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The Surge of Healing Phenomena in African Indigenous Religion and Christianity in Contemporary Nigeria: Rethinking Authenticity

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Abstract

The surge of healing phenomena in African Religion and Christianity in contemporary Nigeria is no longer a new thing, where people from nook and cranny go in search of healing from healers in African and Christian Religions respectfully. The human person is subjected to physical, spiritual and psychological sicknesses, threatening cases of spiritual attacks or destruction required to be handled healers, which has become an important subject in African and Christian healing respectively today. The research unveils factors responsible for the proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria. The paper made use of mixed approach which consist of comparative, expository, analytic methods of research. Data were collected through field survey, Focus Group Discussion and consultation of books. The paper discovers that, proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria is becoming a lucratic business, and people are been

exploited daily by healing tycoons, and sometime administered with fake healing. There is also high spiritual poverty, quest for materialism, and socio-economic factors as some factors responsible for the surge of healing in the duo religions in contemporary Nigeria. Also, sources of healing amongst some healers in the duo religions are fake and unverifiable. The paper suggests genuine healing to be carried out in African and Christian Religions in order to restore or offer solutions to people's related health, spiritual, psychological and physical challenges. People should also guard against patronizing fake healing tycoons inorder not to be exploited by them. Government and meaningful individuals should as well assist genuine healing in the two religions in order to help improve people's wellbeing now and always. Also, punitive measures should be put in place in order to curtailed proliferation of fake healing activities in the duo religions now and in the future.

Keywords: African Religion, Christianity, Contemporary and Healing.

INTRODUCTION

Healing in African and Christian Religions is an essential theme which cannot be underestimated, but has attracted alot of interest from those seeking healing, protection against evil or spiritual forces, antidotes against other related diabolical human heinous activities as well. In both religions, faith in God is a prerequisites for authentic healing. It is a fact made known that, people encounter spiritual, physical, and emotional sickness which continue to pull them down and which required the services of healing experts to help, and which without doubt plays a very significant role in religion (Opaleke 20).

When people's wellbeing and good health are impaired, they become depressed, their normal rhythm of life is disrupted and their daily activities are either slowed or even stopped. When drugs also fail to cure the sick, people go in search for healing from African and Christian Religions with the hope their conditions would be better. Hence, healing in African and Christian Religions is simply to cure, prevent, restore health and warn against any impending danger and even given antidote against unforseen attack. Thus, this entails a myriad of physical, psychological and spiritual problems, afflicting a substantial number of people in our time that prompt people in search of healing remedy to their related physical, psychological and spiritual problems.

Suffice to say that, due to quest for financial and material gain, desire to be famous,rival spirit of competitions among healers have been factors leading to incessant proliferation of fake healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria. As similarly maintains, there are complains and abuses of healing activities among healing experts in contemporary Nigeria. Some of these healers lied and attribute nervous, headache, typhoid and maleria, mental disorder, dreams, ailment and misfortunes to witches and wizards, demonic attacks inorder to demand people to availed themselves for healing and their profession given cognizance among the people (Gbenda37).

Thus, factors responsible for the surge of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria remained alarming and worrisome because people are made to pay through their nose,while some receive no healing at all, rather their wellbeing is worsen by fake revelations and administration from quack healing tycoons today . Another disheartening things about the proliferation of healing in

the two religions in contemporary Nigeria is that, people who patronized some of these healers in quest for their related problems to be solved ended up been frustrated , exploited and given wrong a complicated situation of the phenomena thereby complicating spiritual, psychological and physical healing by these fake healers.

It is a known fact also that, there are many sicknesses which cannot be healed via orthodox means but only through the use of traditional methods, spiritual or using exorcism. Hence demonic and spiritual, attacks from magicians and sorcerers are believed to bear dreadful impact on their victims, and can only be counteracted through healing and administering of herbal medication .Thus, healing is sought with the aim to solve related health issues or other related metaphysical as well as related well being challenges (Karbon et al 51).

Inview of the above excerpts, economic factors, desire for power, un healthy rival competition among healers or to be famous, or woe more members are considered to be some of the core reasons responsible for the proliferation of healing activities in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria. However with the proliferation and search of healing centres in Nigeria, there constant healing campaigns by healers , who enjoyed great crowd and the Nigeria Television Authority or other radio and television stations sell long viewing airtime to healing healers to advertise their healing on those TV (Ikeobi 45, Vol. VIII No.I).

The unprecedented rise in pursuit of healing in contemporary Nigeria and especially in African and Christian Religions is responsible for the surge of healing experts, who claimed to offer genuine healing to those in need but failed in that regard. People experienced fake healing which undermines the authenticity of genuine healing in the duo religions in contemporary Nigeria. This research is going to examine in details factors responsible for the proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria with the view of making some recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

African Religion

Religion denotes man's experience and recognition of a supernatural being or beings and awesome recognition of their powerful existence in human experiences(Smart1-2).)African Religion is defined as the living indigenous religion handed to Africans by their forebears. Gbenda asserts also that “it is a religious tradition of the African peoples that is based purely on their culture” (5). In another manner, Gaiya posits that “African Religion is ainstitutionalised system symbols, beliefs, values, practices which are focused on question of ultimate meaning to different African societies” (2). Shishima also defines African Religion as “the indigenous religion of the African people which is written on their hearts and can be seen in other sources like songs, proverbs, idioms and symbols” (1). Adasu also sees African Religion as" the religion which is being practised by men and women today as the religion of their forebears. It is therefore not only a heritage from the past but a living reality today"(14).

In view of the above , Ekwunife did not mince words when he defined African Religion in the Nigerian experience in this manner:

> ... living institutionalised religious beliefs and practices, which are rooted in the past… religious culture; a religion that was transmitted to the present overt and covert votaries by successive

forebears mainly through oral traditions(myths and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, dances, pithy saying and names, sacred specialists and persons, initiation rites, festivals , sacred spaces and objects and religious works of art; a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new religious experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities(1).

Christianity

This is a religion founded by Jesus Christ. Anyacho also asserts that Christianity was establishing in Palestine through the person and activities of Jesus of Nazareth, which is popularly known as Christianity (180). In a nut shell, Christianity is one of the viral religions founded by Jesus Christ of Nazareth, born of Mary and Joseph the carpenter.

Healing

Healing is a process of restoring somebody or thing to healthy state again. According to Hornby “it is simply a process of curing, preventing, and restoring health. It also has to do with casting out evil spirits and demons” (54). In another succinct definition, "it is the process of restoring to bodily wholeness, emotional well-being, mental functioning, and spiritual aliveness (Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling221). Ordinarily, healing is a word that belongs to medical aspect of human existence. It is a situation whereby a sick person is restored to normalcy (Otonko 85). Hornby similarly captures healing to mean "the process of becoming or making some body or something healthy again" (693). Oyor in his own word also defines healing "as a process of recovering from an abnormal physical shock (84). In another similar vein, healing is natural process of cure or repair of the tissue" (126). In another lucid view, Shimawua also sees healing "as the removal of the factor that causes diseases and infirmity in people" (143).

The Healing Dimension in African Religion

Traditional healing in African Religion is an indispensable religious phenomenon that builds the African confidence in their worldview. Thus, prior to the coming of orthodox medicine, Africans depends largely on traditional forms of healing till date (Gbenda 48). As an inseparable link to his worldview, an African is seriously concerned with living a pleasant, happy, full life and dying at a very old age. Hence, healers in African religious life include herbalists, medicine men, and, to a certain extent, priests. The services they render to people are highly appreciated and the people cannot live or do without them (51). Thus, below are some similar methodological process in the restoration of patients' health by traditional healers in African societies:

i. Having a thorough knowledge of herbs and roots which are are mostly found at secluded groves, forest and at the mountains or riverine areas to be used.
ii. Knowing the appropriate rituals to be performed at the right time.One of the secrets is that,they practice holistic medicine,applying traditional herbs and medicine to forestall and cure diseases.

iii. Knowing the right rituals to be performed, and the most efficacious herbs and spirits involved in their trade.

iv. Treatment of patients may simply start with simple herbs and antidotes for specific number of days required. Thus, some herbs are efficacious within their potency.

v. A diviner(*Zang ganang* or *nee gbal zala* in Mumuye) are usually consulted if there is no improvement in the health condition after the first treatment. The medicine man identify the causes of sickness, and recommends the herbs and medication to be administered for the treatment of the sick persons(Gbenda52).

vi. There is ritual washing of the sick with boil herbs as necessary way of making the patient 'whole' whose contact with spiritual agencies is disrupted but could be restored through rituals(52).

vii. Healing involves both the physical and spiritual aspects of man which are inseparable. Thus,body and soul work hand in hand.

viii. Traditional healers may be itinerant medicine men or they may build 'clinics' in their homes to admit patients and closely monitored the persons until their health is restored.

ix. Methods of therapy vary from one African healer to another depending on the kind of disease or demonic or spiritual attacks affecting the health of the sick person. Thus, it is in this regards that Ezeanya adumbrated three kinds of healing to include physical,spiritual and psychological. The physical healing is done by the use or application of substances such as herbs,plants,root, leaves,liquids,powder, bones and parts of animal. The spiritual and psychological healing are highly necessary,it is common knowledge that disease, all forms of suffering, calamities and misfortunes are caused mystically in the African worldview. They are caused by witches,evil spirits , divinities, deities or sorcerers(qtd in Gbenda 5-6).

Healing Dimension in Christianity

Healing in Christianity involved two phases, the Old and New Testaments, which are accepted method earlier started by Jesus Christ, and still continue to present generation as expounded in the below excerpts :

A. Healing in the Old Testament Perspective

Christianity is one of the religions that is recognized among world practicing religions. The religion was founded by Jesus Christ, son of Joseph and Mary the Carpenter. There are a number of variant words translated as healing in the Hebrew Old Testaments. However, most of them possessed the idea of the restoration of the condition of something that is really abnormal. In (Genesis 20:17, Exo. 21:19 and Chro. 30:20, Jer. 11) depict the relevance why people go in search of healing. Most of the other words used for healing in the Old Testament are used infrequently and do not add much to the concept of healing as obtained here.

Shimawua succinctly observes that, connection with healing may be because Greek also denotes the “profound flesh” or granulation tissues which cover the surface of an open wound during the process of healing (144). Furthermore, healing as noted in Old Testament is no doubt that it comes from the Supreme God. Instances of evidence in Genesis vividly showed where women who were unable to

conceive for instance (Gen. 18-11-14), 21:1-3), the woman of Abimelech's house hold (Gen. 30:22-23) and Rebecca (Gen. 25:21) experience the favours of God's healing in their lives. The book of Ex. 15:26 clearly affirmed also that "if you listen carefully the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases. I brought on the Egyptians for I am the Lord who heals you". Hence, God was involved in the healing ministry since the Old Testament period, he restores the fortunes of Israel and cause plaques to cause suffering on the Egyptians.

B. Healing in the New Testament Perspective

The New Testament is one of the portions that makes the Bible. Jesus Christ is the principal character and restorer of a fallen humanity whom God send to redeem. He is the founder of the Christian Religion and in the course of His earthly ministry He clearly reduced the sufferings of his people by healing them from various diseases as well as casting out demons from them. For instance, the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida was carried out by the compassion Jesus had on the blind man (MK. 8:12-26).

Jesus demonstrated, practically a high power as given his disciples and apostles to carry out all He has commanded them. Thus, in the mission of the twelve they were charged and instructed, among other things to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleans lepers, cast out demons (Mtt.10:5-9). In the same vein also, in the mission of the seventy, Jesus commanded "whenever, you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you, heal the sick in it and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you (Luke 10:8-9)" (Gbenda 55).

From the foregoing Biblical chapters and verses, they vividly pin point spiritual healing as an integral aspect found in Christianity which has begun long ago. A clear instance is also found in the healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate, which shows that spiritual healing is indeed manifest in Christianity, which believers must pray with faith as a necessary condition as outlined by Jesus and that of his disciples (Ikeobi, Vol.V No.1, 17).

Spiritual Healing

The mission Jesus Christ delved on both vertical and horizontal reconciliation therefore, restoring the relationship existing between God and the entire human race on one hand and among God, children themselves. Hence Christ did not only avail His divine prerogative to forgive sins (Mtt. 9:1-8) but made forgiveness on the part of his followers a *sine qua non* for God through His son Jesus Christ embarked on one extensive apostolate of receiving pardon themselves (Shimawua145).

Physical Healing

Christ often combined physical healing (Mtt. 9:1-8) at other times he devoted himself exclusively, occasionally cured from a distance , which is a clear manifestation of his love for people to be healed. Thus, this is also seen on the centurion, whose servant was ill, who expressed deep faith and unworthiness to have Jesus under his roof (Mtt. 8:5-13). Another similar example of Christ physical healing is curing of the court official's son (Jh. 4: 46-53). Healing of Peter's mother in-law, who was

down with fever (MK. 1:30-31) which vividly portrays that physical healing was undertaken by Christ himself.

Psychological Healing

The divine physician excels in these spheres of healing as showcased in a peaceful way, and Jesus dealt with public sinners and out casts where he brought psychological healing to the tax collector, Zacheaus when he hosted Jesus as a big quest in his house (LK. 19:9).

Bodily Healing

There are forces of nature which attack people. These forces are often been expelled through the use of exorcising. In Mtt. 24:24, it clearly shows the forms of demonic healing, which requires both spiritual and bodily healing. Forces of evil are considered realities we do not fully understand but we do not deny them because we do not fully understand. Hence, St. Paul said "for it is not against the sovereignties and powers which or the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens (Eph. 6:12). These forces of evil by their operation they remind us of what Paul called "the devil's tactics" (Eph. 6:10). As further adds, it is true these forces of evil are here with us but it is dangerous to exaggerate them (Ikeobi45, Vol III. No 1).

Comparative Perspectives on Healing in African and Christian Religions

As far as healing is concerned in African and Christian Religions, here are some comparative perspectives :

i. During healing in African and Christian Religions, God is involved. There is divine manifestation to reduce the suffering of people. God is the ultimate controller of life as observed in both religions.
ii. Secondly, faith is also a pre-requisite for healing in the two religions. A clear instance is found in Mark2:5, when Jesus saw their faith , the paralytic received forgiveness and healing. In African Religion as well, faith in God and in the medicine man as being'real' and his ability to cure is necessary for psychological and spiritual (Gbenda56).
iii. Both religions are monotheistic in nature, for they recognise the essence of prayer as the surest way to communicating to the divine to intervene in healing. Hence, during healing, both religions call the name of God , who is seen as supreme or chief healer to intervene. Hence all prayers are addressed to God by the healers to grant quick healing to the sick and those in need of protection from evil forces.
iv. Those who carry out healing in African and Christian Religions are people who are specialists, and they possessed special gifts either by physical or spiritual training.
v. In both religions , healers use spiritual and material things to heal the sick. In African Religion for instance,items involved in healing include the use of plants or animal substances, sacred objects or other things. While in Christianity, Holy water, candle, incense, sacramentals, laying of hands and so on and so forth are employed.

Factors Responsible for the Surge of Thereupeutic Practices in African and Christian Religions in Contemporary Nigeria

Below are some of the factors responsible for the proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria:

i. Poverty what ever forms is a central challenge to bedeviling people who are suffering, in need of necessities of life. Poverty is the lack of resources to satisfy ones needs which is also considered as material poverty. Though poverty is as old as human history. Hence, its significance has changed over time because poverty has become accepted as inevitable human phenomenon(Kass et al 2). No doubt also, the only means of eradicating poverty is to join the league of healers in the duo religions. Thus, high rate of poverty in Nigeria is indeed alarming as the United Nations Development Programme ranked Nigeria 171 on its index of natural development with more than 70 percent of the population living in extreme poverty (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Hence, from the above index, it clearly shows that one of the driving forces responsible for the proliferation of healing in contemporary Nigeria is the need to escape from material absence as a catalyst that drive people into healing with a lot of their close associates and extended families (149). Further, the burden of responsibilities to cater include things like obsequious burial ceremonies, tuition fees, hospital bills, feeding and soon triggered people to go into healing in the two religions inorder to be abled to cater for these pressing needs.

ii. Because of spiritual and material poverty, there is lack of faith on the part of the people in the sense that things have not understood the proper meaning of what healing means and should be. Hence, most of these healers find anchorage in God or divine because for the healing actions to reach their intended aim , faith creates the connection between God and man and comes as the fruit of the way of Christ (Gal. 4:4). It is a pre-requisite as Ikeobi rightly reiterates also that,because of the living faith which is supposed to be our preparedness to fill up what is lacking in us, intending healers or many people joined the queue of becoming healers(IKeobi 45, Vol. Viii No. 3). Thus, because of God of spiritual poverty, many join the healing in the two religions to demonstrate their faith and bring it to reality by asserting that,without faith; nobody can be able to bring about healing.

iii. Socio – Economic Factor: Nigeria today is indeed been ravished by socio-economic challenges. The country is rich but the people are poorer than ever. Corruption, selfishness, greed are been exhibited by the callous elites who are responsible for dragging the country to a stagnant point, and which is pathetic . The culture of begging is a manifest in our streets, motor parks, entrance to religious places of worship, Government residential places, or entrances to institutions of learning. Also, unemployment creates insecurity which is also on the rise. Amidst these re-occurring challenges, zeal in healing in the duo religions in Nigeria kicks start. It is in this similar excerpt that Shimawua posits that “The flourishing of healing is seen as the easiest means to generate funds" (149).

iv. Unhealthy competition among healers in African and Christian Religions is another factor which necessitates the surge for healers today. Hence, there is need to canvas for more members which instigate unhealthy competition and is responsible for the proliferation of healing in both religions in contemporary in Nigeria. Similarly, Otonko further adds that, most healers have

made the mainline Churches and some sitted places as the target of their activities using healing as a strategy to dominate their counterparts from other fields (103).

v. The Desire to be famous and become relevant is another instigating factor for the rise of healing in African and Christian Religions today. Thus, strong desire to be famous among other healers has prompt many healers to join the healing profession at unprecedented rate (Gbenda 55). Hence, healing is aggressively engaged in the use of electronic and print medias to be advertised so as to pull more crowds, and remained famous and to also win more members to their denominations (Nwankwo and Ibegulam 9).

Recommendations

Due to healing at the Crossroads:Factors Contributing to the surge of Thereupeutic Practices in African and Christian Religions in Contemporary Nigeria the paper has the following recommendations:

i. Healers in both religions should heal by restoring the individuals wholly and entirely without any option or attachment to materials gains or exploitation of their clients.
ii. Abuse of the Sacred Book, other healing instruments , items or calling the name of God without reverence, or employment the use of diabolical power for healing in the duo religions should be discouraged.
iii. Undue crave for healing and material things from healers in the duo religions should highly be condemnable.
iv. Adherents of African and Christian Religions should have faith and trust in God as the Divine healer who grants and answers the prayers of people in moments looking for healing.
v. People should be aware of fake healing tycoons and their healing activities which may be fake as well posed serious related challenge to them.
vi. There should be sensitisation by Government and relevant authorities on the need for people to be cautious against patronising fake healings merchants in African and Christian Religions.
vii. Relevant authorities should instilled punitive measures on those practising fake and unlicensed healing in African and Christian Religions in order to serve as deterrent others.
viii. Unhealthy rivalry and competitions of healing in the two religions should totally be discouraged. Instead, there should harmonious collaboration of healing between the two religions.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, research examine the concept of healing in the two religions and factors responsible for the proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria.Healing is a profession carried out in African and Christian Religions for the restoration of those who are sick, and for curative and preventive purposes by experts. No doubt, the proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria is at unprecedented rate, and becomes rampant with genuine and fake healers all over the place. Thus, the human person is subjected to sickness, ailment, spiritual attacks by spiritual forces, witches and wizards, sorcerers which required healing as an essential aspect of religion to be administered by specialists in the duo religions to those in need of

cure, protection, immunity or antidotes against any unforseen devastating evil or attacks from even, sorcerers,or spiritual forces themselves.

Without mincing words, there is need for people to guard against other factors responsible for the proliferation of healing in African and Christian Religions in contemporary Nigeria in order for genuine healing to prevail, and those seeking healing to be at the safest side. The two religions must make it a point of duty to collaborate and defend the integrity of healing profession which is been distorted by unscrupulous healers there by instigating mistrust and loss of confidence from adherents of the duo faiths and the general public. There is need for the two religions in Nigeria to practice genuine healing in order to be of great help to their members and even to the general public.

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