THE CRUX OF PERFORMATIVITY IN SOME WHITE GARMENT CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Research Problem: *The exploration of the presence and significance of trance, ritual, dance and song as elements of dramatic performance in the modes of worship and service of the White Garment Churches in Nigeria is the thrust of this paper. It focuses on the Cherubim and Seraphim Church and Celestial Church of Christ alone. The existing studies on the modes of service of these churches have focused on the spiritual aspects such as healing, deliverance and prophecy, with little or no consideration for the depiction of the traditional African dramatic conventions and performance that are inherently embedded in the church services which is the critical gap this paper attempts to fill.*

Methods Theory: *The research method shall be qualitative. Data will be drawn from four selected White Garment Churches; two from Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), and two from Celestial Church of God (CCC), these churches shall be referred to as C&S and CCC respectively in this paper. Thorough observation of their modes of service shall be done to establish the level of performance in their rituals, trance phenomena, dances and songs. Also, an interview with some church leaders and worshippers will be done to provide useful insights. Similarly,there will be participant observation where the researcher will attend the church services and participate in the church activities in order to gain an immersive understanding of the performative elements and their functions. Inspirations are drawn from Richard Schechner's model of Theory of Performance that emphasizes ritual as a performance and Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality. The essence of this theoretical framework is to provide an avenue for the investigation of the performative elements in these churches.*

Results: *It is discovered that the modes of services in White Garment Churches serve as preservative spaces for African dramatic traditions. It is also discovered that trances, rituals, dances and songs that are pivotal and integral parts of their services carry essential elements of African dramatic spectacles and performances. It reveals that the modes of service in these churches project the continuity of the indigenous African*

culture, and reaffirms that drama in Africa is inseparable from her spiritual and cultural roots.

Conclusion and Recommendation: *Since performativityhas to do with the capacity and expression of action, it is suffice to adjudge that the modes of worship and service in White Garment Churches are quintessential strategy to interrogate and engage religion as dramatic entity in spite of its spiritual connotations. It recommends that the paper will provide insights for further exploration of indigenized religious practices and their roles in shaping contemporary African drama and society in religious, sociological and anthropological studies.*

Introduction

The studies of African drama and African Indigenous Churches are interwoven in the area of performativity in spite of the differences they exhibit in term of focus and functionality. Their contextual interrelatedness will be the crux of this paper. Performativity has to do with the capacity and expression of action. It is a concept that brings dramatic effects to the combination of words and actions. Performativity behests that words or actions are not just descriptive, but they should be capable of doing something.Performativity in this paper is a unique way of viewing African drama that is a bit detached from Western theatre and dramatic convention inherent in Aristotle's *Poetics.*It is very succinct from Aristotle's *Poetics* that drama encompasses elements such as plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song, with a particular emphasis on written scripts and staged performances. This is plausible, however African drama may not focus on written scripts or plays or stage performances, it is found in the everyday lives of Africans through their rituals, ceremonies, and cultural practices, for example, African drama often includes singing, dancing, drumming, and audience participation (Adenekan 2025). So, with performativity, people watching the performance don't just sit quietly; they actively take part by clapping, singing along, or even joining the performers.

The practices of White Garment Churches in Nigeria today reflect and replicate many of these attributes of African drama. Theirmodes of services, which include drumming, dancing, call-and- response singing, and others, show that African drama is very unique and evolving. The call-and-response format in their hymns, where the congregation answers the leader, is a key attribute of Africa drama that will be discussed in this paper. Similarly, their ritual-like spiritual demands for cleansing and healing are dramatic acts that connect the congregants with their faiths in God and their societal culture. It will be pertinent to know more about White Garment Churches.

The White Garment Churches in Nigeria literally referred to churches where members always put on white garment or robe to attend all church services. It is a coinage that is particularly attached to the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S) and the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC). These churches are formed as African responses to the needs of local people who wanted a kind of Christianity that will match their own tradition, culture and spiritual beliefs. According to Peel (2000), these churches did not reject Western Christianity, but tried to make it speak in a way that Africans could understand. They combined Christian teachings brought by European missionaries with African traditional religious practices like rituals, trance, music, and dance (132). In

Adogame's view, the White Garment Churches create a space where African beliefs were not ignored but embraced and given Christian meaning, the goalwas to make faith feel familiar and powerful within the local culture.

These churches focused on prophecy, healing, and visions, which made them very different from others. Members wore white garments to show purity and holiness. They used candles, incense and special types of libations for prayers, which were similar to traditional African ways of worshipping (Kalu 103). The use of these items made people feel that they could worship God in a way that revered their traditions and be spiritually fulfilled. Both C&S and CCC show how Christianity can be shaped to fit into African beliefs. These churches use symbols and engage in practices that the members already knew. For example, using water, candles, and incense reminded the members of African purification rituals. Entering into trances and giving prophecies reminded members of traditional spirit possession in Africa. Dancing and drumming were ways to show joy and feel connected to God, just like in many African festivals (Adogame and Spickard 144). These churches were not just copying African religion; they were reshaping it through Christian eyes to make it meaningful and holy.When considering the rituals and practices of these churches, it becomes succinct and clear that their mode of worship encapsulates performativity. Their worship is like a performance, a drama that shows the spiritual and cultural life of the people, their acts of dancing, praying aloud, prophesying, and using symbols are not just for spiritual growth but are also cultural expressions and embracement of African dramatic identities (Ukpong 96). Above views from Kalu, Adogame and Spickard, and Ukpong are very apt and tenable on African indigenous churches but these views have focused largely on theological, historical, and sociological stints of these churches.Also, these studies have significantly advanced our understanding of the White Garment Churches' spiritual and social roles, they have systematically neglected the artistic and performative features of their worship, treating them as merely ancillary to the 'serious' religious activity.

This neglect constitutes a significant gap, leading to an incomplete understanding of the churches' cultural significance and reinforcing a dismissive perspective on their practices as mere syncretism. This study, therefore, addresses the problem by investigating how rituals, trances, dances, and songs in selected C&S and CCC churches function as dramatic performances, demonstrating their role as preservers of African cultural identity.

To address this gap, the objectives of this study shall be:

- To identify the key performative elements within the worship services of the C&S and CCC.
- To analyze how these elements replicate the conventions of traditional African drama (e.g., audience participation, symbolism, transformation).
- To demonstrate that these worship practices constitute a unique form of theatre that preserves and enacts African cultural identity within a Christian framework.

Literature

The review of related literature in this paper will be done under three bodies**.**

Studies on African Indigenous Churches

Extant studies on African indigenous churches have shown the different perspectives and perhaps approaches that depict the churches' worship and service as theological, historical and sociological. Mitchell opines that the churches have played a key role in preserving aspects of African identity alongside their theological doctrines. According to him, these created a space where traditional practices could thrive within a Christian establishment (Mitchell 67). This position of Mitchell is apt because some practices in these churches, for example their drumming pattern and dance are not just for entertainment; they are deeply spiritual acts that connect members of the congregation to their ancestors and to God. Thus, the practices are a form of continuity of the cultural expression found in African festivals and ceremonies. In this same vein, Adogame sees the concept of divine healing in African indigenous churches as cultural. He further explains that in many African cultures, traditional healers like herbalists or diviners, played a key role in addressing the physical and spiritual needs of the community (Adogame 89). The blend of traditional healing methods with indigenous Christian faith has made these churches to be relevant from historical and sociological points of view.

African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria are more than just religious institutions. They are a testament to the resilience of African culture and its ability to adapt to new influences (Kalu, and Hastings). This view is germane as the mixture of Christian and traditional African practices has created a form of worship that is both spiritual and cultural. Their theological, historical and cultural significance lies in their ability to preserve African identity whilst embracing a global faith, making them a vital part of Nigeria's cultural and religious landscape. These views have overlooked the performative dimension of African Indigenous Churches.

African Drama and Performance Theory

To a very large extent, the Western view of drama is mostly based on the ideas of Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher who emphasizes that a drama must be a written script and must be performed on a stage (Finnegan 34). In contrast, Peekdeemphasizes focus on written plays and stage performance as he argues that African drama is found in the everyday lives of its people – through their rituals, ceremonies, and cultural practices. This view is tenable because African drama often includes singing, dancing, drumming and audience participation. People watching the performance don't just sit down and watch, but they actively take part by clapping, singing along or joining the performers.

African drama is a reflection of the cultural, spiritual, and social life of her people. This reflection is grossly rooted in oral traditions that combine storytelling, rituals, songs, dances, and communal participations to create a vibrant and expressive art of performance (Bell, 1992). Unlike Western drama, which often separates audience from the performers, Bell projects African drama as a thriving performance based on interaction and spontaneity, with the audience often participating actively in the performance.

Akinade (2017) demonstrates how African drama can remain rooted in tradition and performance whilst addressing modern realities as he opines that the richness of African drama in ritualistic and performative elements form a foundation for understanding contemporary practices in African society. Within the context of African Indigenous Churches, a dramatic tradition has evolved, blending with Christian theological practices to preserve the

performative and communal essence of African drama.

The Intersection of Religion and Performance

From a dramatic perspective, the cultural practices of African Indigenous Churches have added a theatrical quality to their worship. Fatokun (2006) posits that the processions, symbolic gestures, and ritualized actions that are prevalent in African Indigenous Churches create a performance which is both spiritual and dramatic. From Fatokun's view, it is vividly glaring that in the worship and service of indigenous churches in Africa, cultural practices and Christian practices intersect. This aligns with Schechner's illustrations that trance, lighting of candles and sprinkling of water mirror traditional African rites of purification and sanctification which are reminiscent of spirit invocation in African traditional religion. Under close perusal, Schechner's illustration is deeply theatrical and performative in nature.

Moreover, Turner lays credence to the performative elements and nature in the services of these churches with emphasis on 'fire' and 'water'. He terms fire to be a cleansing force, believed to ward off evil and herald divine presence, while water is a totem for purification rites in African spirituality as it cleanses, brings blessings and sanctifies individuals or spaces. This argument heightens the intersection of religion and performance in African Indigenous churches. Boddy buttresses Schechner and Turner when he argues that the prophetic utterances in these churches are both spiritual and performative because the prophecies are often accompanied by physical gestures, vocal modulations and heightened emotional expressions, which reinforce the performative essence of the trance.

Dove-tailing from these three bodies of literature, this study argues that the worship of the C&S and CCC is a quintessential site where the spiritual, sociological and performative aspects of contemporary African life converge, a fact that has been neglected in previous studies. This paper, therefore, fills this crucial gap by providing a performative analysis of their worship.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The research design shall be qualitative and ethnographic. It is qualitative because, it has to do with complex cultural, religious and dramatic processes, and essence of being ethnographic is the involvement of culture and religion from early post-colonial period to the contemporary time. These chosen research designs are appropriate for exploring the lived, embodied, and performative aspects of worship in White Garment Churches in Nigeria.

Selection Criteria and Study Sites

- **Publication Date Range:** Data was collected between January and June 2026.
- **Geographic Focus:** The geographic focus is Okitipupa Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. The rationale behind this choice lies on the historical significance that Okitipupa has been the Divisional Headquarters since 1960 and Okitipupa has been the Headquarters of the people that are the first known worshippers of C&S and CCC in Ondo South Senatorial District. This will provide easy access to information needed and accuracy of the information.
- **Thematic Relevance:** The chosen parishes were considered typical or revelatory

examples of the performative elements understudy. They were chosen because they are well known for their elaborate rituals, trance phenomena, and musical traditions.

Data Collection Methods

Data will be drawn from four selected White Garment Churches; two from Cherubim ad Seraphim (C&S), and two from Celestial Church of Christ (CCC). Thorough observation of their modes of service shall be done to establish the level of performance in their rituals, trance phenomena, dances and songs.This method was rigorous, but thorough. It will be highlighted in three subheadings:

- **Observation:** Six services were observed in each church from January, 2026 to June, 2026, one service in each month. Anunstructured observation guide was used to know and elucidate the performative elements that are inherently found in their modes of worship and service.
- **Interviews:** In the four churches understudy, twenty (20) members: 1 Senior Shepherd, 1 Choir Master, 3 lay members in each church were interviewed. Unstructured interview was conducted to sieve out the nature and function of some performative elements that may be identified during the services.
- **Participant Observation:**The researcher attended the church services and participated in the church activities in order to gain an immersive understanding of the performative elements and their functions. He was seated with men in the congregation because of gender restriction.

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis will be thematic, involving the details below:

- **Step-by-Step Process:** The coding process will make use of field notes and interview transcripts which will be read and re-read for familiarization. These codes are descriptive and they are trance, dance, thanksgiving ritual, candles, song, and hymn. These codes were then grouped into broader analytical themes, such as theme of Performativity – trance and drumming; Theme of Communal Expression – dance, and Theme of Symbolic Action - ritual
- **Software:** No software was used. The data collected through unstructured interviews and observation were analyzed manually. Open coding was used to label key ideas, after which related codes were group into themes. The final themes were derived through constant comparison of data to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences.
- **Validity:** To ensure validity, this study employed triangulation by combining unstructured interviews with participant observation of church services. Member checking was conducted by sharing findings and emerging themes with participants.

Summary Table

Church Group	Church Name	Location	Number of services Observed
Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S)	Agbala Libele	Igbodigo	6
Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S)	Ogo Zion	Igbodigo	6
Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)	Premier Parish	Okitipupa	6
Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)	Orisun Parish	Okitipupa	6

Table 1: Summary of Fieldwork Data Collection

Theoretical Framework

Inspirations are drawn from Richard Schechner's model of Theory of Performance that emphasizes ritual as a performance and Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality. The essence of this theoretical framework is to provide an avenue for the investigation of the performative elements in these churches and to emphasize the communal and symbolic dimensions of performance in African culture and indigenous African White Garment Churches. Schechner theory that ritual is performance aligns with various ritual practices of C&S and CCC such practices are trance, dance, song, lighting of candles, burning of incense. Schechner argues that rituals have much in common with theatrical performances; he further opines that both rituals and theatre involve structure, repetition, symbolism, and audience engagement. In C&S and CCC, acts such as the use of holy water, rhythmic drumming, and the symbolic wearing of white robes turn these ritual acts into events that are both spiritual and theatrical. Another area of alignment with Schechner's theory surfaces as he notes that rituals, like theatre, are rehearsed, repeated, and refined over time, giving them a structured form that embodies both action and meaning. This is particularly true in the context of C&S and CCC, where the repetition of rituals reinforces their spiritual importance whilst making them a spectacle for all who witness or participate in them. In addition,Schechner's concept of "restored behavior" (behaviors that can be separated from the self and performed) is perfectly applicable to the Elemi in a trance state, who embodies a spiritually "restored" or transformed identity.

In the other hand, Turner's Theory of Liminality is specifically used to undergird this paper's analysis through the presentation of the churches understudy as liminal spaces between African tradition and Western Christianity.While Turner's work focused on isolated tribal rituals, this paper extends his concept of liminality to the contemporary, globalized context of the White Garment Church, arguing that the worship service itself functions as a permanent liminal phase, a 'sacred theatre' where social and spiritual identities are perpetually renegotiated.

Analysis/Discussion

Embodied Performances: Trance and Dance

In the four churches, trance seems to be the most striking and emotionally performative element of worship. It often occurred during the most intense parts of the services, especially when the atmosphere was charged with loud

singing, rapid drumming, and clapping. It is a dramatic scenario to see how the congregation responds or reacts when a worshipper unconsciously enters a trance state. In some cases, the entire congregation pauses, prayers stop, songs are suspended, and all eyes turn to the individual worshipper who falls into a trance. In the church's parlance, he or she is called Elemi (the inviter of the spirit). The Elemi becomes possessed with the spirit and starts speaking unconsciously from the spiritual realm. The church atmosphere shifts, there is silence, reverence, and often tension among the rest worshippers. The Elemi continues by speaking clumsily or in tongues, he or she issues prophecies, moves dramatically across the floor, and the entire church waits, listens and responds accordingly to the Elemi's dictates.In another situation, when an Elemi enters into a trance the entire church does not pause, but the trance is acknowledged, not emphasized. In this case, the Elemi will be gently guided by the ushers to a seat in a designated space, sometimes in a corner or the centre and the service continues. Songs rise, drums play, prayers are uttered and the Elemi is quietly watched, but not emphasized.

In the first scenario when the congregation pauses, the Elemi becomes the focal actor or character, the "lead role" in that moment of worship. The performance shifts to him/her, and the entire congregation becomes the audience, watching and responding to the actions or words delivered from the spiritual realm through the artistic demonstration of the Elemi. This moment is full of performative energy. The pause, the silence, the focused attention, all contribute to what Schechner (2002) calls heightened performance, where meaning is concentrated in a single action or figure. Schechner further posits that in ritual and theatre, attention is structured, focus flows toward what is most symbolically charged in that moment. Succinctly, the Elemi becomes the dramatic attention, the performer whose role is to channel revelations. The congregation's stillness reinforces the sacred weight of the moment, much like in a traditional drama when the audience leans forward in silence during a climactic scene. This moment of congregation's stillness aligns with Turner's notion of "communitas" in his theory of Liminality because everyone shares in the suspense and transformation, collectively entering into sacred empathy. For Turner describes communitas as a powerful sense of togetherness that emerges when people participate in rituals, setting aside their individual differences. He also describes it as a relational quality of full, unmediated communication, even communion, between definite anddeterminate identities.

In the second phase, where the trance is quietly acknowledged but not centralized, the Elemi still performs a significant spiritual role that is foregrounded within the broader performance. The congregation continues its flow of worship while the recognition of the presence and action of the Elemi is kept at bay. This creates a dual-layered drama: one unfolding in song, dance, and communal prayer; the other playing out silently in the Elemi's spiritual expression simultaneously. This duality mirrors African performance traditions, where simultaneous acts often happen within the same space: a masked dancer might be performing in the centre while drummers signal new movements, while elders chant at the edge of the stage. Everyone is contributing to the ritual narrative, but focus shifts fluidly, depending on the energy of the moment. Thus, performance can be held in the margins and still be sacred (Akinade 2017).This dual-layered performance exemplifies Schechner's (2002) notion of 'efficacy-entertainment,' where the spiritual efficacy (the Elemi's transformation) occurs

within an entertaining, albeit sacred, structure that the entire congregation observes.

Considering the performativity in trance, the worshipper (Elemi) is no longer just an ordinary person in the church. He/She becomes an "in between" the physical and spiritual, between self and spirit. His/Her actions, voice, and movements are transformed. He/She becomes a kind of ritual actor or character, not by pretense, but by living through a deeply spiritual moment that takes the form of a performance. The person in trance was not alone, the whole church was with him emotionally and spiritually. This deep participation by the audience reflects one of the core features of African drama, where a strong connection between the performer and the audience is established. Illustratively, the Elemi becomes the actor performing a sacred role. The congregation becomes the audience watching, listening, and reacting. They are also part of the performance, because their response helps carry the moment as if it is a stage play with performers, actions, audience, performance and emotion. The power of the performance lies in its spontaneity, raw energy, and emotional truth.

Dance

Dance is a common phenomenon in every church, but it has a unique dramatic force in White Garment Churches. It is woven dramatically to the whims of the preacher to elucidate the minds and moods of the congregation. Dance happens often during service, and when it happens, it is not quiet, not private, and not passive. It is joyful, expressive, and collective. The dance observed during thanksgiving is usually rich with symbolism, energy, and participation. The dance is full of meaningful codes and movements such as hand lifting, feet stamping in rhythm, cycling turns, and kneeling and rising. All these combine together to form a requisite dance, without any instruction from anyone. The dancers' body will move in harmony with the spirit and the rhythm alongside the entire congregation. In this manner, the dance becomes a dramatic tool, a means of expressing spiritual joy, gratitude, and reverence. This is buttressed by Fatokun (2006) who argues that performance is not limited to scripted drama; it includes all expressive and symbolic acts that follow a pattern or structure. He further explains that dancing, singing and ritual actions are not just decorative, they are central to the transmission of culture and belief.

Functionally, dance expresses what words cannot. It creates unity. It connects the physical and the spiritual. The body of the dancer becomes the message, and the movement becomes the language. Also, when the congregation dances to the singing and clapping, it experiences more than a performance as it experiences spiritual oneness in anticipation of showers of divine blessings (Celestial Church of Christ). The dance, therefore, becomes everyone's celebration as the worshippers smile, sing, and dance. At this juncture, nobody is excepted because the dance has blurred the lines between the clergy and the congregation, the lines between the performers and the audience. This is a key feature of African dramatic performers. The dance epitomizes a continuation of African performance heritage within Christian worship.

In the churches understudy in this paper, the choir plays a distinctive dramatic role, the choir is central to the worship and service. It is not merely a group of singers, but a spiritual engine, a dramatic tool, and a ritual voice that speaks not only to the ears, but also to the souls. The positioning of the choir is dramatic, the position is orderly fashioned to face the altar with the choristers sitting with a sacred consciousness, distinct from the general congregation. They often sing in unison, every movement is subtle

and intentional, making their presence spiritual and ceremonial. It is obvious that the choir often serves as a kind of ritual specialist group, like traditional priests or praise-singers in African dramatic contexts. Their songs set the tone of the service, guide transition from secularism to celestiality, and trigger unconscious manifestations such as trances and prophetic utterances. They perform roles like the Chorus and Weird Sisters in Shakespearean theatre.

Symbolic and Liturgical Performances: Rituals and Songs

From this study, in the four churches, ritual forms the backbone of their worship and service. It is a glaring and usual routine practice in C&S and CCC churches to formally begin their worship or service with ritual cleansing. One can easily observe a variety of ritualistic and symbolic actions like how foot wears are being removed at the entrance of the church as a mark of reverence, members bowing at the altar, candles are lit, incense is burnt, and water is sprinkled, all these are ritual practices. Each of these acts, though spiritual, carries symbolic meanings and dramatic form which is similar to scenes in a traditional African play.

From the two C&S churches understudy in this paper, the lighting of seven candles marks the opening of the service. It is done with serene reverence, accompanied by soft recitations that almost similar to incantatory chants and carefully timed hand movements. This ritual act is highly symbolic, representing the presence of the Holy Spirit and the invocation of divine light (Open Christian Education). This is a similitude of traditional African rituals that use fire and incense to invoke ancestral spirits or sacred forces. Whenever candle-lighting is done, it is accompanied with a dramatic performance by both the clergy and the congregation, this authenticates that some church rituals entails elements of performativity. Thus, the rituals observed in the C&S and CCC churches are connotative and performative. Though they are driven by spiritual goals, they also carry the marks of drama, symbolism, and communal performance which align perfectly with the tradition of African indigenous drama. These churches have become modern spaces where African dramatic elements exist, not on a conventional theatre stage, but in worship spaces filled with rhythm, symbols, and spiritual energy.

In CCC at the Premier Parish and Orisun Parish, rituals manifest in more elaborate dimensions than the C&S churches. The rituals begin with spiritual cleansing, where members are sprinkled with water while standing and some kneeling in silence. Each sprinkling is accompanied with a prayer chant, echoing the kind of symbolic repetition found in African dramatic performances. The participants are not just being 'cleansed' spiritually; they are also performing a role in a ritual drama, going through transformation right before the eyes of the congregation. Another spiritual cleansing which is tantamount to dramatic ritual occurs as members are given oranges, cubes of sugar and sugarcanes to eat. The aim of this ritual cleansing is regarded as a practical praying process of introducing sweetness and goodness into the lives of every member present. All these rituals establish the assertion of these worship spaces as preservative institutions of African dramatic traditions.

Another striking ritual performance in both C&S and CCC is called Malaika (the descent of an angel). It is a spiritual encounter with an angel during worship session. Some individuals fall into a trance and are believed to be possessed or overshadowed by a Malaika, a divine angelic being sent to deliver a message, to heal, and to reveal hidden truths or correct the

congregation. This act is more than spiritual, it is performative! The individuals that are possessed by the Malaika often undergo a striking transformation such that they may adopt a new voice, speak in tongues or in parables, perform prophetic gestures, and take on an unfamiliar facial expression or posture. The congregation immediately responds with either an awful silence or a rhythmic prayer chants. There will be an unspoken agreement in the atmosphere that the possessed Malaika is no longer acting as human but as a divine entity. This performance is not rehearsed, but it follows an established ritual expectation: prophecy must be spoken clearly or symbolically, movement must be carefully and spiritually charged, and the interaction with the congregation must reinforce the angelic authority.

This dramatic moment of Malaika follows the African dramatic traditions seen in masquerades, oracles, and ancestral performances, where a person takes on a spiritual identity and delivers messages or ideas to the community. The dramatic performance, actions, gestures, speeches, silence, and movements are intensely watched, emotionally charged, and spiritually impactful.

Sacred Songs

Under close perusal of the worship songs and hymns of the churches in this paper, the songs and hymns are dramatic repertoire. They go beyond mere accessories to worship as they are drivers and wheels of spiritual and dramatic experiences. It is observed right from every stage of the liturgy, from the opening of the service to the benediction, the songs are highly symbolic with a heavy spiritual undertone, each song is attached to a specific spiritual function, and it is sung or performed with coordinated movements and vocal techniques that resonate theatrical traditions. This excerpt from Oluwatobiloba (2026) explains the nature and sacredness of the songs in C&S church in Igbodigo:

In C&S, there are specific songs sung for specific purposes: for deliverance, for exhortation, for blessings, for curses. Songs usher everything in the procession of the doctrinal activities. They are the anchor! Each activity demands a song, and each song is symbolic and significant to the potency of every activity. Claps are very identical with our church, along with the shekere or rattle and bell (L.A. Oluwatobiloba, personal communication, April 12, 2026).

From this excerpt, the ritual and power of sacred songs are established, also their function as dramatic device is depicted. It is a replicate of African traditional theatre, where chants, drums, and call-and-response songs guide the audience through a performance. In sum, in White Garment Churches, songs direct the flow of worship, signal transitions, and create sacred atmosphere.

Hymns in C&S and CCC churches transcend ordinary songs. They are sacred scripts, often sung to announce a divine intervention, declare spiritual warfare, or introduce a new ritual act. Many of these hymns are rooted in the Holy Bible, African cosmology, and collective religious imaginations. Their performance, posture and timing reflect deep dramatic significance that aligns squarely with African traditional theatre. C&S and CCC churches hymns are performative tools that initiate ritual acts, symbolize spiritual meanings, and transform the mood and direction of the service. Oluwatosin (2026) comments on the nature of the C&S hymn:

Our hymns in C&S are sacred and spontaneous they don't need to be pre-planned. If the spirit reveals that someone needs

deliverance, a particular hymn that is meant for deliverance comes up spontaneously. The entire church responds. The rhythm changes, people stand or kneel, and everything begins to move around that hymn (S. Oluwatosin, personal communication, April 12, 2026)

Across all four identified performative elements, a consistent pattern emerges: they are not mere accessories to worship but are constitutive of it. They form a cohesive, dramatic system that functions as a primary vehicle for expressing and preserving African cultural identity within the Christian faith.

Conclusion

The modes of worship and service of C&S and CCC have been critically x-rayed in this paper and it has been depicted that White Garment Churches in Nigeria operate as living repositories and repertoires of African dramatic traditions, seamlessly integrating indigenous performance culture with Christian worship practices. Through their trance experiences, ritual structures and actions, dance expressions, and songs, these churches demonstrate the continuity and adaptation of African dramatic elements within contemporary religious contexts.

This work establishes that worship in these churches is inherently performative, creating sacred theatre where spiritual transformation occurs through embodied ritual action. The churches serve as cultural bridges, preserving traditional African aesthetic principles while expressing Christian theological concepts, thereby creating unique syncretic forms of religious drama. The paper confirms that African dramatic traditions have not disappeared with modernization but have evolved and found new expression within Christian worship spaces. These churches represent sophisticated performance systems that maintain communal participation, symbolic meaning-making, and transformative spiritual experience characteristic of traditional African drama.

In addition, the paper demonstrates that religious practice and theatrical performance are not separate categories but interconnected expressions of cultural identity and spiritual belief. White Garment Churches thus represent essential and insightful avenues for understanding the persistence and transformation of African cultural practices in post-colonial Nigeria, offering insights and new dimensions into how traditional performance systems adapt to new religious frameworks while maintaining their essential dramatic and communal characteristics. Since performativityhas to do with the capacity and expression of action, it is suffice to adjudge that the modes of worship and service in White Garment Churches are quintessential strategy to interrogate and engage religion as dramatic entity in spite of its spiritual connotations.

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