

Labourer's death sparks violent attack on Lagos church

•Parish head, others in critical conditions as mob unleashes mayhem

By Gbenga Aderanti

A violent attack by an angry mob on a branch of the Celestial Church of Christ in Lagos has left the church's shepherd and other members in critical conditions. The irate mob also set fire to the church building after vandalizing it and looting its property.

The incident, which occurred on Friday night, followed the death of a Hausa labourer identified simply as Dogo, who was said to have fallen into a soakaway pit he was employed by the church to evacuate at its Overcomers Parish, Oke Ira Nla, Ajah, Lagos.

Dogo's death was said to have drawn the ire of his Hausa kinsmen in the area, who accused the church of ritual killing and promptly mobilised others to attack the Senior Shepherd of the church, VSE Aso James, and other church members they could lay their hands on. A video that went viral yesterday showed the naked and battered body of the Senior Shepherd. Both James and the church's Assistant Shepherd, Senior Evangelist Ayotunde Oladipupo, were said to be in critical conditions in a Lagos hospital at press time yesterday.

The Senior Shepherd's wife, Mrs Aso James, who was said to have escaped the attack by a whisker, however, told our reporter that Dogo's death resulted from a pure accident and had nothing to do with ritual killing. She said the deceased Dogo was a well-known face in the church and until his death was always coming to perform one task or the other.

She said: "Dogo was contracted for the job ahead of the church Juvenile Harvest on 4th June.

"In preparation for the Juvenile Harvest Thanksgiving, the Parish contracted him to clear the church's soakaway during the week and not on New Moon service day (Thursday) as was reported by some online media.

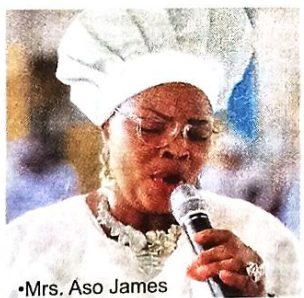
"Dogo, who came in on Thursday night, came with chemicals which he poured into the soakaway before clearing the dirt.

"The man came at midnight on Thursday without prior notice or permission from the church authorities.

"Those who saw him come in did not stop him because he was a familiar face. Besides, service was ongoing.

"As at the time Dogo came into the church, the shepherd was on the altar ministering."

Mrs James said the Senior Shepherd and Dogo bonded very well because the former speaks Hausa very well. She added that if the shepherd of the church had been notified that



•Mrs. Aso James



•Assistant Shepherd, Oladipupo

Dogo would do the work at night, he would not have allowed that.

She said: "Thursday midnight is Celestial New Moon Service all over the world, and it was being conducted by the parish shepherds.

"We were already in New Moon service when people saw Dogo carrying a ladder around 2 am because Dogo saw the church gate open during the service.

"But because the church members knew that he was the one normally contracted to clear soak away, he was allowed to do whatever he wanted to do."

Dogo was said to have placed the ladder inside the soakaway pit in order to evacuate the

dirt, but after a short while, they noticed that he was sinking and shouting.

She said the assistant shepherd of the church, who was with Dogo, tried to help him out but his efforts were fruitless as he too fell into the pit.

At that point, the Senior Shepherd was alerted and he also joined in the rescue mission and Dogo, as well as the Assistant Shepherd, were eventually rescued from the pit.

Mrs James said: "It was not only Dogo that fell into the soak away pit; the Assistant Shepherd, who was curious about Dogo's decision to clear the soakaway at midnight, stayed to supervise him.

"The moment he noticed that Dogo had sunk, he entered the soak away too to rescue Dogo. Unfortunately for him, he also fell into the soakaway.

"Immediately the shepherd was alerted, he stopped the service and came to the scene of the accident.

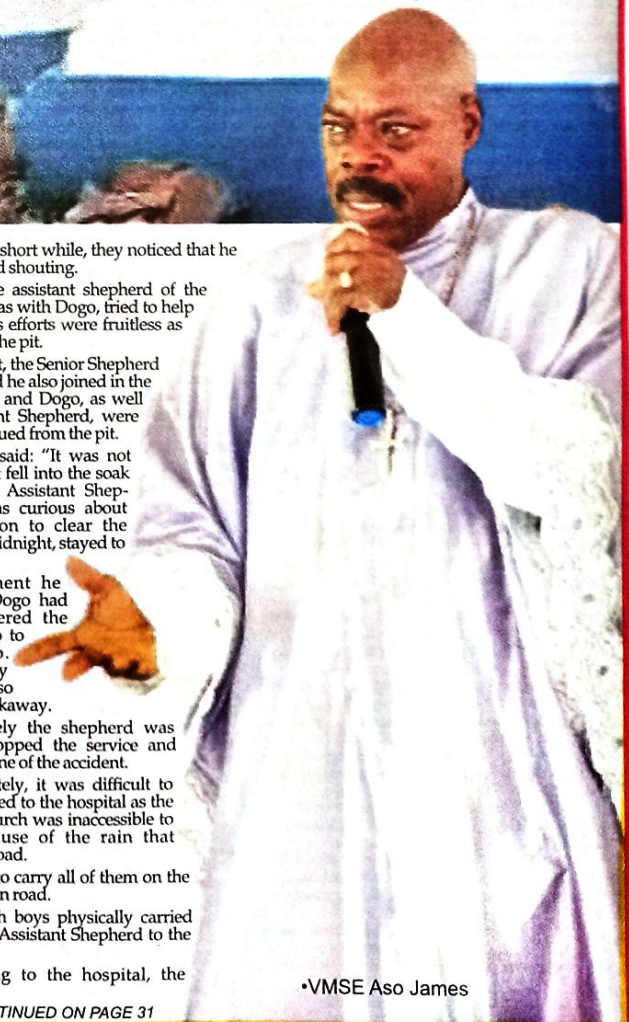
"Unfortunately, it was difficult to move the injured to the hospital as the road to the church was inaccessible to vehicles because of the rain that damaged the road.

"They had to carry all of them on the back to the main road.

"The church boys physically carried Dogo and the Assistant Shepherd to the hospital.

"On getting to the hospital, the

•Damaged building before the roof was removed by hoodlums



•VMSA Aso James

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people on duty confirmed Dogo dead while the assistant shepherd was attended to."

Mrs James said at the hospital, the Senior Shepherd was advised to immediately report the incident at the nearest police station while the body of the deceased was taken to the mortuary. The Senior Shepherd reported the matter at Langbasa Police Station and the police advised him to remain at the station till daybreak.

"But while we were at the police station making a report, the police advised us to call the family members of the deceased.

"We did, but the person who responded told us to evacuate Dogo's body from the mortuary and return him to the church premises. All this happened at midnight," a member of the church told *The Nation*.

The church member said in the morning, the police accompanied members of the church to the church premises where Dogo was laid.

"Suddenly, a group of people came to the church and saw the cow we had bought for our Juvenile Harvest for Sunday, and the crowd started shouting ritual! Ritual!

"A few minutes later, we saw a crowd with the representative of Dogo surrounding the church premises.

"All these happened in the presence of the police, but the crowd was too much for the police to control.

"Some of the church members jumped the fence into the bush while the shepherd told us to run for our lives and allow him to meet the crowd.

"The Shepherd, who speaks Hausa very well, felt he could explain what happened to the irate crowd and douse the tension, but he was wrong.

"The mob charged and attacked him.

"The police tried to calm them but it seemed the irate crowd had made up their minds to go violent. There and then, they

started vandalising the church property, setting some parts of the church ablaze and battering the Senior Shepherd and the church secretary."

Mrs James, who spoke amid tears, explained that the mob invaded the church secretary's house and lynched the shepherd and secretary, leaving them critically injured.

She said: "This is a pathetic situation, there was nothing like ritual killing. Some people are just being mischievous because we are a white garment church, because we are a Celestial Church.

"Dogo was a known person, and my husband treated him like a brother because he stayed in Benue, so he understands Hausa.

"The harvest cow they saw alive was what prompted them to start shouting ritual. Dogo's parts were fully intact. Nothing was removed from his body.

"The police witnessed that and the body was there for people to see.

"Dogo didn't die inside the soak away. He fell inside along with another church executive and both of them were rescued alive before he died on the way to the hospital."

Speaking to our correspondent on the telephone, the spokesperson of the church, Mr. Kayode Ajala, said that Dogo was brought out from the pit dead. He also said the assistant shepherd who fell into the soak away with him was in a critical condition.

Ajala said: "It was when they took them to the hospital that the family of Dogo said Dogo's corpse should not be taken to the mortuary; that they should bring the corpse.

"The corpse was intact. He wasn't alive when they took him out of the soakaway.

"The assistant pastor that was alive was moved from the hospital he was yesterday night to another hospital. He is in bad shape. We are praying that he survives.

"But Dogo was not alive when they brought him out."

A member of the Celestial Church of Christ,

Overcomers Parish, Oke-Ira Nla, Ajah, Lagos, while throwing more light on the incident in a post on his social media handle with the name *xin_nightwolf*, described the crowd that invaded the church as "a bunch of looters that spent two hours looting the Mission House and stealing all electronic devices and musical instruments in sight."

He stated further that they did not stop at that, they also removed electric cables, slaughtered and shared the cow tied down in the Parish premises for the Juvenile Harvest on Sunday.

Reacting to a viral video where a woman was condemning the church, he said "the woman in the video condemning the Celestial Church is one of the neighbours around who does not like the fact that there's a C.C.C. Parish in the neighbourhood..."

Reacting to the reports making the rounds, the church on its official website advised members of the public to "disregard any other narrative meant to tarnish the name and image of the Celestial Church of Christ Worldwide."

The church explained that contrary to the false narrative making the rounds that the parish was burnt because the deceased's body was mutilated and human parts removed, "The deceased Hausa man known as Dogo was quite popular in the neighbourhood and was known for the job of evacuating overflowing soakaway. He also doubled as an *Okada* (commercial motorcycle) rider.

"...was contracted to evacuate the soak-away in the premises of Celestial Church of Christ, Overcomers Parish, and was actually paid for the job three days before the unfortunate incident.

"...Dogo, out of his own volition, chose to do the job on the night of Thursday, 1st June, 2023. This was while the New Moon Service was in progress.

"The Shepherd in Charge of the Parish, VSE Aso James, was busy in the inner altar as

he was the Service Conductor.

"While carrying out the job he was engaged for, the deceased Hausa man, Dongo, slipped and fell into the soak-away.

"The Assistant Shepherd of the Parish, Senior Evangelist Ayotunde Oladipupo, who was supervising Dogo as he carried out the job immediately tried to rescue Dogo and in the process, he also fell into the soak-away.

"Church members alerted by the shouts for help abandoned the service and began a rescue operation for the two people that had fallen into the soak-away.

"The lifeless body of Dogo was eventually brought out, while the unconscious body of the Assistant Shepherd, Senior Evangelist Ayotunde Oladipupo, was also brought out of the soak-away.

"The unconscious Assistant Shepherd, Senior Evangelist Ayotunde Oladipupo, was rushed to the hospital, while the lifeless body of Dogo was also taken to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

"The family of the deceased Hausa man, Dogo, took custody of his remains with all parts of the body in place.

"The Police also attest to the fact that no part of Dogo's body was tampered with.

"The arson at the Overcomers Parish was carried out by an angry mob largely made up of 'area boys' and *Okada* riders who also attacked the Shepherd of the Parish, VSE Aso James, and inflicted grievous bodily harm on him.

"The Hausas in the neighbourhood are doing a house-to-house search, on a reprisal attack, looking for Celestial Church members with the intention to harm them. Many C.C.C. members in the neighbourhood have since abandoned their homes and gone into hiding.

"VSE Aso James (Shepherd) and Senior Evangelist Ayotunde Oladipupo (Assistant Shepherd) are presently hospitalised and in critical conditions."