

A CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL HEALING MINISTRIES DRIVEN AS CHRISTIAN HEALING MINISTRY: A CASE STUDY OF EDDY NAWGU'S ANIOMA HEALING HOME

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Abstract

Many traditional religious priests especially in Nigeria today adopt healing ministries that operates as Christian healing ministries thereby posing great threat and confusion to genuine seekers and promoters of biblical and apostolic brand of divine healing. The commercialization and syncretization of Christian healing ministries by traditional religious medicine men and women in our country is doing more harm than good to the advancement faith healing ministries based on the teaching of Christ. This work therefore is an attempt to examine the abuses inherent in Traditional Religion Healing Ministries driven as a Christian Healing Ministry using Eddy Nawgu's Anioma Healing Home as a case study. The work employed content analytical tool in analyzing data collected from survey approach. The Christian organizations should put in place regulatory bodies that ensure that those operating as Christian Healing Ministries operate according to approved standards of Biblical Christianity. Furthermore government should provide legal framework that helps to provide sanctions against those who abuse the functions and operations of institutionalized Christianity. The mass media should work with the Christian Churches and the government to promote sensitization of the public on the dangers of patronizing occult healing homes parading themselves as Christian healing homes. Equally it called for early religious education by parents to ensure that their wards are grounded on the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith thereby helping to safe guard them in their later years from hawkers of fake Christianity.

Keywords: Critique, African Traditional Healing Schemes, Christian Healing Ministries, Syncretism, Eddy Nawgu.

Introduction

The Traditional Healing Ministries have in recent times become a booming business in Nigeria. This is even made evident as many of them have Christianized themselves as Christian Healing homes thereby making themselves very attractive to many gullible and undiscerning minds. The result is that on daily basis many people are falling into their traps

as victims with some ending up being used for rituals to service blood thirsty satanic banks and evil altars. Commenting on the place of religion in the African continent, Madu (1997) states that a fundamental trait of African societies is the importance of religion.

Explicating furthermore he observes that Nigeria, as a microcosm of the African world consequently shares in this highly religious consciousness. The above view is corroborated by Ugwu (2002:66) when he states that Igbo people as a race in Africa are said to be notoriously religious. It is against this backdrop that these three major religions namely Christianity, Islam and Traditional religions have found the Nigerian soil as a strong breeding ground. According to Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) 2015 report Christianity has been noted as the dominant religion in the country with a population of 48.85% while Islam has 43.4% and other religions has a total of 7.68%. Moreover according to The World Christian Encyclopedia (Johnson and Zurlo 2020) the World Christian Database (WCD) report states that Christians in Nigeria is 46.3% of the population while the Muslims constitute 46.2% and the traditional religions is made up of 7.2%.

Although the Christian faith occupies a dominant place among the Nigerian religionists the influence of Traditional Religion has continued to hold a strong grip on many gullible adherents of the western religion or Christian faith. Ugwu (2002) avers that the above view is predicated on the fact that though the Igbo are highly religious they are equally amenable to change. It is this vulnerability in the Igbo world view that has made it possible for traditional healing homes to thrive especially among the Igbos of Nigeria. The traditional religious healers no doubt exploit their collective appeals to religion to engage syncretic approach as a marketing strategy for promoting traditional medicine and magic under the brand names of Christian Healing homes. In other words by making traditional religion a belief system that speaks all languages as well one that has answers to every mundane problem of man and society they make it attractive to desperate individuals in search of healing and life solutions by all means. This is because traditional religion employs all kinds of ethical and unethical methods in providing healings and deliverance to the sick and spiritually oppressed. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to critically examine the abuses inherent in the marketing of traditional healing homes as Christian healing ministries using Eddy Nawgu's Anioma Healing Home as a case study.

Theoretical Framework

There are various theories that are employed in the study of religion. Sociological theory of religion as proposed by Emile Durkheim 1921 as cited in www.cliffsnotes.com holds the view that religion is a creation of society. The above view is equally echoed by Okeke (2002) as cited in Amunnadi (2016:17) when he states that the sense of the holy and of God as the source of sacred demand, originates from the absolute claim which society impose on her members. According to this school of thought religion is an illusion driven by the vagaries and dynamics of culture and society. Religion from this context is a reflection of a society's absolute demand of loyalty on her citizenry. In other words they hold the view that religion has nothing to do with the existence of fundamental truth or moral absolutes. However while religion is mediated within the milieu of society religion transcends society as the divine gift of free-will makes man a free moral creature endowed with freedom of choice to choose what to believe or worship. Traditional religion and traditional healers unfortunately adopt fear in most cases as a medium to gain followers instead of faith and sound judgment.

This work would be based on the theological theory of religion. According to this theory as propounded by Christian theologians it is the God essence in man, *imago dei*, that God endowed man at creation that provokes his religious culture. Nmah (1998:71) is in agreement to the above view when he posits that it is the response of man to inherent consciousness of the divine that gave birth to religious expression. Religion according to him is a product of man's recognition of the divine reality through his divine essence (human spirit). This work is of the view that religion must moderate culture and society as long as it draws its roots or foundation from universal or moral absolutes or simply put from the divine lawgiver called God Almighty. Chidili (2018:239) sums the above view when he avers that religion relates to the relationship that subsists between the transcendental reality called God and humanity "where the transcendent is perceived as an awesome but fascinating mystery to which humanity owes total submission and absolute obedience". Furthermore he submits that when people try to fix human problems outside divine principles they create more problems than solutions for society. It is against this backdrop that this study sees the engagement of occult and magic in name of traditional healing operating as Christian healing homes as the promotion of the misnomer.

Conceptual Clarifications

In this section, effort will be made to examine conceptual underpinnings of key words relevant to this study. This no doubt will help to provide a background understanding of the work.

Traditional: The term "traditional" relates to the word tradition which according to Shils (1981) is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. It equally refers to the rising view or belief that customs, ancient values and ideas are more important for society than modern ideas. The above view is equally corroborated by Mariam-Webster dictionary online when it defines the above word as the way of thinking, behaving, or doing something that has been used by the people in a particular group, family, society etc., that have been part of the custom of a group for a long time. The word therefore has to do with deployment of the mindset, values, ideas or beliefs that has their root from ancestral or age long held patterns by a given society or people. It involves the rise of African or indigenous or approach or philosophy, arts, religion and non - Christian standards in addressing existential challenges or problems.

2) **Christian:** Ugwu (2000) defines Christianity as the religion which is based on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Christians are the followers of Jesus Christ; an individual whose religion is based on the teachings of Christ. Christian is therefore a term that describes adherents of biblical Christianity whose lifestyle and convictions are driven by the claims and teachings of the lord Jesus Christ.

3) **Prayers:** prayer is defined by Wehmier (2000) as words which one says to God which may be expressed as thanks giving or petition for help. This was equally the view of Wikipedia while explaining prayer from the context of Hebrew bible. According to it prayer is an evolving means of interacting with God, most frequently through a spontaneous, individual, unorganized form of petition of and/or thanking. From the Christological view point prayer is described as a private time between God and the worshipper. It is therefore an act of worship which could be done publicly or by a group through vocal expression or silence reflection on the divine personality called God with a view to accessing divine grace or acknowledging same in praises.

4) **Healing:** The word healing and health according to Mcmorrow (2017) come from the same root word “Health” which according to her is the same old English word “hale” meaning wholeness, being whole, sound or well. However he states that while health is a noun the word healing is a verb word. Healing is defined by her as the process of restoring health. The word health as described by WHO (World health organization) refers to a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Healing therefore is a concept that has to do with the aiding of the physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual and religious faculties and wellbeing of individual as well as fighting disease. This was put pointedly by Charles and Hunter (1983) when they stated that healing can be secured in various ways such as counselling, miracle, casting out devils or excursion etc.

5) **Ministry:** The term ministry is defined by Rapids and Zondervan (1988) as Greek word ‘diakopne’ meaning to serve as a slave. In this work it is used to refer to the services provided within the context of Christian organizations either though institutional public or independent private framework.

6) **Anioma :** According to Okeke as cited in Anizoba (2018) the word Anioma is used to refer to a place where Edward Okeke Onyebuchi popularly known as Eddy Nawgu’s ministry is located.

Eddy Nawgu’s Healing Ministries Modus Operandi

According to Ekenna (2000) Eddy Nawgu’s Healing Ministries is structured partly as a Christian Religion healing ministry and also as an African Traditional Religious healing enterprise. It is against this backdrop that he avers that while they worship and acknowledge the place of the trinity i.e God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the source of divine healing they also pay allegiance to local deities, cult of ancestors, mediums and native doctors in the course of administering healing to the hurting. Chukwudozie (2008) as cited by Anizoba (2018) puts this view more pointedly when he posits that the above healing ministry is a bundle of deception for while they use the Christian Bible in the public to pray for the sick they would privately resort to consult mediums just to paint a picture that his occultic church is after all a Christian faith agency.

The above view is equally corroborated by Anene (1993) when he observed that the late Eddy used tricks and divinations to mix up the traditional religion and Christian religion as a means of trapping undiscerning public. It is no wonder he avers that most of the membership of the above healing home are shallow minded Christians who are easily swayed by adulterated brand of Christianity. Anigbogu (2008) affirmed the above submission when he posits that Eddy Nawgu was not a genuine prophet but rather a native doctor whose religion is heathenism and not Christianity.

Okeke (1986) is equally in the affirmative with the above reasoning when he described that the above late prophet as an occultist who has used more than 32 million Talisman of Indian “yogism” in the course of healing ministries. From the foregoing the Eddy Nawgu’s healing home though operated openly as a Christian ministry through the use of Christian Bible and the invocation of the names of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost in their prayers

this appears only to serve as a cover up of from it's covert and diabolical activities. His was therefore an organization that employed magic, witchcraft and high occult powers as a quick fix medium for addressing the problems of the teeming population of his clients who falsely assumed him to be a great prophet from God.

Threats to Biblical Christianity

In this section we shall discuss the various threats this brand of healing ministry pose to Biblical Christianity.

Promotion of Witchcraft: According to Chambers dictionary witchcraft is defined as the craft or art of witches. The word witch is described as a person, especially a woman that exercises supernatural or magical powers and knowledge through entering into compact with the devil or evil spirits. It is therefore a religion that diverts people from placing their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ to Satan and elemental powers. By so doing the resort to witchcraft and magical powers as sources of healing result in promotion or creature worship instead of the Creator or the Divine personality called God. Their harm is resident in the fact that it engages or deploys negative or evil powers for promotion of good. It is in this context that the terms "witchcraft" and "witch" was defined by <https://www.ucalgary.ca>>witch to refer to those who are believed to cause harm by occult or supernatural means. It is against this backdrop that God in the Old and New Testament Scriptures prohibited his covenant people from practicing witchcraft as in indicated in the following Scriptures

Let no one be found among you who sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, cast spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consult the dead. (Deut 18:10-14). The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, factions ... and the like. I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal.5:19-21) Furthermore the book of Revelation 21: 8 underscores the above submission when it states that those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers and all liars will end up in eternal damnation in burning lake of hell.

The Biblical argument against witchcraft is predicated on the motive of same and not just on its effects. Onyinah (2015) puts the above pointedly when he observes that even though witchcraft is believed to be essentially evil, witches are often known to have the power to turn several evil omens such as infertility, impotence, business failures, and broken marriages around for good. Most importantly he avers that people advance in witchcraft not just for the intention to do good but for the insatiable thirst for human flesh or blood and power. The resort to diabolical powers through witchcraft and divination by Eddy Nawgu's healing home from the foregoing is predicated on the entrenchment of evil as an instrument of inordinate lust for power. It is like engaging in self- help or the deployment of jungle justice approach instead of due process or rule of law as a means of containing violent conflict and still pretending that it will result in evolving a sane and flourishing society. Pauline theology says it tersely when he observes in Deut 18:10-14 that no one can conquer evil with evil. Rather he enjoins people to overcome evil with good. (Roman12:21)

Promotion of Deception: The above healing home provides an environment for the promotion of institutionalized deception using religion as a safe haven or platform. The implication of the above anomaly is that the enemy of true Christianity or religion are provided a vintage avenue to categorize or assume albeit erroneously that Christian faith is an instrument of misleading of the feeble minded. By directing people to occultic powers and magic it introduces the concept of falsehood and erroneous doctrine which are antithetical to genuine Christianity. This is because it introduces the concept of the commercialization of divine grace of healing in Christianity by making same available only to the highest bidder. However this is contrary to the apostolic teaching which condemned the use of money to buy spiritual graces as shown in the Scriptures cited below.

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving himself out that himself was some one great. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God. And when Simon saw that by laying on of the apostle hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money. Saying give me also this power that whosoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, your money perish with you, because you think that you can purchase the gift of God with money. (Acts 8:9–10,18 -20).

Agbo (2010) underscores the above submission pointedly when he states that there is a high wave of deception sweeping across the Christian faith due to increasing army of prophets and preachers whose main focus in recent times is on materialism, self-projection, self-making and avarice. The implication of the above ugly trend he posits is that such teachings cannot foster the harvest of quality of Christians that Christ had in mind when he commanded His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.

The Primate of all Nigerian Anglican Communion is in agreement to the above view when he states in an online editorial of the Nigerian Guardian of July 7th, 2019 that in spite of the increasing trend of stories of men of God engaging in illicit sexual affairs and occult practices the Nigerian Church must strive to remain the ground and pillar of truth. That is to say that the Church must be on guard against the erosive influence of another gospel which in the language of Apostle Paul is no gospel at all.

Conclusion

The above work has attempted to examine the errors inherent in the operation of a traditional healing home as a Christian Healing ministry using Eddy Nawgu's Anioma Healing Home as a case study. This study identified that the use of priests, Christian Bible and prayers does not necessarily bestow upon an organization a Christian identity. This is because one can be employing all these Christian ritual publicly as a cover up while still engaging in covert activities that are inimical to Biblical Christianity such as witchcraft and satanic worship as was the case of the above healing home.

Recommendations

Based on the above discourse, the following recommendations that were made with the view to addressing the challenges discovered in the course of the study:

- (1) Christian organizations should secure regulatory bodies that ensure that those operating as Christian Healing Ministries operate according to approved standards of Biblical Christianity.
- (2) The government should provide legal framework that helps to provide sanctions against those who abuse their operations by exposing innocent citizens to dangers of ritual killing and dangerous blood covenants while pretending to be providers of healings and deliverance from sicknesses and diseases.
- (3) The mass media should work with the Christian Churches and the government to promote sensitization of the public on the dangers of patronizing occult healing homes parading themselves as Christian healing homes.
- (4) Parents should start early to impart the fundamentals of the Christian religion so that as their wards grow up they cannot be easily led astray by scammers of genuine Christianity through traditional healing homes disguised as Christian healing ministries.
- (5) Christian missionaries should strive to evolve deep spiritual capacities or power through praying and fasting as well as care giving education so as to serve as channel for providing divine remedies to very hard and impossible existential challenges such as barrenness, paralysis, deafness, blindness, deep depression, seizures of panic and other fear that is terrifying, compulsions and obsessive disorders amongst others that drive people to occult houses as places of last resort.

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