



Christ Apostolic Church Agbala Itura, North America: Implications of SWOT Analysis

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Abstract:

The Christ Apostolic Church was established in North America with the primary purpose to win souls for Christ and that African immigrants, especially Nigerians, needed to worship God in a more appropriate manner rooted in their perceptions and worldview about Christianity. Currently, the church is interdenominational. It is important to do a SWOT analysis of the organization so that there can be a strategic plan for the future. This is an exploratory and observational study based on discussions, interviews, personal notes, and archival search to arrive at findings of this exploratory study, as well recommendations and conclusion.

Keywords: African Christianity, Christ Apostolic Church, Religion, Samuel K. Abiara, Pentecostalism, SWOT analysis

1. Introduction

Christ Apostolic Church International Miracle Center, Agbala-Itura came into being in North America through a spirit-led man of God, Prophet Dr. Samuel Kayode Abiara with the vision that Africans immigrants, especially Nigerians, needed to worship God in a more appropriate manner rooted in their perception and worldview about Christianity. Pentecostalism is defined as the “end-time outpouring of the spirit of Yahweh upon all flesh.” It is an expression and explosion of the Holy Spirit without boundary regardless of race, culture, language or out of physical identities (Joel 2:28; Fatokun, 2010). This participatory and exploratory study is solely based on the oral interview, observational and archival search methods used to understand the implications of SWOT analysis pertaining to this religious organization while celebrating her 25th anniversary.

It is of essence to state that Pentecostalism was brought about by the western missionaries in the early 1900s by Charles Fox Parham and William Seymour, which led to the creation of many Pentecostal churches especially Christ Apostolic church in Nigeria. The activities of these indigenous churches in Africa have helped many struggling and suffering souls to seek peace and find solutions to their challenges in religion (Anderson, 2000; Ogunrinade, 2010). 1930s-1940s: During the 1930s, Joseph Babalola of Faith Tabernacle led a revival that converted thousands. In 1932, his movement initiated ties with the pentecostal Apostolic Church of Great Britain after coming into conflict with colonial authorities, but the association dissolved over the use of modern medicine. In 1941, Babalola found the independent Christ Apostolic Church, which is estimated to have over a million members by 1990 (Anderson 2001: 86-87). Foreign pentecostal denominations such as the Welsh Apostolic Church (1931), the Assemblies of God (1939) and the Foursquare Gospel Church (1954) were also introduced during this period.

The focus of this study is on Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura, North America under the founder Prophet Samuel Kayode Abiara as it celebrates the 25th. Therefore, there is need to

reexamine this religious organization in order to rejuvenate and revitalize followers in their pursuance of the things of God. As the Bible says “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33). Jesus Christ prohibits his followers to look after worldly things and expects them to learn to be dependent on Him, to allow His Spirit to move and direct them in all their ways so that everything desirable can be attained and retained.

2. Historical Background of Christ Apostolic Church, Agbala Itura, North America.

Prophet Samuel Kayode Abiara –the founder of Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura, New York, worldwide popularly known as “Papa” was born in Erinmo Ijesa, Osun States, Nigeria in 1942. He was an orphan at a very young age. His humble background portrays his parents as adherents of strict disciplines. This upbringing helped him to realize that one could attain greatness with the help of God, the belief in Him and the willingness to obey Him at all times. Papa started his career by going into trading until he received the divine call in 1963 at Amunigun, Ibadan, and moved to Akuffo, where he started his first church in Oyo State, Nigeria. Prophet (Dr) Samuel Kayode Abiara began radio and television broadcasts in Nigeria. Presently, millions of people around the world watch his preaching on electronic media.

In 1987, Prophet (Dr) S. K. Abiara arrived in United States to establish Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura (Vineyard of Comfort) in Brooklyn, New York. His goal was and still is, to spread the gospel and impact lives in many positive ways that will change our communities. The church is committed to empowering people and providing services to all races as an Interdenominational Christian Center, which helps people to experience peace, love and faith through its devotional worship. At Present, God has used “Papa” to establish Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura in other countries like Athens, Britain, Dubai and Canada. His wit, talents, gifts and skills, successes and spirituality have made him to be a formidable renowned preacher and global evangelist likened to Rev. Benny Hinn, Rev. Reinhard Bonnke, Rev. Richard Roberts, Bishop Reid (UK), Rev. Kim (Korea) and others who have visited and ministered in collaboration with his ministry in Nigeria.

Prophet (Dr.) S. K. Abiara was the Director-General of Christ International Evangelical Ministry (CIEM) now Christian Evangelistic Outreach, and Chancellor of Christ International Divinity College (CINDICO) Erinmo, Osun State, Nigeria, an affiliate of Acadia University, Canada. In addition, he is a member of the National Religious Broadcasters Board in USA. His humility and deeds have earned him many awards including that of “Ambassador for Peace.” The founder of Christ Apostolic Church Vineyard of Comfort is married to prophetess Christiana Aduke Abiara and blessed with many children and grandchildren, of which three are pastors. Papa – Prophet (Dr.) Samuel Kayode Abiara has been ordained as the “4th General Evangelist” of Christ Apostolic Church, Worldwide.

Under the leadership of Prophet (Dr.) Samuel Kayode Abiara, the first service was held on September 17th, 1987 at 1134 East New York Avenue, which at the time was Mechanical Workshop owned by Bro. Dayo Adekoya. The service was attended by Late Nathaniel Ayodele, Late Frank Akinje, Bro Isaac Ajayi and Mrs. Elizabeth Akinje. The church is indebted to the following people for their roles at different times in the history of the church; they include Bro James Ojo, Bishop Moses Akinleye, Evangelist Philip Aiyekoto, Pastor (Elder) Green, Evangelist Niyi Shoyelu, Pastors Wale Kuyebi, Sunday Okunola, Isaac Amesakie, Lawrence Lasisi, Samson Ojo, Ayo Fatukasi, Yemi Ayeni (current Assembly Pastor), Tunji Ayeni, Sunday Gbolagun, Pastors Tunde Ogunyemi, Yinka Oderinde, Sola Onifade, Michael Akintayo. The Church later rented a place of worship few weeks later at 545 Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, and in

1990 with the rapid growth of the church a bigger place of worship was rented at 986 Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11221. In this place, the incorporation was duly obtained. In May 1996, members of the church bought the new property at 869 Lexington Ave, Brooklyn, New York with a capacity of 800 seats. In 2001, members relocated to the new place of worship and completed the building in 2006. The current administration of the church comprises of Prophet S. K Abiara, Pastors Yemi Ayeni (Assembly Pastor), Tunde Ogunyemi, Yinka Oderinde, Michael Akintayo (Ph.D), Sola Onifade and the Board of Elders. At the National Level, Pastor David Adenodi (National Pastor), Pastor Zaccheaus Oloba, Pastor Isaac Abiara, Pastor Yemi Ayeni, Pastor Tunji Ayeni and Pastor Sunday Gbolagun.

3. Literature Review

Dealing with strategic planning in any organization involves the ability to assess its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis). Many researchers place great value and emphasis on SWOT theory because of the present day situation whereby organizations compete for uniqueness and committed customers (Kotter, 1994). The relationship between SWOT analysis and strategic planning dates back to a 1957 study by Selznick where he recognized that both internal and external characteristics of an organization affect strategic policy (Kong, 2008). In contrast, Ansoff (1965) explained problems facing an organization as how to configure and manage a firm's resources in order to maximize goal achievement. According to him, the solution is to search and identify those synergies within the resources leading to the development of "capability profile" (Clardy, 2013, p. 91). Therefore, in every organization the strengths are the identified synergies within the strategies of the organization.

In determining organizational success, many paradigms have been applied, including SWOT analysis, and the competing values framework. However, SWOT analysis intends to lead to organizational and program development. It is an all-inclusive paradigm for leaders who want their organizations to be successful. This concept is invaluable in the sense that it creates opportunities for leaders to embrace organizational values by analyzing the entire structures so as to achieve the organizational goals (Bryson, 1995; Morgan, 2005).

3.1 Discussion

(a) Strengths

This study was conducted in one of the branches of the church to understand the activities. A SWOT analysis is simply a description of the church's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Noticeably, strengths and weaknesses are often classified as internal dimensions while opportunities and threats are external dimensions. Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura is blessed with many strengths that include but not limited to a beautiful structure, committed members, a long history in the community, a visionary leader, gift of prophecy, gift of tongues, gift of discernment of spirit, spiritual and physical miracles, power of prayer, effective team leadership, and divine healing. Additionally, the church is able to base its teachings, practices, beliefs and values upon the Word of God (Matt 7: 24-28). It is the notion among Christian followers that anything that is not built on the Word of God is set for failure and will be destroyed (Matthew 15:13).

Furthermore, Christ Apostolic Church Agbala-Itura, Vineyard of Comfort has organized Bible classes with capable teachers just like Barnabas and Saul in Antioch teaching and studying the Word of God with Christian followers. Also, the power of prayer is often exercised among members because they believe prayer helps to discover and rediscover divine blessings and favor. Many believe that prayer can do anything. Many members believe that at various points in

their lives they have been healed of many diseases, received promotions, and obtained supernatural blessings.

During this study, there was a very strong belief that the leaders of the church were viewed as performing well. Members strongly believed that the church has a clear vision statement and a clear mission, and is accomplishing its mission.

(b) Weaknesses

When some members were asked to discuss the weaknesses of the church, some indicated that lack of funds is the major weakness. It has not allowed the church to commit to other laudable projects. Many feel that if the church has enough funding, more attempts will be made to engage in many outreach programs and activities that will attract children and young adults from other communities. During workers' meetings and interviews, some members expressed the urgent need for more people to participate in teaching Bible classes, improve attendance during weekly programs, and a few members indicated lack of visitors, as well as contact with the community.

Potter (1998) stated that "out of necessity for survival, institutional leaders are embracing change as a mantra for the 21st century (p. viii). Other institutional leaders are also refocusing strategy to have more funds from various organizations to fulfill the mission of the organizations rather than solely depending on the church funding (Pellow, 2006). For the future, the church needs to obtain grants and funding to support various strategic initiatives, like youth programs, summer programs, community events, and outreach programs to meet the challenges of reaching out to many people, especially immigrants and the unbelievers in the community.

(c) Opportunities

The opportunities that exist among members rest on the Biblical passage that states "that they all may be one, as thou father, art in me, am I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Many members believe that there is unity and they see themselves as a family, a Body of Christ. According to some of them, they pray together whenever there is a challenge facing the church or members of the church. Some further indicate that whenever the founder Prophet Samuel K. Abiara is around, he often stresses the importance of unity and at the same time enumerates the negative aspects of division. According to the founder in one of his teachings and sermons, the church is a group of people being directed by the Holy Spirit and united with Jesus Christ to witness to people so as to win souls for Christ (Act 5: 29). The leaders tend to encourage members to work out their differences whenever need be, and allow the Spirit of God to prevail. Members tend to feel that having spiritual filled driven leaders can pave the way for unity to prevail in the church. Kotter (1996) explained the importance of the vision of any organization by suggesting that it provide "a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future" (p. 68). The notice is for the church to continue to identify new targets, projects, initiatives and directions to accommodate change in many positive ways to achieve the mission and vision.

Next is the lack of high percentage of young active members in the church. Only few young adults actively participate in church programs. Recently, the Assembly Pastor (Yemi Ayeni) instituted "De Chosen Generation" to bring all the youth and young adults together for the purpose of improving the image of the church among the population and to promote the work of God.

(d) Threats/Challenges

The threats are not really threats but challenges in the sense that God wants us to see ourselves as a role model to others. In every capacity, Jesus Christ teaches us to be ready to serve at all times

because He Himself served his disciples. According to Roberts (2012), “ Jesus Christ did not just give his followers a set of principles by which to live, He lived them personally, daily, and perfectly” (p. 16). As a result, Paul suggests that our attitude, behavior, and mannerisms should be like that of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5).

The concept of discipleship is another huge challenge as Jesus told his followers to “follow me”. Jesus Christ emphasized this to the tax collector, fisherman and a wealthy young ruler. This made him pose many challenges to different individuals who aspired to follow him (Robert, 2006; Matt 4:19; 8:22; 19:21; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). To members of Christ Apostolic Church Agbala- Itura, the idea is to continually follow God without reasons. It means living a holy life, blameless life at all times.

Furthermore some members of the church perceive teamwork as a challenge rather than opportunity for growth. Teamwork is a strategy that increases productivity of members in an organization. To conceptualize this within the ministry means that there must be clear and challenging personal goals motivated by encouragement from members toward reaching them. In essence, leaders are not supposed to be intimidated, or become intimidators but motivators, encouragers who are willing to contribute into both personal and team goals so as to have effective team ministry (Robert 2012).

Based on sermons, discussions and interviews by many leaders of the church like Prophet Samuel Kayode Abiara, Pastors David Adenodi, Oloba, Isaac Abiara, Olaiya, Abraham Akinpelu, Sunday Gbolagun, Yemi Ayeni, Tunji Ayeni, Tunde Ogunyemi, Yinka Oderinde, Sola Onifade, (guest preacher like Arch Bishop Sunday Bilewu) had expressed their spiritual apathy toward evangelism as our personal responsibility toward God and each other. These spiritual leaders of the church have challenged members to be well equipped to have godly zeal to run the Christian race to win (Galatians 4:18; Galatians 5:7)

4. Conclusion

It is imperative that a collaborative effort be initiated among all auxiliary departments. Such collaborative effort will ensure that the cooperative vision of the church can be attained. It will also enable the church members to find ways that the various opportunities discussed can be better explored. Additionally, efforts should be made to utilize the strengths discussed to mitigate the weaknesses discussed.

Dedication

This academic work is dedicated to Prophet Dr. Samuel K. Abiara, the 4th General Evangelist Christ Apostolic Church Worldwide, Founder of CAC Agbala Itura, worldwide, as the church celebrates her 25th Anniversary in North America. Also, this article is dedicated to the current administration of the CAC Agbala Itura Brooklyn New York comprising of Prophet S. K Abiara, Pastors Yemi Ayeni (Assembly Pastor), Tunde Ogunyemi, Yinka Oderinde, Michael Akintayo (Ph.D), Sola Onifade and the Board of Elders. At the National Level, Pastor David Adenodi (National Pastor), Pastor Zaccheaus Oloba, Pastor Isaac Abiara, Pastor Yemi Ayeni, Pastor Tunji Ayeni and Pastor Sunday Gbolagun and all members of the church in North America.

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