptism, local eldership, weekly communion, vocal singing, etc.*), so far each abide in scriptural descriptions and tenets, they are one. Once both parties make contact, their unity of faith and practice is evident from living and scripture, mutual acceptance will follow naturally. The challenge is for anyone to pinpoint to the COC, another known religious group which is either demonstrably conformal to the NT or identical to COC in all aspects of doctrine and practice but whom COC refuse to accept as part of the body of Christ.
2. The superiority of COC teachings and practices to that of other churches (denominations) is sublime and consistent with ‘the true early church’ since it is rooted in scripture. This may not be obvious to Owolabi since he defined the Early Church as spanning both the Patristic Period and the Apostolic Period!

Under **Significance of the Study** on pg.9, SAO wrote: “...it will afford the Church of Christ in Southwestern Nigeria the opportunity to see itself from the mirror of academic scholarship devoid of ‘God-speaks’ sentiments and prejudices... Finally, this work opens the way for more scholarly studies on the idiosyncracies of the Church of Christ in South-western Nigeria.”

SOA’s language – “‘God-speak’ sentiments, prejudices, idiosyncracies” alongside sections mentioning “Pharisaic exclusionism,” etc. suggests that he harboured misgivings towards the COC and used the study/thesis opportunity to vent it out. Since it was significant that the church should “see itself from the mirror of academic scholarship,” one would have expected SAO to send the scholarly mirror (softcopy of his thesis or its Abstract) to numerous congregations especially his survey participants. He should have made it available for church leaders via email/website/WhatsApp Groups, etc. in 2014 after he obtained the Ph.D degree. That was not the case, it seems someone only got hold of the thesis via the UI repository about a year ago and started its online

circulation. I became aware about two weeks ago, when another brother posted the thesis on a mutual WhatsApp group in which even SAO has been a member for years. Why has Bro. Owolabi kept the material hidden from COC congregations in Southwestern Nigeria? As soon as some brethren got hold of the thesis, he released a streamlined book in 2019 titled “American ancestry of Churches of Christ: the Nigerian Legacy.” The title of his commercial volume remains patently misleading. It is NOT the vaunted “academic mirror” but may be tinted glass packaged as a mirror.

Chapter 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Majority of SAO’s literature review is carried out on pre-1959 foreign manuscripts. How could those American works written before the church was planted in Southwestern Nigeria (SWN) be used to appraise the independent COCs in Nigeria? It thus becomes glaring that SAO’s thesis is indeed meant to critique the COC globally and he merely labels SWN congregations as case study. He is entitled to air his opinion on real or imaginary gaps in others’ works as a justification for his thesis.

Chapter 3 - THE CHURCH OF CHRIST: A BACKGROUND STUDY

As in the literature survey, SAO uses over 33% of this chapter dwelling on the American restoration movement, the controversies that led to divisions therein and other debates within American COCs. However, the section provides useful information about the visitation of South-African based American evangelists as well as the sending of ministers from USA to come assist the Nigerian pioneers. It chronicled the spread of the gospel from Southeastern to Southwestern Nigeria, and from the west into Northern Nigeria as well as Ghana.

Pg. 127 states: “there are no statistics or documented record of church growth among Churches of Christ in Southwestern Nigeria in the early stage of the work apart from reports of American missionaries, one is tempted to conclude that several of the early converts reverted to their former faith when they find the teachings and practices of the church highly undercontextualized. The initial growth could not be sustained as some of the new Christians settled down to discover that here were no material benefits apart from the gospel.”

SAO was tempted to speculate rather than conclude since there is insufficient data to back his claim. His use of the terms ‘several & some’ is questionable for he earlier wrote that the congregations were growing and spreading across SWN cities. We know the church must have taught and practiced benevolence for its needy aside the fact that *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Spirit!*

Pg. 128 states: “...the postulation of John Bright that the strength of the church lies in the gospel that it proclaims, ...It is obvious that the gospel of absolute autonomy, ‘saints’ money only for the saints,’ and splendid isolation with the world for whom Christ died **have contributed to relative obscurity of Churches of Christ in Southwestern Nigeria.** Seeing people in a deplorable human condition and looking the other way paradigmatic of the attitude of the Priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, an attitude that is antithetical to the teaching and practice of Christ during his earthly ministry. **The need for Churches of Christ to revisit this hermeneutical presupposition and make necessary adjustments** which will enable her to make the desired impact in the society cannot be overemphasized.”

Based on a postulation of John Bright not tested in the study, SAO not only passed a damning verdict on SWN COCs on issues his study is supposed to investigate, **he penned what would become his core recommendation, in this early chapter before completing or demonstrating his research.** What a bias! (On distribution of goods/money to the needy, the church should continue as seen in the NT. Even Jesus was selective in His earthly ministry; He made exceptions for the Syrophenician woman and the believing

Centurion. It was not the company/order of ministering priests or of Levites at the temple that ignored the man robbed in Christ's parable, neither was the injured victim helped by a religious sect in Samaria; he experienced individual's responses. Let individual Christians similarly do their best to assist a needy outsider encountered).

The restoration hermeneutics SAO sees as problematic are:

1. A democratic theology that "accorded every Christian with equal capacity and intelligence to interpret the Bible alike." [pg. 131]
2. "The conservatives insist that scriptural silence is prohibitive. The liberals argued that silence of the scriptures means freedom in interpretation." [pg. 89]

While the church recognize the priesthood of all believers, Christians however understand that all are not teachers and it takes time and training for a disciple to mature -1 Cor 12:29, 2 Tim 2:2, Jms 3:1, Heb 5:12-14

In addition, those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth know they should have scriptural authority for beliefs and practices or "do all things (*in word and in deed* –Col 3:17) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Incidentally, I have authored articles on the Silence of the Scriptures, recognizing when it permits or restricts. See [The Silence of the Scriptures](#) and [The Silence of the Scriptures Part2](#) freely available for anyone at www.lainosint.com/download/faith

On Pg. 130, SAO states: "The establishment of West Nigeria Christian College and School of Biblical Studies in Abeokuta in 1999 as mentioned earlier also contributed immensely in mitigating the impact of the Antis in the West. In addition to the above, propagation of the gospel was also strengthened in the West through the activities of the World Bible School. The WBS is a Bible Correspondence School based in Texas, USA. The school sends Bible correspondence courses to nations across the world including Nigeria. The organization engages the services of voluntary Bible teachers who grade these courses and return them to the students. Native follow-up evangelists are engaged to follow the prospects at the completion of their courses for baptism and assistance in identifying the nearest Church of Christ to their residence."

SAO views the college he directs as an institution contributing to mitigating the impact of 'Antis' (conservatives). That suggests he is either a 'Moderate' or a 'Liberal.' **This thesis exposes his true category.**

Note: Man-made corporations should not dabble into evangelism and appoint their own evangelists. The World Bible School (WBS) started as a human organization not as a program of a church unlike the correspondence course of the Lawrence Avenue COC Nashville congregation, which reached out to and produced the first convert to the true gospel in Nigeria; C. A. O. Essien. It was many years later after criticism that the Board of WBS was brought under the oversight of a congregation in Texas. How blessed if others would emulate that!

On pg. 131, SAO concludes: "The chapter also posits that Churches of Christ in the Southwestern Nigeria, unlike most Churches of Christ in Eastern and Northern parts of the country developed an anti-institutional disposition opposing the establishment of any institution apart from the local church to carry out the works of the church and were also averse to any local church embarking on any project beyond her financial capacity to accomplish. These are considered to be against the teachings of the Bible and are therefore products of human innovation. This was the belief and teaching of American missionaries who started the work in the Southwest."

It is informative that SAO admitted that he **posits!** He avers the rejection of human organizations that appropriated the mission of the church unto themselves, is mere 'missionary belief.' He could have provided Bible passages where Jesus established/utilized/promoted "any institution" other than local churches, "to carry out the works of the church."

Chapter 4 - SELECTED TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Here SAO cites just selected materials to back his hypotheses and presents questionnaire responses to his research questions. He did not really explain why he just choose to appraise the COC relative to the claims of the uninspired church fathers and the survey responses of COC members. (The beliefs of a religious group are published from the headquarters not determined via a survey of professed members) Could the findings of his study have been different if he compared the COC with the NT from Christ? Or if he used the survey responses of people in denominations? I disregard his (mostly skewed) research questions and the responses he obtained from his survey in SWN COCs. *My main reason for doing so is that the majority opinion of the respondents is inessential to establish truth, just as the opinion of uninspired men from the second to the fifth century.* Nearly every statement in this chapter deserves a response but to avoid repetition let us consider a few.

“Churches of Christ conceive of themselves as the only true church... where was the church from the second century until the nineteenth century when she resurfaced? Where was the church in the post apostolic age? Where was the church during the Dark Ages? Where was the church during the sixteenth century Reformation? Where was the church during the 17th and 18th century Evangelical Reawakening? ...it is preposterous for a single church or group to claim to have the only correct understanding and interpretation of the Bible while condemning others to the compost of human innovation, and yet, her members were not listed as interpreters of any major versions of the canonical Scripture.”

SAO's quoted statement runs through several paragraphs of pg. 133 through 136.

Addressing the last point first, being translators (interpreters?) of major (popular) Bible versions is not a criterion for determining the true church. It is those who authored the original inspired words and those who subsequently obey the word of God that matters.

Now to his first point. Assuming (without necessarily conceding) that there is no genealogical connection (physical linkage) between COCs and the church of the NT, kindly consider the following analogy...

Given that due to war or some other natural contingencies, a sport became extinct in a community and it was not played/practiced for centuries. After a long while, the designer's manual for the sport (containing the rulebook and a detailed log of demonstration games played) was found in a library alongside some old magazine reports about various sports. Supposing further that some individuals decide to recreate and play the defunct sport in this and other towns. Should they give pre-eminence to the designer's manual or to the magazine reports? Can they possibly replicate the old sport by following the manual? Or should they rather have evolved a new sport by borrowing from all magazine reported sports yet claim their invention would represent the sport solely described in the ignored manual?

If it is possible to restore the defunct sport using the manual (**historical blueprint**) then restoration of the early church is a plausibility at any time in any place provided the NT be used as the operational guideline. SAO seems to reject the rationale underlying the analogy above for on pg. 135-136, he disavows that “few congregations of the church did exist in the midst of the apostasy or that the true church had been preserved through the ages by -the seed of the kingdom, the word of God” He avows: “It is interesting to know that as brilliant and apologetic as these arguments were they all crumbled under the klieg light of historical scrutiny.”

However, inspiration states that unto God be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations. This must be fulfilled otherwise it would mean that the gates of hell somehow, sometime prevailed upon Christ's church! Thus, the true church survives in every age; let God be true and every man a liar. Recall I also indicated that Roman authorities might possibly not have known the comparatively few faithful assemblies during “the apostasy and the dark ages” just as the hidden seven thousand prophets were concealed from

Israel's power brokers, in the days of Elijah. Such congregations may even be oblivious of one another's existence since God in the post apostolic period, would not expressly verbally talk to such as He did with Elijah. As noted earlier, SAO ignores published volumes such as [Traces of the Kingdom](#) by Keith Sisman, which identified worshippers who over a millennia in England, called themselves churches of Christ and hold our tenets as inherent in the NT. Yet, as knowledge increases with advances in history, archeology, etc. more supporting evidence could emerge on the divine preservation of the church since its inception in 33 AD.

On pg. 137, SAO repeats the refrain: "Moreover, this study reveals that most hermeneutical suppositions of the church were traceable to Alexander Campbell, a leading member of the church's precursor -the American Restoration Movement."

Unfortunately, this is a recurring allegation **that is not proved at all in SAO's thesis!** Firstly, those 'hermeneutical suppositions' ought to have been identified and shown to be assumptions. Secondly, it is insufficient to merely assert such were traceable to Campbell. It is even unscholarly to adopt such claim made by any other prior writer or conclude based on any recent interview. To substantiate his claim that his 'study reveals,' it behooves the researcher to actually analyze the writings of Alexander Campbell alongside the publications of COCs over the years to establish correlative and causal dependence.

On pg. 147, SAO wrote, "...the Restoration Movement also variously known as the Disciples, Stone-Campbell Movement, the Christian Movement started as a single entity but later fragmented into three different churches in the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ and Independent Churches of Christ. How come a product of a group that later split up into three churches claim to be the only true church?"

It is akin to asking, how could the one church which started on the day of Pentecost be later split into factions, a development which made Paul and John to pen Rm 16:16-18 & 1 Jn 2:18-19? Were the apostles' not in the true church because there were splinter groups who falsely claimed to serve Christ in their era? Whenever there are contending, distinct groups holding unto different tenets, it makes sense that at most, **only one** of such could be right. Identifying the true group if it exists within the lot is a different matter altogether. Even when the Corinthian brethren were factionalizing themselves, inspired Paul reminded them of the name into which they were baptized. He affirmed "*there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*" This implied that it is only those who abided in the truth (doctrinally & in practice) which say '*I am of Christ*' that were approved of God. As it was then, so it is now and so shall it be until Jesus returns.

Pg. 139 states: "Churches of Christ believe that Christians are not commanded to celebrate Christmas and Easter. The presupposition for this belief is premised on the conviction that the Bible did not command Christians to celebrate the birth and resurrection of Christ unlike the Lord's Supper that was specifically instituted by Christ to be observed weekly to remember his sacrifice for the sins of the world... To start with, attestations from the writings of early church fathers did not support the position of the Church of Christ that the Old Testament is invalid as a guide for Christian faith and practice."

I checked the dictionary meaning of the word 'presupposition' and found the following – to tacitly assume beforehand at the beginning of an argument or course of action, presumption. If COCs are guilty of presupposition on their non-celebration of Christmas and Easter, all SAO need do is to show where Christ or His apostles celebrated or delivered either feast unto disciples in the kingdom. That the inspired writers did not command Christians to celebrate both is a fact and not a presupposition, unless SAO posits that, the writings of his 2nd to 5th century church fathers is scripture! Those writings however, constitute fallible human opinions, which are not binding on Christians. Every generation must study the scriptures for themselves to determine its

message and application. COCs believe that all scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness and that the things which were written of old are for our learning (2 Tim 3:16-17, Rm 15:4). Our position is that the New Testament supersede the Old Testament as a guide (Mt 17:1-9, Heb 1:1-2; 8:6)

Pg. 146 asserts, “Several attestations of the church fathers like Irenaeus, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, and Hippolytus during the Quartodeciman controversy testified to the celebration of Easter as early as the first century.”

SAO did not cite the so-called attestations that purported Easter celebration originated in the first century. Could this be an attempt to project his thoughts unto those early fathers’ writings? Even if they did make such claims, how could uninspired men who lived in the second to fifth century be more credible than the eyewitnesses of the first century such as John, Peter, Paul, Luke, etc. who wrote the NT? The apostles established only the Lord’s Supper commanded by Christ in both the Jewish and Gentile congregations (Acts 2:36-42, 1 Cor 11:20-26). That Easter is a post-apostolic festival is evident and indisputable, the earliest extant primary source referring to Easter is a [mid-2nd century](#) homily attributed to Melito of Sardis. **SAO inadvertently admitted the late and uninspired origin of Easter** when he discussed the “Quartodeciman controversy” further on pg. 146. That debate was on when to celebrate Easter, which was considered by the disputing believers to be a relatively recent festival being made to correspond to the Jewish Passover. Their argument was on whether to observe it on Sunday or stick to the Old Testament prescription of Nissan 14 for the Passover. If Easter was an established tradition endorsed by inspired apostles, the ‘when/how’ of its celebration would have been long settled without controversy.

SAO states on pg. 147: “Contrary to the position of the Church of Christ, the earliest reference to December 25 as the date for the birth of Jesus was traced to a *Philocalian Calendar* which referred to Romans observance in 336 A.D.”

COC does not contest the date or first observance of Christmas, our position is that it is of human origin and not scripturally enjoined on Christians.

On the issue of miracles, SAO wrote, “Contrary to the position of the Church of Christ that miracles have ceased with the apostles and as enumerated above, there are enthralling evidences³²⁹ from early Christian writings to debunk this position.”

His argument for post-apostolic and/or modern day miracles were swiftly dealt with via my remarks on the Abstract of his thesis. No one need to argue for miracles if he could perform one.

Chapter 5 - SELECTED PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

On pg.160 SAO states: “There were overwhelming evidences from the writings of the church fathers to support the position of the Church of Christ that the classic form of music in the public worship of the early church was *A cappella*-music devoid of the use of musical instruments. And it is on this ground that I take my stand.”

The last statement on his ‘stand’ is revealing; it shows his position (conviction) is based on what the majority of the ‘church fathers’ avers, not simply what the Bible teaches that most of his brethren in COC believes.

He asserts, “The church advocates that absolute or unbridled autonomy of the local church must be respected in every activity of the church including evangelism, edification and benevolence... It is feared that cooperation

may foster corruption of a pure church by a spiritually corrupt congregation hence the sovereignty of each local church ...cooperation destroys the independence and equality that should exist among autonomous congregations.”

That is SAO’s perception and over-generalization. Many congregations in SWN COCs believe in cooperation as per assisting needy brethren and exercising concurrent actions to support evangelism or edification projects. The ‘**joint** planning, execution and management of programs’ is abhorred since the leadership of a local church scripturally has jurisdiction only over its own members and oversight over its own work. The headquarters of COCs is in heaven so the issue of a congregation dominating or corrupting others should not be encouraged. That COCs have one faith does not mean every congregation has the same ability or opportunities. Christ praises or rebukes each local congregation for its own beliefs, works and efforts (Rev 2-3).

SAO avers “The conjecture for Churches of Christ’s affirmation on absolute congregational autonomy superintended by elders was derived from Alexander Campbell’s constitutional view of the New Testament.”

Again, I looked up the word ‘conjecture’ in the dictionary and found it means an opinion formed based on incomplete information, a guess. Does the term really fit into the discussion as used by the researcher? Which other information source aside the NT would SAO demand that COCs consult on church organization?

In 2013 [Bro. Owolabi used the so-called “Campbell’s constitutional view of the New Testament”](#) during our debate with the Adventists on the day of worship under the new covenant. ***Does he no longer believe that there are Patriarchal, Mosaic & Christian ages; the apostles were inspired to guide the church into all truth and the knowledge of Christ via His NT has given us all things that pertains unto life and godliness?***

SAO on pg. 168-169: “Historical sources from the second century... confirmed that the early church started as autonomous congregations... However, as the church continued to grow, there were challenges of coordinating the affairs of the congregations in the battle to ward off heresies that had started to emerge from the second century. Consequently, Episcopalianism emerged out of expediency as the church polity in vogue from the second century -thus the emergence of the offices the monarchical Bishop and metropolitan Bishop... Church of Christ’s claim that absolute congregational autonomy was the only form of church government in the early church was not entirely true.”

Whenever men try to help God, they deviate from His pattern for worship, render service in their own way and not according to His instructions or given blueprint. For something to be expedient, it first needs to be lawful. COCs desire to offer true worship not vain or will worship hence emulate the local church structure ordained by Christ through His apostles. Aside the original apostles via their word and local elders via their teaching and decisions, God has not given anyone or group the mandate to ‘coordinate the affairs of congregations.’ Hence, the emergence of monarchical or metropolitan Bishops, Popes, General Overseers, etc. is due to apostasy.

SAO on pg. 170: “Churches of Christ assume a posture of sectarian exclusivism towards other Christian denominations. They claim to be the only true church and that there is no assurance of salvation outside their ranks. This spirit of sectarian exclusivism was premised on doctrinal emphasis on baptism and their identity as the truly restored church.”

This shows SAO sees the church as just another denomination making unfounded claims. On COC members attitude and statement that those not baptized are yet to become Christians, SAO classifies such speech as “sectarian venom” in the last paragraph of pg. 175.

After narrating the criticism which he once received (from his minister), for officiating at a wedding in a denominational religious service, SAO on pg. 176 states: “it is not surprising that the Church of Christ does not belong to any religious association including the Christian Association of Nigeria... However, a cursory look into the history of the Christian faith shows that there was no historical precedence for such practice. For instance, the New Testament is replete with instances of Jesus relating with Pharisees and the Sadducees who were staunch opponents of his Ministry and teachings. Christ also eats with a tax collector and sinner.”

Extrapolating individual attendance of a wedding ceremony to justify religious association membership for COC is quite a stretch. SAO’s submission that it is unscriptural for the church not to engage in continuous fellowship or joint worship services with denominations is incredible! Perhaps he has forgotten Paul’s epistle instructing Roman saints to avoid those who denominate (cause divisions and offenses contrary to apostolic doctrine –Rm 16:16-18) or the apostle’s exhortation in Phil 3:17-19.

Jesus never attended the religious meetings of the Pharisees or of the Sadducees to partake with them in their activities. These groups often challenged Him openly and He sometimes accosted them doctrinally. Christ however visited individuals who may belong to any of these sects for social interaction and used the opportunity to teach God’s word. He also welcomed private visitations from their members who *nicodemously* (secretly) came unto Him for spiritual dialogue.

A gospel teacher may accept an invitation from a religious sect provided it will afford an opportunity to present the word of truth to such group or to reason with them and answer their queries about his faith (Acts 17:18-19, 1 Pet 3:15). However, CAN is for religious groups not individuals, its statutes prevents member-denominations from open proselytization and from criticizing one another’s beliefs and practices. COC does not have to belong to religious associations like CAN before it interacts with the individual members of any denomination or attempt to persuade them with the scriptural truth on any matter. Since the COC is in the world but not of the world, it behooves her to interact with and seek to influence people/sects via her preaching and conduct without partaking of their sinful ways of life.

On pg. 179 SAO avers, “Contrary to the pharisaical exclusivism and anti-ecumenical disposition of the Church of Christ, writings of the Greek and Latin Fathers... confirm that ecumenical councils that started from the fourth century provided the forum for Christians across the world to define the substance of their faith and to defend it against heresy. For instance, the Nicene Council (A. D. 325) was attended by 318 bishops, large number of priests, deacons and acolytes to settle Arian controversy and establish the doctrine of true divinity of Christ.”

Whereas the inspired writers affirmed that without controversy God was manifest in the flesh, that the faith had been once and for all time delivered unto the saints in the first century, SAO insists it was the 4th century Nicene Council and subsequent ones that defined the constituent of Christian faith, establish the teaching of true divinity of Christ, etc.

SAO concludes the chapter with the following as opening words, “Findings reveal that Churches of Christ practices like absolute congregational autonomy under plurality of elders and pharisaical attitude towards other Christian denominations were at variance with church practices in the first five centuries of Christianity.”

This shows SAO made no distinction between the apostolic period and the patristic era. We ought to distinguish between the NT and the writings of the church fathers or the pronouncements of the various Councils conveyed by uninspired men.

Chapter 6 - STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SELECTED TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

This chapter supposedly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of COCs.

On pg. 181, SAO wrote, “Churches of Christ are reputed for their insistence on rightly dividing the word of truth by rigidly following the letter and the spirit of the Scripture in their teachings and practices. They claim to speak where the Bible speaks and silent where the Bible is silent. Another cliché that is characteristic of the church is the penchant for doing Bible things the Bible ways and calling Bible things by Bible names. Reference is often made in many of their literature and tracts to Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 4: 11 – ‘If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God’ to affirm their so called fidelity to the Scripture.”

If COCs **are reputed** for something then it is no longer mere claim on their part but a recognition by others. Thus, their fidelity to scripture should be factual and not ‘so-called’ if indeed they are renowned for handling aright the word of truth.

On pg. 183-186, SAO gave “Few examples of areas where Christian denominations can benefit from the teachings and practices of Churches of Christ.”

However, the issues wherein he counsels them to emulate COC are within the pages of the NT for everyone to discern. These include concepts such as church ownership, governance, leadership succession, spiritual worship, fund raising, etc.

On pg. 187 SAO wrote, “As noted earlier, communication of religious views through publications is one of the legacies inherited from Alexander Campbell by Churches of Christ.”

He seems fixated in attributing every practice of COCs to Campbell. Should it not have occurred to him that communicating via publications could be a legacy from John, Luke, Paul and other pioneers of the NT church (1 Jn 2:21, Lk 1:1-4, Acts 1:1, Col 4:16)?

On pg. 190, while commending Bible correspondence courses adopted by COC, SAO states: “Waddey then wonders, -‘If WBS did not exist, hundreds of congregations of the Lord’s church would not exist and hundreds of thousands of members of the church would never have learned the gospel way of salvation.’⁴⁰⁶ ...From the discussion and the evidences above, it could be seen that Bible Correspondence courses have proven to be an effective means of conversion as successfully employed by Churches of Christ. This method can equally be employed by other Christian denominations to reach millions of prospects across the world and ultimately leading them to become citizens of the kingdom of God.”

Firstly, I disagree with Waddey’s position suggesting that without WBS, many “would **never** have” become Christians since God could have achieved that irrespective of WBS. After all, millions did become Christians without World Bible School and many more will be without it. Secondly, it is noteworthy that SAO posits denominations could lead prospects to become citizens of the kingdom of God.

On pg. 193, SOA states: “Apart from the fact that Church of Christ members believe that each member is a minister in his own right and has a right to his interpretation, individual opinions and perceptions are often imposed on the whole church and any attempt to reject imposition of personal views or misinterpretation on the whole church often leads to conflict.”

This is inaccurate, for there is disparity of knowledge, talents and church offices. I addressed this point on pg. 8. Suffice to add that COCs believe *no scripture is of private interpretation* hence we prayerfully study together in order to be of the same mind. How could a church so methodical, which is not swayed by a single ‘revered man of God,’ often have individual opinions imposed on her?

On pg. 200, SAO states, “...Churches of Christ cannot be called the church of the community in their neighborhoods.”

This alleged weakness might be an unperceived strength since the church is Messiah’s kingdom on earth and quite unlike the social groups of the world. Right from the beginning, the church typically suffers isolation and persecution from society so it is even remarkable whenever she is tolerated. Have the host communities not heard the gospel from COCs? Many received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. COCs seem obscure for ‘*narrow is the way and few are they that find it.*’

On pg. 203, SAO states, “American missionaries were frequently blamed for encouraging congregations to start under trees, public schools, rented shops and makeshift enclosures. This study has however succeeded in unearthing irrevocable evidences to change this perspective. The truth is that pioneering missionaries encouraged the congregations they planted to acquire properties and meet in decent worship environment...”

Brethren should appreciate the need to use a befitting and comfortable meeting place, whether it be rented, leased or owned. That requires also that we be generous in giving for all aspects of the work of the kingdom.

On pg. 209, SAO surmises, “...plethora of factors for paucity of eldership in congregations of Churches of Christ in Southwestern Nigeria notwithstanding, the truth of the matter is that the church has not succeeded in matching conviction with conduct concerning this aspect of the church’s teachings.”

Indeed, COCs can do better in this respect. Brothers should aspire and prepare to take the God given roles of Pastors, Deacons, Preachers and Teachers. Every hand must be on deck, saints should encourage one another to serve to the best of our respective abilities in the household of God.

Chapter 7 - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND GENERAL CONCLUSION

This chapter begins with the demographics of the questionnaire respondents. That is rather strange for ordinarily that should have been the opening of a chapter titled ‘Analysis of Results’ following another chapter conventionally known as ‘Methodology.’ Thus, SAO’s chapters 4 through 6 could have fit into the two suggested herein.

This treatise has earlier addressed the points SAO now lists as his findings and conclusions.

On pg. 220-227, **extracts of SAO’s “Recommendations” are:**

- 1) “Church of Christ should own up to her history by accepting that the church actually started in the 19th century out of the desire to restore primitive Christianity and unite Christians on the basis of the Bible”
- 2) “...it behooves the Church of Christ to have a rethink of its position on the issue of miraculous manifestations in the life of the church. It is true that the Nigerian society is burdened with phantom and stage-managed miracles orchestrated by some so-called men of God to deceive the public and aggrandize themselves. ...The above misuse of miracles notwithstanding, to claim that miraculous manifestations have ceased seems to constitute another abuse...”

- 3) "the need for Churches of Christ in Southwestern Nigeria to repudiate the practice of absolute congregational autonomy for a more context-sensitive and biblically faithful model of church cooperation cannot be overemphasized."
- 4) "need for the Church of Christ to abandon her sectarian exclusivism and embrace Christian ecumenical movement aimed at advancing and defending the cause of Christianity. ...realization of how the Church of Christ began and where it is today should engender ecumenical spirit to seek and pursue peace with other Christian denominations without necessarily compromising the faith but fostering unity within the body of Christ and extend the frontiers of the kingdom."
- 5) "it is presumptuous of a single church to arrogate the right of accurate interpretation of the Bible to itself and seek to impose this on the entire Christendom, more so when this 'accurate interpretation' is premised on the assumptions of one man."
- 6) "If the Church of Christ in Southwestern Nigeria must be transfigured from her present obscurity to reflect the grace of God to the community, the church must incarnate into the various communities it find itself through holistic ministry. ...it seems impossible to separate the spiritual from the physical without truncating the main substance of the gospel. The church must minister in words and in deeds."
- 7) "Churches of Christ should learn to plan new congregations with a view to putting necessary structures in place to facilitate leadership development of her members. This will also help nascent congregations to harness and motivate members with leadership potentials to assume responsible spiritual positions in the church within the first decade of the establishment of a congregation."
- 8) "Since charity begins at home, it is recommended that potential church leaders should make their homes the centre of family life and spirituality ...encourage her male members to marry as soon as affordable..."

A review:

- 1) The church knows its true origin, is aware of history and its divinely appointed mission. The insinuation that she is a recent denomination cannot hold up since congregations are independently patterned after the NT and not beholden to an earthly headquarters. SAO ignored relevant literature, which chronicles the evolution and history of the kingdom of God as the church of Christ.
- 2) It takes more faith to serve God without expectation of miracles in daily living, trusting Him to answer prayers according to His will. God though immutable in power and character now providentially sustains the universe through His spiritual and natural laws. Until the day of resurrection when the Lord reveals Himself, there is neither need nor proof of post-apostolic miracle. Modern claimants do not know what a miracle is. For example, child conception via intercourse after years of marriage is not a miracle unlike Mary's conception of Jesus. Giving someone a bag of rice is natural unlike multiplying a grain unto a bag.
- 3) No congregation practices absolute autonomy for that would require non-communication with others. Being independently ruled by a plurality of located elders (or prior to their emergence, being guided by a minister & teachers) but able to moderate cooperation with others, is scriptural. Since SAO advice COCs in SWN to renounce this model, would he recommend the adoption of Episcopacy or a General Overseer?
- 4) SAO invariably recommends that COC should join Christian Association of Nigeria, World Council of Churches, etc. He posits that will "advance and defend Christianity." We beg to differ; those in such unions are not in unity of faith and practice. COC could continue to reach out to their individual members without joining any ecumenical council to partake of their joint activities.
- 5) What is SAO's understanding of '*there is one body ...one faith ...one baptism*' (Eph 4:4-5)? It is not presumptuous for the COC to claim she alone proclaims the unadulterated gospel message to all; her action is based on the teaching of one man -the mediator Christ Jesus. He delivered His word through the writing of His apostles for believers to understand (Eph 3:4). For instance, anyone can correctly interpret "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel...*" Why do many denominations choose to misinterpret

“*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved...*”? Only one out of several conflicting interpretations can be correct when examined grammatically and against the background of how the apostles carried out that command. That is the plain truth irrespective of any denominational claim, modern survey responses or the commentary of some church fathers on Mk 16:16.

- 6) COC lets its light shine via the word she pronounces and the conduct of its members. The NT reveals that the mission of the church is to glorify and worship God, evangelize the lost in the world, edify the saints and render benevolence to needy (destitute) saints. There are things an individual can do wherein the church should not be burdened being out of its mandate/scope e.g. run a commercial-for-profit business or a global charity, adopt and raise orphans in her home, engage in recreation/entertainment, etc. (This is not to aver that the church when able and chanced, cannot render help to an unbeliever in an emergency, rather the point is she cannot design programs for outsiders’ social welfare, budget for such and go seeking beneficiaries. They may sometimes inadvertently benefit from her altruism. The saints primary responsibility is to members of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). The church cannot exhaustively address her members’ material needs with the limited financial resources available hence must not go looking for non-members’ needs to cater for. For more details, kindly study [Church and Social Responsibility](#))
- 7) As per 7 & 8, these are already being emphasized now in many COCs before SAO’s thesis came out.

On pg. 228-230, **extracts of SAO’s professed “Contributions to Knowledge” are:**

- 1) “Firstly, the Church of Christ claims to be the only true church that Christ promised and was established on the Day of Pentecost. Research findings however unearthed the fact that there was no traces of the church in the writings of the early church fathers and chronicles of ecclesiastical history from the apostolic age through the Middle Ages to the Reformation and beyond. ...This discovery is a major contribution of this study to academic knowledge and a demystification of the church’s sense of historylessness.”
- 2) “Furthermore, the work equally discovered the broad disparity between the teachings of the Church of Christ and that of the early church and that these contestable traditions and her sectarian disposition accounted for the church’s unpopularity within the region and a factor for her alienation from other Christian denominations.”
- 3) “Similarly, while the Church of Christ was fond of flaunting her sacred root attributed to biblical documents left behind by the primitive church via the aphorism, -we speak where the Bible speaks and silent where the Bible is silent, this study was also able to uncover the church’s profane root. This is in the fact that the church’s hermeneutical presuppositions were inherited from Alexander Campbell.”
- 4) “from the avalanche of evidences from patristic writings the study established the fact that the classic form of music in the public worship of the early church was music without the use of instruments of music. This corroborates the position of the Church of Christ on music in Christian worship.”
- 5) “the study has also afforded the Church of Christ the benefit of an intellectual study of some of her teachings and practices to expose their strengths and weaknesses.”

’Biodun Owolabi’s examiners would be particularly interested in his avowed contributions to knowledge. He used the terms “*unearthed, discovery, demystification, uncover, established*” to indicate how ‘original and profound’ his work is, they must have approved that for him to earn the doctoral degree. In essence, he convinced them the thesis is the product of his own research, which has now revealed or explained facts previously not known or well understood by scholars. We can be sure he did not give a disclaimer that “*I do not believe what I am presenting to you in this thesis; it cannot be true due to my faith in the Bible, I am just stating these to get a Ph.D.*” He must have used all within his power to convey the message that his research results are valid; he does believe in and would defend it.

Asaolu's Closing Remarks

'Biodun Owolabi's research approach was faulty and his conclusions are unsurprisingly erroneous. He could have done a better work as a scholar by using words based on exact definitions, evaluating literature that negates his suppositions, etc. **His thesis is unjustifiably scathing of the Church of Christ.** Pursuit of secular honours is not an excuse for one to act detrimentally to the truth and the Lord's church. Inspiration says:

...fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church ...Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ ...and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. -Col 1:24b ; 2:8 ; 3:17

Owolabi's philosophical work is widely circulated online. He and his supervisor would have jointly published journal articles from it. After saints obtained an e-copy of the thesis, many expressed their disappointment. He maintains the thesis is mere "academic exercise in a public university not an exegetical work." Now Bro. Owolabi has authored a book titled "American Ancestry of Churches of Christ: the Nigerian Legacy." That book is meant to be the spiritual complement to his secular thesis; produced to help re-orientate Christians, dampen our "historylessness," etc. It reportedly avers that COC emanated from the American restoration movement but essentially conforms to the NT. The book effort is inadequate 'damage control.' He knew the church of the NT is the essential part of the Early Church when he penned his thesis about Churches of Christ.

Towards properly redressing the issue, I hereby offer the following suggestions for Bro. Owolabi to explore:

- 1) He cannot retract the thesis without academic justification (such confessing to plagiarism, falsification of data/results, etc.) and having his degree withdrawn by the university. He could nevertheless in penitence approach the institution to admit 'hypothesis hacking' and lopsidedness of selection in literary materials consulted. This would be followed by a request to update the study and carries a risk of certificate-withdrawal and re-certification. It seems impractical and unusual but is can be done.
- 2) He may go for post-doctoral study or Sabbatical Leave in an academic institution to expand on the study wherein the Early Church would be properly recognized/defined as predominantly apostolic in nature and he would without bias, review broader historical writings of uninspired writers. He would need to publish whatever results he subsequently obtains in an open-access journal for wide-reach.
- 3) He could encourage or sponsor someone to do a comparable postgraduate program, Masters or Doctor of Philosophy, wherein his 2014 thesis and similar works are surveyed and critiqued academically with the new output widely disseminated.

Unless Bro. Owolabi adopts one of the above or a similar measure and apologize to the church, he should be:

- 1) Investigated for possible discipline by his local church.
- 2) Queried by the Governing Board of WNCC & SBS.

Otherwise, brethren should beware of his lectures/writings and congregations should henceforth be wary of the products of the faith-based institution under his leadership. If Bro. Owolabi had used scripture with/without non-canonical documents or had simply examined non-canonical documents broadly without bias, to expose faulty claims of the COC, we would commend him. We appreciate his previous apologetic efforts but cannot help admonishing him on this flawed comparative historical study. I did not undertake this review out of idleness or personal feud but because I prioritize resolution of controversies about the church's identity, beliefs and practices. On Oct 1st 2013 at Orodu in Lagos, SAO and I together, publicly debated representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the day of worship in Christianity. That I differ with him now is a matter of conviction. Let him be assured that his brothers are not "bent on destroying" him. He should pause to listen and reflect. We chastise because we love him as well as all the unsaved souls that would read his thesis, aside the fact that we also love the Lord and His church. I make this review public since his thesis is widely circulated in the public domain and he remains defensive of it when some reached out to him to express their reservations.