

**THE DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY AND DETERIORATION OF CHRISTIANS'  
IMPACT ON ARA, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Historical reflection on the decline of Christianity and deterioration of Christians' impacts on Ara, Osun State, Nigeria examines the religious and historical dynamics of Ara. The study investigated the town's antiquity to identify factors contributing to the decline of Christianity and its societal impact. The research was motivated by claims that Ara Kingdom—including its villages—was once a predominantly Christian community, hence, it addressed two questions: "Is the impact of Christianity fading in Ara?" and "What factors are responsible for the decline?" Using historical and descriptive methodologies, fieldwork and interviews were conducted in Ara and its villages. The study reveals a tangible decline in Christianity and its influence, attributable to both external and internal factors. External factors include ancestral worship, polytheism/syncretism, idolatry, acculturation, social change, and the roles of traditional rulers and government. Internal factors encompass denominationalism, individualism, doctrinal differences, and lack of pastoral discipline. These factors have significantly diminished the influence of Christianity in Ara. To address this erosion, the study recommends fostering unity in diversity, reorganizing Christian organizations, engaging in inter-religious dialogue, holding discussions between religious leaders and traditional rulers, and prayer for the community.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Decline, Ara Kingdom.

## **Introduction**

The coming of Church Missionary Society (CMS) led by Henry Townsend into Yorubaland through Badagry in September 1842 marked the begging of the sustained Christianity in Nigeria. (Ayandele, 1991 & Babalola, 1992). Thomas Birch Freeman and his team - the Missionary of Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) came in December the same year and joined Henry Townsend in January 1843. This was followed by the arrival of some other missionaries that later came into Yorubaland to advance the course of Christian missions. Their first attempt to proceed to Abeokuta from Badagry was delayed by the sudden death of Sodeke. However, he received Thomas Birch Freeman, the half-Negro half-English Wesleyan missionary before his death. This was when Freeman went to Abeokuta on an exploring visit in December 1842. Nevertheless, Christian stations were established in Badagry and Abeokuta between 1843 and 1846 (Ayandele, 1991). The advent of missionaries at Abeokuta was an event of significant standing. The missionary enterprise went on apace and from there Christianity spread throughout Yorubaland and Lagos Protectorate. Ayandele (1991) further wrote "Sodeke lost no time in impressing upon him (T. B. Freeman) Egba's desire for the white man's friendship". The arrival of CMS in 1843 with their opportunities in Abeokuta fostered the spread of Christianity across all nooks and crannies of Yorubaland, including Ara.

## **Historicity of Ara Kingdom**

Ara Kingdom, encompassing Ara town and its villages, is strategically situated between prominent Yoruba settlements such as Ejigbo, Awo, Ojo, Iragberi, Ilobu, Ifon-Osun, and Ede, located in Egbedore Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. Ara lies 14 km from Ede and 8 km from Ejigbo. The kingdom comprises eight communities and 26 farming centers, each governed by a Baale (village leader) (Okunade, 2005).

Culturally, Ara shares similarities with other Yoruba communities in beliefs, dress, language, and practices. However, a distinctive feature of Ara's culture is its emphasis on artisanal skills, with nearly all residents—regardless of age or status—engaged in one or more handicrafts.

Religiously, Ara was initially dominated by indigenous Yoruba religion, characterized by the worship of divinities, spirits, and ancestors. Major divinities included Esu, Ogun, Ifa, Sango, Oro, Obatala, Agan, Osa Oko, and Egungun. The Aaro River held particular spiritual significance, akin to the Osun River. Festivals such as Aaro, Alami, and Egungun Oba (royal masquerade festival) remain culturally significant, while ancestral shrines like those of Obabon, Apaja, and Oyelami are still venerated.

The advent of Christianity and Islam introduced significant shifts in Ara's religious landscape. Initially, these religions had limited impact, with adherents continuing to engage in traditional practices. Over time, however, Christianity gained prominence, aided by western education and the conversion of prominent traditional religious adherents. By the mid-20th century, traditional religion had largely declined. However, in recent years, a resurgence of traditional religious practices, particularly festivals like Alami and Egungun have been observed.

Economically, Ara's residents traditionally engaged in farming, blacksmithing, and artisanal crafts. Subsistence agriculture remains a cornerstone of the community's economy. Practices such as 'esusu' (traditional savings), 'ajo' (mutual aid), and 'aaro' (communal labor) reflect a cooperative spirit. The introduction of Christianity and western education catalyzed significant social and economic transformation, enabling many Ara indigenes to pursue white-collar jobs. Today, Ara boasts a high number of elites and civil servants within the region.

### **Ara Kingdom And Its Festivals**

Another significant aspect of the cultural heritage of the people of Ara, and Yorubaland at large, is the celebration of various traditional and cultural festivals. The famous and popular festival in Ara in the olden days was *Egungun* festivals. According to the elderly people interviewed, there are over one hundred *Egungun*. Among these were about fifty strong ones e.g. *Owolaake* (king's masquerade), *Adinimodo*, *Sodo*, *Badimeji Laagbo*, *Badimeji Adumari*, *Badimeji Iyawo Ogun* (all these are royal families masquerades), *Lobanka*, *Ipaye*, *Pakokomo*, *Fere*, *Keranjakun* (*Olode* Compound), *Mogi* (Magic Masquerade), *Lasogbaja* (*Ooye* Compound), *Layewu* (Hunters' masquerade) etc. There are other little ones called *Orebe*, every male child in the town must have one (Nathaniel Alao, Interview 2011). Only three – *Owolaake*, *Badimeji Adumari* and *Lasogbaja* are still exiting.

Apart from *Egungun* festival, the major festival that has outlived others is *Alami* festival. The first six Kings of Ara, that is *Orira* and five out of his six sons; *Obabon*, *Apaja*, *Onilepa*, *Okege* and *Oyelami* that reigned in the former locations of Ara displayed exceptional sacred authority that is probably unparalleled in Yoruba history. A foremost exploit performed by these successive kings - *Alara* of Ara was that they never died for their corpses to be seen and buried. They sank into the ground and had no tomb after the successive completion of their life span. Immediately, after they might have sunk, the place would be turned to shrine, and the people would relocate, that was the reason for six locations (in the same vicinity) of Ara before the present one. Therefore, they were all deified, but only the last one is really and still revered (Nathaniel Alao, 2011 & 2024).

*Oyelami*, the sixth *Alara*, who happened to be the last of them, was deified as *Alami*, and is commemorated through an annual festival called *Alami* festival. It was said that *Oyelami* warned all other princes not to sink again, in order to stop them from relocating. On this Okunade (2005) wrote:

It was at the verge of *Oba Oyelami's* life being extinct that he instructed the Royal family members to the effect that no *Alara* after him should sink into the ground. They should rather die and be buried so that they could have tombs.

According to Rev J. A. Alao (Rtd) and Pa Oyelade (Interview 2011), there are no tombs for the first six Kings that reigned at Ara. They are *Orira, Obabon, Apaja, Onilepa, Okege, and Oyelami*. The subsequent *Alaras* in Old Ara who died, and had their remains buried are *Lalu* – the last born of *Orira*, who had no child, *Adumari, Ajadi, Laagbo (Olawo-agbo)* and *Adedijo*. Okunade (2005) claimed that the only time he sneaked out of the house to join the King's entourage to the *Alami* grove was in 1961 and then drummers were Papas Ayanlola and Okanlawon, now late. They led the then King, *Oba Ilufoye* to and fro the grove with the song:

<i>Orisa ni baba awa</i>	Our father is an idol
<i>Oba ti ko ku</i>	A King who did not die
<i>To wole laaye</i>	Who sank alive
<i>Orisa ni baba awa</i>	Our father is an idol
<i>Alami, Alami</i>	<i>Alami, Alami</i>

*Oba Ilufoye* was the nineteenth *Alara* of Ara *Orira*, the twelfth after the king stopped to sink, the eighth after reestablishment of Ara by *Odušina*, and he was famous Yoruba (Oyo) king in his time (Kenyo, 1952 & 1964).

### **The Advent of Christianity in Ara Kingdom**

It was discovered through interviews that the first indigenous Christian known and really no other before him was a young man named James *Odebunmi* who came from Iresi, where he went to learn a trade. Iresi is around seventy kilometers away from Ara. He became a Christian in his bachelor age at Iresi while his father and step mother were devout idol worshippers at Ara. He learnt how to read, and probably write, so he was able to read Yoruba Bible and Hymnal, hence, he had a copy each. The only Christian denomination belief that could be traced out around that period in this part of Yorubaland, was the Baptist denomination, therefore, the Hymnal would be a Yoruba Baptist Hymnal. More so, evidences about him revealed that he loved singing songs and was an active member of the Baptist Church, Iresi (Pa, Oyelade, 2011 & 2024).

According to people interviewed (2011 & 2024) James *Odebunmi* rarely visited his parents and relatives at Ara, and later his elder brother went for him at Iresi to come and stay in Ara. He was very reluctant to come and settle at Ara, because he did not want to mix up again with the adherents of indigenous religion of his family and of the whole town. As at then, every male child in a family must have a masquerade for the annual Royal fiesta. He finally came to Ara in 1896, thus, he became the only Christian in the whole town. Subsequently, 1896 became the year Christianity entered Ara town, although no convert was made and no church was built until 1910 and 1912 respectively. The young James *Odebunmi* devoted his time to personal Bible study and singing of hymns. He was said to be seen studying the Bible at the cool of the day under the trees at the front of his father's house, but he did not bother anybody with preaching for the fear of being lynched. This was as a result of ritual killing that was very rampant in the town then.

Nevertheless, in 1901, five years after his arrival at Ara, his first persecution came when he refused to participate in the Royal Masquerade fiesta of that year. He was highly victimized, oppressed and humiliated but spared. Few years later, he experienced harassment, after his

father's death, when he was mandated according to the custom of the land to marry a young lady, newly married to his father. The lady (*Awero*) who was a Muslim refused to marry him unless he renounced his Christian faith. Unfortunately, he succumbed under much pressure, and married the lady, meanwhile, he was bachelor. Hence, the trace of Christianity in the town was rendered void and ineffective for a period (Rev. J. A. Alao, 2011 & 2024).

In 1906, one Isaac *Adewale Alao* came back to Ara from Ede where he sojourned to learn tailoring. He came intentionally to take over his grandfather's properties - land and house. He had been a Christian from his adolescence at Ede, and had married a Christian by name *Aderoju*. At their arrival they continued to worship in their house until when the people in the same compound and street took notice of them. In the course of meeting with the people with the Gospel message, Isaac *Alao* heard about the first Christian in the land - James *Odebunmi*, who had turned to Muslim, and became *Amodu Odebunmi*. With the burden for souls and love for his people, that is Ara dwellers, Isaac *Alao* preached to the people of Ara and *Amodu Odebunmi*, so *Odebunmi* accepted the faith again, and bore the name James *Odebunmi* until his death, although, his wife remained a Muslim until her death in July 1962. Thereby, three (Isaac *Alao*, his wife – *Aderoju Alao*, and James *Odebunmi*) Christians were reckoned with in the land. They continued to exhort each other from the Bible and had Bible study with people who used to gather at Isaac *Alao* tailoring shop (Interviews, 2011 & 2024).

Fortunately, their efforts yield dividend when they had some converts. The first converts were Emmauel *Latunji*; Gabriel *Opawale* of *Akogun's* Compound, who was a strong herbalist and the *Osa Oko* priest; Abraham *Ajani*, Samuel *Adigun*, Jacob *Olaniran*, Joseph *Ojo*, Solomon *Bambee*, Isaiah *Babatunde*, Ezekiel *Ishola*, *Baale Yemope*, *Oba Oni Asaolu Oyinlola* – the then *Alara* of Ara, and *Oyewole*. Thus, Christianity in Ara gathered momentum between 1906 and 1912. However, due to persecution two of these slipped back from Christianity, Joseph *Ojo* to indigenous religion, and Abraham *Ajani* to Islam (Interviews, 2011 & 2024).

In 1912, the Christian gathering in Ara became recognized in the town, when the members would gather round Isaac *Alao* to learn Bible in his tailoring shop. The little seed later germinated to the establishment of the First Baptist Church, Ara. After some years, the second batch of Christians arose, when some other people were converted and joined the church. Like the first Church of the apostolic era, there was mutual love and assistance among them. With the help of Dr. George Green the sick received free or cheap treatment. Consequently, there were converts from different indigenous faith and cult or secret societies. As a result, persecution arose against the church with ritual killings. Prince *Lanrewaju* Timothy backslides when the affliction became tough. The sick and wounded ones during this period were often taken to the Baptist Hospital at Ogbomoso. Fortunately, years later, they overcame the challenges and subdued traditional religions and cults to the extent that Ara was referred to as a full Christian community (Interviews, 2011 & 2024).

### **Reasons for the Decline of Christianity and Deterioration of Christians' Impact in Ara Kingdom**

In the course of this research, it was discovered that the decline of Christianity and deterioration of Christians' impact in Ara Kingdom is a reality. This resulted in the resurgence of African Traditional Religions (ATR) in Ara where the propagators were astute believers of a particular faith. Thus, greatly retard the growth and expansion of the Christian faith and ultimately result to a syncretism among some Christians and in some places of worship. When the impact of early Christianity is compared with most recent, it is revealed through the responses of almost all the respondents that it is truly fading away. Question was asked "comparing the impact of early Christianity with the present, do you agree that the impact of

Christianity is fading away?” Out of thirty-six people interviewed, only two said “no”, all other responded with “yes”.

Consequently, to ascertain the factors that is responsible for the decline of Christianity and deterioration of Christians’ impact in Ara Kingdom, other questions were also asked and the summary of people’s responses resulted in establishing that factors responsible for the decline of Christianity and deterioration of Christians’ impacts on Ara are the same, and are categorized into two: 1. external factors, which include ancestral worship, polytheism, idolatry, acculturation, social change, role of traditional rulers and role government; and 2. internal factors, which are denominationalism, individualism, doctrinal differences, and lack of pastoral discipline. These factors have greatly wane the impacts of Christianity and Christians in Ara kingdom.

### **External Factors**

Basically, external factors are those things militating against Christianity and Christians’ impacts in Ara from outside the Christian faith. In ATR, there are certain abiding principles which promote human values and good living. These are the values upon which according to the belief of Yoruba indigenous religion, the creator designed things in such a way that they could survive. These are principles and values that have seen by the people of Ara through difficulties and seemingly impossible times in the past. These values do not die, they last forever and they are sublime (Sarpong, 1974). These values and principles in indigenous religion are expressed mostly in religious festivals. This traditional religious festival being celebrated in many occasions, poses serious challenges to the Christianity. Some of these challenges became external factors that are reducing the impact of Christianity. These external factors include ancestral worship, polytheism, idolatry, acculturation and social change. In addition to these are the part played by the traditional leaders and government.

#### **Ancestral Worship**

The belief that those who departed from this earth continue in existence elsewhere and are actively in touch with those who are still here on earth is seen in Yoruba indigenous worship. Most Africans believe that when a person dies; he enters the spirit world where he is more powerful than before (Fuller, 2001). In Ara town, ancestral worship is one of the predominant exercises among the people, and the major feature of the *Alami* cultural festival.

Although, Belcher (2005) disagreed with the fact that ancestral worship form part of the African traditional worship when he said;

No Christian would accept it if Christianity were termed “saint worship” Christians would rightly protest... The protestation would be justified on the grounds that indeed saints are not worshiped, saints are not deified, and saints are not the ultimate object of our petition and praise or adoration. We honor saints as having lived our lives and being worthy of emulation and we pass our petitions through them to the Almighty God.

But, it is a well-known fact that ancestral worship is part of traditional worship, which is being practiced in Yorubaland. This is one of the challenges that face the Christianity in Ara town.

#### **Polytheism/Syncretism**

When ATR is fully in Ara, the way they show case their worships and festivals seemingly presents the Supreme Being as almost equal or equal with some deities in their community. For instance, whenever *Alami* festival is being celebrated by the inhabitants of Ara, the Supreme Being will be recognized in the beginning through praise (*Ijuba*), while all

other prayers will be directed to *Alami*. So, this is another challenge that is facing Christianity in the town, because the people still have motive that going to church should not stop one from consulting native doctor.

### **Idolatry**

Idolatry simply means the worship of idols. In the view of Beyerhans (1971), the ideas found in ATR comprise the beliefs in Supreme Being, the ancestors, the lesser gods, and powers and potencies. The people of Ara are deeply linked with the worship of status, pictures or images representing divinities. The lesser gods are idols one worshipped, and they formed only part of the religion concept of Ara people. Some Christians are participating directly or indirectly in idolatry, thus pose a challenge to Christianity.

### **Acculturation**

This has to do with cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture, and sometimes, religion. It deals with contextualization. But it becomes a challenge when contextualization brings the elements of traditional worship pattern into the Christian church. In practicing acculturation, some of the worships of traditional religion are experienced in some Christian churches. This leads to idolatry in the Christian churches, thus pose a challenge to Christianity.

### **Social Change**

The concept of social change is problematic in several ways. Social change, to these writers simply means transformation, which may be sudden or gradual. It may also be partial in that it does not displace what has been in existence before the changes takes place. It may however replace and upset something already in existence. Cultural contact is an important source of cultural change and from our knowledge of the outcome in our society. There are lots of social changes as a result of traditional or/and cultural influences posing challenge to Christianity in Ara town.

### **Role of Traditional Rulers**

Furthermore, the traditional rulers i.e. the *Alara*, *Alara* in Council, the *Molebis* and honorary chiefs also contributed and are still contributing in no small measure to the fading away of Christian impact in Ara. The *Alami* cultural festival and the *Egunguns* (*Owolaake*, *Badimeji Adumari* and *Lasogbaja*) that remains out of the traditional religion in the town are as a result of the notion that “this thing will not stop in my own regime”. For instance, *Alami* cultural festival is believed to be a festival that must be strongly upheld by the royal families, and must be monitored by the king. The three *Egungun* have to do also with the rulers, *Owolaake* belong to the Kings irrespective of his royal family, *Badimeji Adumari* is *Adumari* ruling house masquerade the family of the immediate past king, while *Lasogbaja* belongs to *Ooye* family – the ruling family of one *Alara* villages i.e. *Ooye (Isangbe)* village. The immediate past *Alara* of Ara – HRM *Oba Sunmonu Omolaoye Ekundayo, Adumari III*, who reigned and ruled for about forty-one years (he was crowned on September 5, 1969 and died on February 3, 2010), held tenaciously to all tradition that had to do with *Alara* throne and his office as the *Alara* till his death. Even if anybody wanted to stop him, he would not because he loved *Egungun* from his childhood, said Pa. Rev. J. A. *Alao* (2010) when he was asked ‘why can’t you as elderly man of God tell the king to stop all these idol festivals?’ *Adumari III* used to fight anybody either Muslim or Christian who preached against idol or sins that has to do with Ara traditions, cultures, and customs.

### **Role of Government**

On the other hands, the governments also contributed and are contributing to the decline of Christianity and fading away of its impact in Ara. From Federal, to the state down to the local government are deeply involved. It was discovered that there is particular money that belongs to all traditional rulers from Federal allocation via state and local governments to the kings and their chiefs. And this has been tied by the government (Osun State government in particular) to traditional or cultural festivals. According to Pa. J. A. *Oyelade*, Pa. Nathaniel *Alao*, Rev. J. A. *Alao* (Rtd), and Pa. *Adedapo* until they celebrate one cultural festival this money will not be given to them. Therefore, the chiefs find it very difficult to convince the king (*Alara* of Ara) on the need to stop those festivals. Apart from this, in these festivals, government is being represented with gifts for the traditional rulers.

### **Internal Factors**

Literarily, internal factors are those things militating against Christianity and Christians' impacts in Ara from within Christendom. This includes denominationalism, individualism, doctrinal differences, and lack of pastoral discipline.

#### **Denominationalism**

As much as no one can boast of the possession of the complete word of God, yet as 'iron sharpens iron' so a man sharpens the countenance of his friends, would it have been in the church if not for the disrespectful response of some conservatives against the views of the radicals. This attitude has caused division and even assaults on many occasions in the Christendom. Under normal circumstances, every Christian should have complete freedom of worship in any church without any other consideration in the Christianity, but today, as much as people want to interact with one matter as member of the family of God, the fear of being misinterpreted as unfaithful to a particular denomination continues to hinder possible unity of faith. At a point in the history of Christianity in Ara, there arose crises that led to division and schism. Some left First Baptist Church (FBC) while some withdrew from Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). Those that withdrew their membership from CAC, and could not go back to FBC for the fear of being castigated and vice-versa; had to wait (remain unconcerned about any of the two churches) until the establishment of Ebenezer Baptist Church (EBC). In a situation like that the possibility of total neglect of one's faith is very high. While some people never minded whatever anyone would say about the liberty, they ended up becoming jack of all trades. In a situation where the recognition of one's belief is called for, what will such a person who has been involved in three denominations says?

Spiritual awakening is always a step towards spiritual growth among Christians. When such essentials are scolded and assaulted either of the following might happen, the radicals might become lukewarm in the Christian living or if the conviction could not be suppressed, division and ridicule of one another results. The church in Ara witnessed and is witnessing the rivalry between two adamant groups – Islam and ATR, and within the Christianity, there was rivalry between FBC and Deeper Life Bible Church (DLBC). Denominationalism aids hard heartedness. Since the loyalty is divided already while each group runs after recognition in the locality, the possibility of correcting the wayward could become unreal. When people are confronted with their mistakes, they never felt sorry for such attitude, rather, they would claim that there is freedom of thought and expressions. This situation was witnessed among Jehovah Witness Society (JWS) when confronted with their teachings as very unbiblical and unloving by the EBC.



Churches become competitors rather than cooperators, unsaved souls are forgotten as Christianity becomes ridicule in the land. Rather than demolishing paganism totally, the Baptist Church looks down on the CAC as being unable to exercise full Christian liberty in wearing jewelries and taking wine. Meanwhile, CAC in response find fault and criticize her as gluttons in exercising her liberty. At the end of the day, many people become confused as to which one should be joined or fellowshiped with. The sanctity of worship is lost when different sermons in both churches are centered on inductive response against another. If such attitude is not quickly controlled, many would refuse to be converted. Pagans would even declare that they are more even united than the “so called Christians” because no Sango worshipper would fight *Osa Oko* adherents (Rev. J. A. James, 2011 & 2024).

### **Individualism**

The adult ageing church members are not ready to be influenced by the youth who are on the race of reformation already. In a situation like this, the church will break into two, the young Christian movement versus older people in Christianity. Often times, rather than having a service in spirit and in truth one experiences the worship of suspicion and of tricks. Families, spouses and friends have to go on opposite directions because Deeper Life Bible Church will not go with Celestial Church Christ while Cherubim & Seraphim Church will not agree with Jehovah Witness Society. In a situation where members of either of the two groups belongs to the same compound, demarcation line of interaction is draw (Interviews, 2011 & 2024).

### **Doctrinal Differences**

According to the interviewers (2011 & 2024), the worst of it all is the confusion that pervades the community over the different behaviors of Christians in the town as a result of doctrinal differences. Although, doctrinal differences have been adjusted to by the people of Ara, but before the understanding of the fact that each church or denomination has its own differences, things has spoiled before measure. The Baptist believe that with the conversion of soul and grace of the Lord Jesus, the Christian is bestowed the liberation from any bondage of sin or law, hence, he is free indeed (John 8:36). Nothing could serve as inhibitions to him and his relationship with Christ. So, there is no restriction to what should be eaten or discarded, to extent that then the use of wine even in the church marriage ceremony at the reception hall is permitted. No special day is observed because there are different programs every day of the week and thus run through the year.

The Christ Apostolic Church could not tolerate the state of the Baptist church hence adopted strict regulation against any alcoholic drinks and adornment of the body with jewelries. This dispute was so hot that it affected the construction of the secondary school for the town in the late 1950s. In the long run, when the present Baptist Secondary Grammar School (Formerly Baptist Secondary Modern School), Ara was constructed, the CAC members refused to allow their wards to attend the school. The Celestial Church of Christ has emotional service with respect for the artifacts in the Old Testament temple worship and Mosaic Law in Leviticus 11. The Jehovah Witness Society refuses to honor any event in the Bible that violates the laws of nature or cannot be verified by empirical methods (sight, hearing, feeling etc). At the end of the day, the biblical teachings that all the denominations pursue to share are lost, corrupted and disregarded (Interviews, 2011 & 2024). Yet, if the foundation is destroyed what shall the righteous do? If the authority of the Bible is disproved out of different convictions of the leaders of the denominations, what will serve as sanctifying measure for the church (John 17:17)?

The JWS believed in the observance of Jewish custom against their spiritual position before God. The regulation binding the slaughtering of animals or games hunted in Leviticus 17 is strictly adhered to. While some meat are declared as unworthy for consumption due to their nature and source of provision (from pagan hunters) there is strict observance of special

day a typical instance is the observance of “Nisan 14” once in a year with the sharing of the holy communion. The Baptist denomination regarded it as unscriptural, rigid and not to be reckoned with as a Christian congregation. This enraged the Baptist Churches to the expulsion of her members who held the beliefs out of one of her members’ house (*Bara Compound*) that used to serve as their meeting place. The JWS forbids association with the Baptist Churches as those who realize the truth but for their lust towards indulgence in worldly pleasures, and freedom to do everything denies expressing the fact of the Judeo-Christianity. The DLBC felt grieved in the heart by the liberty acclaimed by the Baptists that there is no inhibition to diet or wine. The DLBC in her weekly Bible study class taught avoidance of anything alcoholic and refusal to participate in any ceremony organized by the Baptist members. When the Baptists could no longer endure the scrupulosity of the DLBC, the venue of their meeting and worship - the Baptist Day Primary School was locked up. It resulted in court injection used against each other. Last of all, DLBC opted for another location at the Ara-Iragberi junction, and till today they are still moving around in one rented apartment or the other (Interviews, 2011 & 2024).

The CCC with the claim that she is a celestial gathering sent from heaven followed the regulations in Leviticus 11 on the type of animals to be eaten in strict sense. Hence, the eating of pork meat, duck, bat meat, etc are forbidden. The laws of motherhood and child birth in Leviticus 12 are highly respected. No woman going through her menstrual circle or has just given birth is allowed to enter the church until specified days and purgatory rites observed. Special days are also observed with different ritual, and anointment offered, such days are ‘Immaculate Maria Day’, ‘Journey to Port-Novo’, ‘Ma king of journey to meet Jesus in Galilee by disciples’, and the ‘Pastors’ Representatives Day’ on 30th December of every year to mention but few. Consequently, a Baptist member - Pa. Nathaniel *Alao* expunged the members of CCC from his landed property when he could no longer accept the rituals offered on his land at interval of days. The CCC then moved to one of the house of her members at *Oke Ewure*. In the response of the CCC, it was asserted that the Baptist church had over stayed her time like any other orthodox churches. Hence, she must not be tolerated to exist as an assembly near the location of any Celestial Church or Christ settlement. Thus, each denomination (although most of them seceded from the First Baptist Church) stands aloof of the others. (Interviews, 2011 & 2024)

### **Lack of Pastoral Discipline**

It was discovered that the leadership both of the church and town along with the government are also responsible for the decline of Christianity. Although, the church leaders both the trained and untrained across all denominations in the town are trying their best, but they also have their contributions to the fading away of Christianity’s impact in the town. They are not enforcing discipline on the erring church members like the early period of the church, because of seldom embarrassment. One of them Pa. Nathaniel *Alao* said the fear of what people would say about them did not allow some of the leaders to say the true and sometimes to enforce discipline (Interviews, 2011 & 2024).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Evidently, as long as humans exist and form groups, societies, and organizations, problems, crises, and disagreements will arise, potentially hindering growth. The Church of Christ is no exception. The challenges faced by Christianity in Ara Kingdom, as discussed, have persisted since the church's inception. Nevertheless, Christians must unite as soldiers of Christ with one spirit, strength, and voice—rooted in love for one another—to combat the issues diminishing the impact of Christianity in Ara. In Acts 6:1, a crisis arose in the early church, and the apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, addressed it amicably. This serves as a model for contemporary challenges.

Consequently, these researchers recommend the following:

1. **Unity in Diversity:** - All Christians in Ara should recognize individual differences, as no two people are identical. Disputes over doctrinal differences must be entirely set aside. Emphasis should be placed on publicly highlighting the shared beliefs that unite Christians, while de-emphasizing divisive issues, especially in public forums. Periodically, a forum should be organized, apart from Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN) meetings, where Christian leaders and members can openly discuss their doctrines. This forum would aim to affirm commonalities and address denominational differences to foster understanding and interaction among Christian churches in Ara.
2. **Reorganization of Existing Christian Organizations:** - CAN and BSN should be restructured to include all denominations. Other Christian organizations, such as CCN, OAICs, PFN, and CPFN, which are currently inactive, should be revitalized. This restructuring will significantly promote unity, friendship, and cooperation among different denominations in the town.
3. **Inter-religious Dialogue:-** In addition to inter-denominational and intra-denominational dialogues, there is a need for inter-religious dialogue with other religious groups in Ara. Christian leaders should organize forums with leaders of other religions to discuss issues that enhance mutual understanding, particularly regarding idol worship and cultural festivals. Such dialogue would promote peaceful coexistence in the town.
4. **Engagement with Traditional Rulers and Government Officials:** - Religious leaders should regularly meet with traditional rulers and government officials to help them understand their responsibilities concerning religious activities in the land. These leaders should be reminded that they serve as God's representatives in their roles.
5. **Prayer for the Land:** - Christian churches in Ara must prioritize praying for the community, particularly for the spiritual awakening of Christians and the deliverance of the land from disputes, disagreements, and crises. Prayer should focus on fostering unity and seeking divine intervention for the growth and stability of Christianity in Ara.

By implementing these recommendations, the Christian community in Ara can restore its impact and contribute significantly to the spiritual, social, and cultural development of the town.

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