

Christianity in Awka: faith or syncretism

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Abstract

In the course of this research work, I observed some challenges in Awka Christianity: lack of commitment of Awka Christians in Jesus Christ; the practice of vain syncretism by those who profess Christianity, Chris-paganism, believe in sorcery, witchcraft, marine spirits, sun and moon gods; animal deities etcetera. The ignorance of scriptural truths and theology has also contributed to the resurgence of witchcraft in different dimension-related beliefs and practices among Christians. Pastors and evangelists are more prone to issue superficial condemnations than to give systematic teaching on philosophical, religious and theological beliefs and values in Awka context. The work recommended that Christian faith in Awka should be total christocentric and sola scriptura. Methods of approach are historical and descriptive methods with the review of related extant material.

Introduction

To O'Donovan (1996), God sees the human race as divided according to the language and culture groups to which people belong. The human race developed into different language and culture groups through the descendants of the sons of Noah according to Genesis 10:4, 20, 31-32. Thus the division of the human race into separate ethnic nations was hastened by what happened at the tower of Babel. With time many of these original groups probably split into smaller groups with different language dialects and other cultural differences. In the great commission, Jesus commanded his followers to take the gospel to every one of these nations of people, in order to make disciples in each group (Matt. 28:19-20). In the book of Revelation (especially Rev. 7:9-10), we discover that when God's purposes are completed there will be people from every one of these ethnic groups gathered around the throne of God to worship him.

The ancient town of Awka is conspicuously known in the annals of history in Igbo land and by extension Nigeria. Their trademark as blacksmith, in metal and woodcarving prowess also brought them civilization and fame even before the coming of the Europeans with their Christianity and act of governance. Although it was not easy for the missionary to settle at Awka on their arrival, but even when they eventually did, history has it that Awka people in spite of their existing traditional religion still embraced the Christian faith. The issue of concern as time went on up to this contemporary era has been the continuous drifting of Awka Christian faithful from good Christian beliefs and practices and having to meddle with traditional religious activities even as a Christian. These acts of them have been seen by many as an act of playing Jesus (Christianity) in the morning and voodoo (fetishism) in the evening. This speaks volume of the participation of Christian faithful of Awka in traditional ceremonies which entails masquerade performances, idol feasts and patronizing of dibia (the traditional medicine men). In this study, we intend to carry out a survey on Awka and its Christian and religious life, with a critical look at the Awka Christians acts of meddling with Awka traditional beliefs and religious practices.

Conceptual Framework

McKinney (1985) defines witchcraft as “an inherent capacity to exert supernatural influence over another person. This influence frequently causes harm, and it explains phenomena such as breaches in social relations, anti-social behaviour, unexpected occurrences, sickness and death. This belief is a philosophical attempt to deal with the question of evil. It has its own natural logic:

“This explanatory system provides answers to questions of why particular Occurrences happen to specific individuals at the time they do. It does not invalidate their understanding of empirical cause and effect of an occurrence. Rather it deals with its ultimate cause” (Evans–Pritchard, 1976, p. 71).

To Shaver, and Strong (1976), values are “standards and principles for judging worth. They are the criteria by which we judge ‘things’ to be good, worth, while, desirable; or on the other hand, bad, worthless, despicable; or of course, somewhere in-between these extremes. We may apply our values consciously. Or they may function unconsciously, as part of the influence of our frames of reference, without our being aware of the standards implied by our decisions”(p.15). There are three important elements in the above definition namely first, that values are concepts, not feelings; second, that we may not be conscious or explicitly aware of the values we hold; third, that values are dimensional rather than absolute categories. Rokeach (1973), remarks that a value is a belief and like all beliefs, values have cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. Christianity is the religion that is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that he was the son of God.

To Packer (1993), faith means union with Christ by the Holy Spirit in the whole sweep of his redemption, and that means that all Christians, however new or immature their faith, have died with Christ, been raised with Christ, are ascended in Christ and will share Christ’s glory. Faith

denotes a belief which, so to speak, takes a man out of himself, and puts him into Christ. It is not simply a belief that carries an intellectual assent, but one wherein the believer cleaves to his Saviour with all his heart (Douglas, 1980). Faith is the body of truth (the Christian faith) to be found in the Creeds. Again it is the human response to Divine truth (Livingstone, 1977). The later definition is applicable to our research work.

Syncretism is the mixture of different religious ideas. To Livingstone (1977), it is the attempt to combine opposing doctrines and practices, especially in reference to philosophical and religious systems.

Awka people: a brief ethnography

To Okafor (1992), there is a mystery with regard to the origin of the first *Oka* (Awka) people, that nuclear group around which other people attached themselves to form *Oka* town. These first *Oka* people were known as Ifiteana. To them others came and joined them and they all fused together to become one whole—the *Oka* people of today. These Ifiteana people were living in *Oka* under the names of Urueri, Amaenyiana and Okpo respectively. Who they were, where they came from (if they came from somewhere), who their own ancestors were, are not known. *Oka people* simply said of themselves that they were Ifiteana stock.

Okafor (1992) maintained that Awka people claimed to be the most ancient nation in Igboland and that no other nation surpassed them in antiquity. Thus other people have history or stories of where they came from but Awka have none. They believed that other Igbo communities took the names of their gods and days of their week such as *Eke*, *Oye*, *Afo* and *Nkwo* from them. The name *Oka* is derived from *Okika-na-Ube* shortened to *Okanube*. *Okika-na-Ube* is the god of war and hunting and the Ifiteana people the progenitors of Awka worship *Okika-na-Ube*; so they were called Umu-Okanube or Umu-Oka hence their town became *Oka*. The name *Oka* was changed to Awka in 1908 by a British colonial secretary, Mr. F.S. James.

Furthermore, this Ifiteana community lives together at the present Nkwelle later they separated. Urueri remained at Nkwelle with the original Nkwelle people namely Achallaoji, Umunamoke, Agbana and Umudiaba who came and joined them and they become one village. But it is unfortunate that the original Urueri later decreased in number to the extent that they joined Achallaoji family. Amaenyiana on the other hand were later split into two; the main Amaenyiana and Ndu group. They all live in Okpuno Ochu the present old Enugu and ring road junction. The main Amaenyiana group does not live long because they killed their brother and were asked to leave the town. Ndu group later moved to the present Umuayom and formed Umuokpandu family. This made them to take over the headship from Urueri. The Okpo people settled near Nwannu stream. They were the founders of the three villages, Amachalla, Amudo and Umuzocha popularly known as Amachalla na-ato meaning the three Amachalla villages.

Other people that came to settle in Awka are Umudioka and Agulu. Umudioka came from a town in Idemili known as Umudioka–Akpom. They were popularly known as Diokas. The Diokas

usually came to Awka to do business. Later one of them known as Ichide decided to settle at Awka. He later got married to Nwanyanwu. Nwanyanwu is from Amikwo village. She bore four sons. Ichide having seen that he has settled in Awka called his brother Udeke. They both settled together and were the founders of the five families of Umudioka Village popularly known as Umudioka-Obu-nese.

Another theory of *Oka* origin has it that the founding father was Nneoshi (Kanu, 1996). He wandered from one place to another probably in search of a better place to farm and hunts and later found himself at the present Ugwuoba in Enugu State. He settled there and has two sons Ugwuoba and Oka. When Nneoshi died, Ugwuoba his first son occupied his father's obi and lived in the family house as the tradition demanded and the name of the place became Ugwuoba. Oka who is the second son moved out of the compound and settled at Amaenyi meaning the abode of elephants in the present Awka. His families were the founders of the two major sections in Awka namely Ifite and Ezi. Ifite section were the original habitation of Ifiteana while Ezi were the outskirts that is why Ifite section always take the first share and Ezi the second in sharing of things in Awka. Udoeye and Ofoegbu (2011) said that, "Awka comprises thirty three (33) villages grouped into two Ezi and Ifite sections and each section is divided into three and four quarters respectively." (p. 85). The two sections and their respective quarters are Ezi with Amikwo, Agulu and Ezioka quarters. The Ifite section has the following Ayom-na-Okpala, Amachalla, Nkwelle and Ifite-Oka quarters. In sharing things quarter by quarter Ayom-na-Okpala takes first share, because of a part of Amaenyi-ana family known as Umuokpandu family that are living there who became the head after the disappearance of Urueri while Nkwelle especially the Achallaoji takes the second share, because of the remaining part of Urueri that joined them. The thirty three villages in Awka in order of taking shares according to Okafor (1992) are: Umuayom, Umunnoko, Umuoramma, Umuokpu, Achallaoji, Umunamoke, Umudioka, Agbana, Amachalla, Amudo, Umuzocha, Ezinato-Ifite, Enu-ifite, Agbana-itife, Omuku, Umueri, Umukwa, Umuogwai, Umuogbunu 1, Umuogbunu 2, Umudioka, Umudiana, Okpaeri, Igweogige, Isiagu, Obunagu, Umuogbu, Umubele, Umuana, Umuike, Umujagwo, Umuenechi and Umuoruka" (p.42).

Occupation

Awka is a rich town blessed with economic trees, water and other natural resources. They are not very good in farm work. They substitute agricultural practices with crafts work. Okafor (1992) asserts that *Oka* people before the advent of British people in 1905 were great people, resourceful, inventive and courageous. They specialized in iron, copper, brass, and bronze work. Afigbo (1981) said that "after the Awka blacksmith had finished his assignment, Eri rewarded him with an *ofa* which conferred on him special claims to the smith profession" (p. 41). This depicts that Awka people are professional blacksmiths, since *ofa* is a symbol of authority. They specialized in producing farm implements, hunting spears, weapons of offence and defence like guns, knives. They manufacture also musical instruments like *ogene* (gong). Hence Awka people were known for *egwu ogene* the metal gong music. They use it to make money and to entertain people during Imoka festival, marriage ceremony, title taking and funeral rites and so on.

Awka people substitute agriculture with crafts work, but that does not mean that they do not farm at all. Hence they practice subsistence system of farming. They cultivate crops like maize, cassava, and vegetables. Some of their women use the cassava to produce garri that is why there are cassavas grinding machine centers in Awka urban. Their major markets are Eke Awka and Nkwo-Amaenyi markets where people from Awka and nearby communities buy and sell their farm products.

Christianity, civilization through western education, commerce cum Awka new status as the capital city of Anambra state and headquarters of Awka South L.G.A. made Awka people to assume a new form of occupation. Apart from Paul University and Central School Awka, which were among the oldest schools in Awka, there are many public and private schools in Awka nowadays. The establishment of primary and secondary schools cum universities in Awka gave the people opportunity to attend school. Today most of them are graduates and this offered them white collar jobs. Thus some of them are medical doctors, teachers, soldiers, policemen, lawyers, African traditional and Christian religious leaders, and bankers in both public and private establishments in and outside Awka.

Awka Religion and Culture

The most common religion in Awka is the Igbo traditional religion (at times known as African traditional religion). In respect of cultural practices or festivals, the most popular cultural festival in Awka is the Imoka festival. Okafor (1992) said the *Akpoto* native doctors from Idoma were invited by Awka people to prepare a medicine to appease the spirit of *Nomeh* who was the most beautiful girl in Awka then and was said to have been murdered at Umuezeukwu war with Awka people. *Nomeh* was buried in what is now the shrine of Imoka. The name of the medicine *Akpoto* native doctors made for them is *Akwali-oda-omumu* also known as *Akwali Umuoka* or *Imoka*. Okafor believed that the medicine was buried at the spot *Nomeh* was buried and when the medicine became powerful Awka people started worshipping it as a god and celebrate its festival once a year. Thus Imoka or egwu *Imoka* became an annual festival in Awka that takes place mostly in the month of May.

During this festival, Awka people both home and abroad members are expected to participate in the festival. Masquerades from various villages in Awka are expected to assemble at Imoka shrine at Nkwo Amaenyi market. The women celebrate their own a day before the men's day. On the women's day, masquerades are not allowed to perform that day while on the men's day which is the actual Imoka day masquerades are allowed to perform. It is also pertinent to point out that Imoka festival takes place four days after the visit to Umuokpu shrine. One of the sacred or totemic animals in Awka is the *enwe Imoka* (black money) which is venerated and cannot be killed by the people. This is because of the people's belief that the black monkeys are the Imoka children and that Imoka used them to inform Awka people that war is approaching Awka if there is a threat of

such. There are certain deities worshipped by the people such as Agunabo and Akpu-taakpu deities located at Umuzocha village; Akoyoli deity is worshipped by Umudioka, associated with ancestral cult and is located at Umudioka Obu-nese; Ofufe and Ngene deities are idols worshipped by the people of Umuayom-na- Okpala; Ofufe deity is located at Umuoranma; Nwagu Ofufe deity is located at Nkwelle village and is associated with ancestral cult; Oye nwa-ofufe deity is worshipped by Umuokpu village; and Agulu-nne-buzo deity is worshipped by Agulu-Oka village.

The Advent of Christianity in Awka

Christianity came to Awka in 1899 and 1903. Their first visit in 1899 was on one of their major market days and their arrival attracted a crowd. Okafor (1992) said that Avo Agulu was in full swing. Men and women, but mostly women were bustling about pricing and re-pricing commodities offered for sale. Suddenly there was a more than usual excitement from Umuenechi end of the market so people gathered to know what was happening and they saw an Awka man from Umuokpu leading the missionaries; a white woman and two white men who were church missionary society missionaries. The people were excited and those that followed them reported that they stopped at the house of Owo Ukaozo in Umuanaga village. Okafor said that the missionaries were of the Anglican Communion. They preached the gospel to the crowd and promised that they will come again. The missionaries visited again in 1903 and the people gave them a land to build a church at the place known as *Ajo-ofia* (evil forest) by Agulu quarters. Later another land was given to them near Udo shrine at Iyiokpu quarters where they built both school and church known as St. Faith School and St. Faith Church respectively. Today there are many churches in Awka such as the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church Nigeria, and Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. The Baptist Church, Evangelical Church of Winning All, Deeper Life Bible Church, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, The Redeemed Christian Church, The Assemblies of God Church, Grace of God Mission and so on.

According to Idowu (1973), when the missionaries came to Nigeria to teach and preach, they found ready to their hands communities of people who were educable in every way. Apart from preaching the gospel, they taught their converts or the adherents of the new faith to read and write, employing, of course, the only method known to them-that of western education (English system mainly). By a certain miscarriage of purpose, however, their effort succeeded not only in enlightening, but also in enslaving the mind, inasmuch as it inculcated that the only way to human dignity and full-grown personality was to be in everything like Europeans and to despise their own culture. It was in this way that Christianity arrived in Awka dressed up in European garb. It was immediately associated with civilization in the sense of being well dressed in European fashion, dexterity in European etiquette and manners, and proficiency (or dabbling) in the use of English language with a corresponding disdain for their own culture, a disdain which crystallized into inability to use their own language properly. It must be said here that if at the beginning, any one had enough vision to suggest that while accepting Christianity, Awka people did not need to throw away what was good and valuable in their own culture, such a person would have been accused of rank 'heathenism' by the European religious educators whose set purpose was to exterminate as of the devil anything

that had no meaning for them; such a person would also probably have been stoned by the Awka natives in whom inferiority complex was them finding a soothing compensation in the adoption of what appeared to them to be a fashionable and more acceptable way of life. Thus, today, we find especially in Catholic, Anglican and like churches that in spite of the political independence of Nigeria, the way things are done in Europe and America still forms the norm and standard by which the life of the Church is ordered.

Awka and Jesus in the morning and Voodoo in the evening

By this 21st century, the growth of Anglicanism, Methodism, Catholicism, Evangelical Church to Win All (ECWA) and the like has slowed down in Awka. With very few exceptions, the decline has continued to this date. Never before had any large religious body in this community lost members steadily for so many years. Many theories have been advanced to explain why these old denominations have fallen on recent times. The least credible theory attributes their decline to the effects of Jesus in the morning and Voodoo in the evening, dust to dust rite, Imoka, secularizing effects of industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of mass education (Johnson, Hoge, and Luidens, 1993).

If syncretism and secularization were the sole explanation, all but the most culturally insulated sectors of European religion would be losing members. Biblically conservative non-denominational Christian fellowships, for example are among the fastest growing groups whereas in many areas the former “mainline Churches” are stagnating or continuously shrinking. To explain the decay of the mainline denominations, one must look instead for special factors at work within these churches themselves or in the lives of their constituents. The tendency of many adolescents who had been confirmed in these denominations from the early 1990s on to drop out of church and not return is a threat to the church growth. When the congregation is left to the graying and balding heads, rising death rates will diminish the ranks of the mainline denominations even further in the years ahead. Given the reluctance of so many parents to talk about religion or to instill their own views in their children, the prospects that their offspring will make a serious Christian commitment are even dimmer than their own prospects turned out to be. And among the “religious” dropouts the prospects are dimmer still.

The underlying problem of the mainline churches cannot be solved by new programmes of church development and sanctions alone. That problem is the weakening of the spiritual conviction required to generate the enthusiasm and energy needed to sustain a vigorous communal life. Somehow, in the course of the past decades, these churches lost the will or the ability to teach the Christian faith and what it requires to a succession of younger cohorts in such a way as to command their allegiance. Admittedly, doing so has become increasingly difficult for churches as close to the very center of Europeans culture and institutional life as the mainline denominations are. The challenges posed to Christianity by various secular ideologies and moral systems have been truly formidable in recent times. Many of the forebears of these mainline churches read such authors as Charles Darwin, H. L. Menchen, and Aldous Huxley. In response to the currents of modernity,

denominational leaders promoted ecumenism and dialogue, but they did not devise or promote compelling new versions distinctively Christian faith. They do not fashion or preach a vigorous apologetics.

To O'Donovan (1996), non-Christian religions have arisen in the world for a combination of reasons. The main reasons have probably been wrong concepts of reality, resulting from superstition and ignorance. These wrong ideas have been actively given to human minds through the discerning lies of Satan and demons (1 Tim. 4.1). In the Old Testament, the pagan people who surrounded the Israelites had patron gods or goddesses who were known to them by name. For example, the Moabites worshipped a god they called Chemosh and the Ammonites worshipped a god they called Molech (1 Kings 11:7). The Philistines worshipped an agricultural god they called Dagon (Judges 16: 23). The Sidonians worshipped a fertility goddess called Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:15). The Assyrians worshipped a god they called Nisroch (2 Kings 19: 36-37). These spirits often required evil practices, such as human sacrifice (Jer. 32:35) and sexual immorality (Jer. 2:20, Ezek. 16:25). It seems that each ethnic group had one or more traditional spirits whom they were required to worship and obey. Even God himself describes these pagan spirits as the particular 'gods' of each of these people (1 Kings 11:33). Missionaries entering groups of people who have had no contact with Christ, often report severe conflict with demons, especially in the early days of their ministry.

Awka religious, through all their varying forms and degrees, still show men worshipping, praying, sacrificing, building altars and shrines, making pilgrimages to holy places and exhibiting so much of what is recognized as religious belief and practice. One will also be familiar with the various types of religious leaders-priest, prophet, mystic, saint, diviner, teacher, proselytizer, mediator, saviour, or sacral ruler. In phenomenological terms, a limited number of physical features are being referred to time and again: caves or rock shelters, sacred stones or stone circles, feathers, hills and mountains, sacred groves. The overarching and commonest term is the 'shrine', with or without a hut or house as part of its structure. Awka religious beliefs and practices could be described as apostasy (cf. Heb. 10:29; Nu.15:27-31).

According to Barrett (1970), basic to these loyalties are certain time-honoured institutions: the family unit; the family land; the polygamous economy; the lineages; traditional religion; the ancestor cult; the magical worldview; divinations; and the like. The Christian mission has been faced with this kind of highly developed pagan society all down the ages. In the early church, strenuous efforts were made to discern at what points in the pagan world these could be found a *praeparatio evangelica* preparing the way for acceptance of the gospel. The realities of pagan religion were accepted and the relevance of Christ. It is certain that the majority of the converts regarded the old objects of their worship as existent, worsted indeed by Christ but still active and not wholly to be deprived of their activity till the coming of the kingdom of God. The redemptive operation of Christ lay in deliverance from demons rather than in deliverance from sin (Bailey, 1932; Nock, 1933).

Traditional African people know that certain spirits demand practices of ritual worship and obedience from the people under their influence. Sometimes they have appeared in dreams, and sometimes they have communicated these demands through a possessed person or through a diviner. The evidence all points to the same fact that non-Christian religions involve contact with satanic powers of darkness. Sorcery and witchcraft are found all over the world. These practices are also found in most African cultures including Awka. They are the cause of great fear in many African societies (O'Donovan, 1996). In Awka culture, a distinction is made between a sorcerer and a witch. A sorcerer is a person who purposely uses mystical power for or against someone. In sorcery, there is almost always the use of ritual words or ritual practices, such as the use of magic, spells, curses or the use of medicines. In most cases the sorcerer or sorceress will demand a fee for his or her service. A witch, on the other hand, is thought to be a person who compulsively acts with evil supernatural power. Witches act because of an irresistible inner evil power. Sometimes they are believed to act blindly, without knowing what they are doing.

It is thought that witches are either born with these evil powers or get them by becoming part of a community (coven) of witches. The witch is believed to be a prisoner of the evil power within. Thus witches do not need to use ritual words, magic medicines, spells or curses to perform their evil deeds. Instead, the power to do evil comes out from within. Witchcraft is thought to be carried out unconsciously by the witch when he or she is asleep. The witch is believed to leave his or her body and fly about at night seeking 'to eat human flesh'. It is believed that when the witch eats the flesh of a person, the person becomes weak and sick and finally dies. This belief about witches and witchcraft is very strong in Awka and in many parts of Africa.

For a great many people, including some weak Christians, the fear of witches and witchcraft is the greatest single fear in their lives. The fear of witchcraft can be so great that a person can develop serious symptoms of physical or mental illness. The Bible recognizes sorcery and witchcraft, but it does not make a strong distinction between the two (Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4; Deut. 18:10-11, Isaiah 47:9-12).

Traditional beliefs about witchcraft are a way of explaining the ultimate caused of any evil, misfortune or death. According to Kunhiyop (2008),

Barren women, people whose children die at birth, women with irregular menstrual flow, accident victims, traders who suffer losses, office workers who fail to get promotions, a political candidate who fails to get elected, a student who fails examinations, a person who notices scratches on his or her body, a hunter or fisherman who fails to bring home meat, a farmer with bad crop yields, a football team that consistently loses matches—all suspect witches as the cause of their misfortune. Even those who are most successful in their business or profession constantly fear being bewitched by envious relatives or friends. This shows the extent of average Awka person's belief in witchcraft.

Natural causes and witchcraft are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. The one supports the other, accounting for what the other does not account for. Awka people do not deny the working of natural causes. They would never deny that a motor car accident caused the death of a young man crushed by a car. But they would assert that this was not a complete explanation; things do not just happen. It must have been witchcraft that put the young man in harm's way.

Belief in witchcraft thus serves a very practical purpose in explaining events and the causes behind them. For example, death is not regarded as a natural phenomenon, and the death of a young man or woman is especially unnatural. Witchcraft is real in the mind of Awka man and is considered the enemy of life. "Harmony, order, good neighbourliness or good company, cooperation and sharing, propriety and equitableness, honesty and transparency-all of which constitute signs of how the human and created order should be—are denied in the most fundamental way by witchcraft" (Magesa, 1997, p. 187). Awka people believe that witchcraft is real as a result of oral tradition. They have heard the stories relating to witchcraft. They have also heard the confessions of perpetrators and the testimonies of victims.

Awka Christians who are trying to be relevant to their culture must begin by accepting that there is something such as witchcraft, by which we mean the general power of Satan and his evil cohorts to bring suffering and misery to humanity. It is not unbiblical to accept this. To Kunhiyop (2008), belief in witchcraft does not exonerate us from asking serious philosophical questions about it. The two critical philosophical disciplines that are relevant to a study of witchcraft are metaphysics and epistemology. To take one example, witches are often accused of eating human flesh and drinking human blood. When such an accusation is made, we need to ask a metaphysical question: Was this action metaphorical or literal? The Nupe people of Nigeria, for example, believe that such "eating" is spiritual not physical. Christians, too, admit to a spiritual sharing in the body and blood of Christ each time they take communion. But they do not each actual human flesh or drink actual human blood.

At the epistemological level, we have to ask ourselves: How do we know whether a story is true? To underline this point: stories and confessions about witchcraft do not prove the reality and certainty of witchcraft. They simply affirm the belief in the existence of witchcraft. Though the belief in witchcraft attempts to provide a solution to the existence of evil in the world, the solution it offers is inadequate.

Our understanding of witchcraft must not be based on stories but on the teachings of the Old and New Testaments, both of which warn the people of God to have nothing to do with any form of witchcraft (Lev. 19:31, 20:6-7; Ex. 22:18; Deut. 18:10-12; 1 Sam. 28; Gal. 3:1; Acts 19:13-19 etc). "Jesus' power is super power and Satan's is powerless power," as in the chorus children sing in Nigeria. The basis for this assertion is that Jesus has stripped evil forces of their power: "having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). The Bible is often used merely as a source of proof texts to support our traditional opinions and beliefs. However, when properly interpreted, the Bible does not support

the kinds of doctrines of demons, evil spirits and witchcraft that are supported, nursed and propagated in Awka. Though Awka experiences and stories like any other African society are relevant and should be interacted with, the truths we believe should be based solely on the scripture.

Some of the causes of Jesus in the morning and voodoo in the evening on the part of the missionaries include ignorance; avarice; imperiousness; faulty biblical interpretation; multiplicity of missionary agencies; land hunger; personal quarrels; hankering after ancestor worship; condemnation of polygamy as an institution, which was not a moral issue in African traditional society; missionary ignorance of Awka psychology; language and culture (that is African personality). To Ayandele (1970), "Any African who does not contend for the purity of his race is not worthy of a place in the ranks of humanity" (p.286). For many African *literati* today, including Leopold Sedar Senghor, African personality (identity) has mainly a psychological and emotional connotation, clearly discernible in their abstract philosophy, songs and poetry.

Christianity and Voodoo Syncretism: Its Syntheses

Witchcraft, sorcery and spirits have nothing good to offer; they encourage disrespect for parents and children, disunity and hatred among families, and even murder. Christian rituals are often seen as new and more powerful protection against the attacks of one's enemies and those who may be jealous. Missionaries, early African church leaders and some contemporary leaders have dismissed belief in witchcraft as mere superstition. In doing this they fail to understand the Awka worldview. To Turaki (1982), "The major pitfall of the pioneering and early missionaries was the way they berated African culture. Their attitude was in the main the basic negation of African culture, custom, religious and social life" (p. 27).

Church leaders are now painfully aware that dismissing witchcraft and the like as superstition no longer carried weight with many members of their congregations. Many young and old Christians can tell countless stories testifying to the power of witches and wizards, but can hardly tell one story about deliverance from demonic power. Nominal Christianity has also contributed to the resurgence of witchcraft. External change without an internal transformation does not affect the whole person. Many Awka indigenes have confessed that they became Christians because it was the expected thing to do. In most former mission churches, it is normal to be churchgoers. Though at the external level these churchgoers claim to be Christians, they are unbelieving and unchanged and cling tenaciously to deep-seated traditional beliefs and values.

According to Mbiti (1969), "A careful scrutiny of the religious situation shows clearly that in their encounter with traditional religions, Christianity have made only an astonishingly shallow penetration in converting the whole man of Africa, with all his historical cultural roots, social dimension, self-consciousness and expectations" (p. 263). In the same vein, Shorter (1977), notes that "at baptism, the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook. What remains above the surface is in fact, the tip of an iceberg. The African Christian is

not asked to recant a religious philosophy. Consequently, he returns to the forbidden practices as occasion arises with remarkable ease” (p. 10). The resurgence of witchcraft, sorcery communities in Awka illustrates the point.

Ignorance of scriptural truths and theology has also contributed to the resurgence of witchcraft-related beliefs and practices among the so-called Christians. A quick survey would show that many professing Christians have no knowledge of the scriptures and are unaware of what the Bible really teaches on many issues, including witchcraft, sorcery and witch-hunt. Pastors and evangelists are more prone to issue superficial condemnations than to give systematic teaching on the philosophical, religious and theological beliefs and values in Awka context. According to Neill (1957), “Almost everywhere, there has been grave failure in the giving of systematic instruction to the members of the Christian faith” (p. 130). Oosthuizen (1964) averred, “Why does the African, in times of human crisis, revert back to non-Christian practices? This appears to be the rule rather than the exception because the Africans past have been ignored and no attempt has been made to penetrate it with the regeneration power of the gospel message; the converted African lives in two levels” (p. 4). The breakdown of law and order corruption, mal-administration and ecclesiastical poor leadership, made children and young people of today, to claim to be experts in witchcraft, sorcery and the like. There are no checks and controls to curb the modern mass hysteria of belief in and practices of witchcraft.

Witches are detected by means of an oracular technique, such as the manipulation of a special rubbing-board (which it sticks it confirms the suggestion put to it) or the administration of a strychnine poison to fowls, the victims determines or confirms the identity of the attacker (Beattie, 1980). To avert conflict, the witch will be asked to withdraw his witchcraft. Witchcraft, oracles, idols, magic and sorcery form a coherent system on the levels of both thought and action, and as social institutions they have important implications for the life of the community. Awka is associated with blacksmith. This, too, is also associated with particular rituals, and joint participation in these is mandatory.

The old natural religions continue to thrive in Awka. While Christianity vies for supremacy in Awka thirty three villages, she has failed to banish the rain gods, witchcraft, sorcery and spirits in these communities. Frequently the pagan rites such as *ikponye aja n’ili* (dust to dust), *imoka* and *okuko onye uwa* have fused with a faith in Jesus Christ. The clashes between Christianity (especially Catholic Church) and Awka beliefs and practices are becoming increasingly bitter. Yet, as hard as the monotheistic and polytheistic faiths have struggled for supremacy, Christianity has for now failed to wrest power from priests of *Imoka*. With its nature deities, the Awka mythology is often the only stabilizing force in a world full of suffering, corruption, poor political institution, fraud electoral institution, displacement, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, terrorism, religious fanaticism or extremism and death, where everything is in constant flux, but rarely changes for the better, where-in many respects—time has stood still. This is a world populated by nymphs and sirens, by elfin spirits, sun and moon gods, marine spirits, and by animal deities such as cows, stags, tortoises (and other reptiles), lambs and calves. At the end of the 19th century, the British

ethnologist Taylor (1871) coined the term animism (the Latin word anima means soul or breath) to describe this pantheon, correctly assuming that plants, animals and objects also have souls in the minds of these “primitive peoples.” Someone who attends church in the morning at midday night easily invite a voodoo priest over in the evening or even day time to read the kola nuts.

Practically everywhere the cult of the dead or ancestral cult intermingles with Christianity, “There is scarcely any distinction between the secular and religious spheres; faith is omnipresent”, says Stinger (1997). It is therefore no surprise that when a person is sick, he seeks for a preacher to pray for him, a traditional medicine man and a doctor to administer drugs, and a local sorcerer, or oracle to find the root cause of the sickness.

In Kenya, for instance, the modern-minded Kikuyu, Flashing cell phones and Ray-Bans, happily journey to Mount Kenya and pray to Ngai, the supreme God of the animists despite often being members of one of the numerous congregations. In Benin City, Nigeria’s “human trafficking hub,” where the women from the region’s slums begin their journeys to Europe’s red-light districts, the path to the gods of nature runs through a backyard reeking of urine. The voodoo priest Chief John Odeh, receives his flock in a white gown. His upholstered throne is trimmed with red satin. Beside him hang drums made of cowhide and the sword-like insignia of his position, known as Eben and Ada. As the voodoo mass begins, Odeh flourishes a chicken over his head, mumbles unintelligible incantations and pours liquor over the skulls. Then he takes a knife and cuts the bird’s throat. Blood fountains in every direction, splattering onto the wooden fetishes—crudely carved figures with huge penises. More liquor is dispensed, another invocation mumbled, bringing the juju ceremony to its conclusion. Tribute has been paid and the king of the night appeased.

Citing James Johnson, one of the heroes of African personality, posited that James Johnson did not believe in the oneness of the human race. He perceived the fact that history and geography had introduced differences between peoples all over the terrestrial globe; he described that these differences be not only recognized, but also respected. Geography and history, he noted, had been responsible for the evolution of different cultures and civilizations. In the light of this fact he believed that civilization could not be absolute but relative.

In defence of and respect for African culture, for which Edward Blyden is better known, James Johnson was asking that Africans should know themselves as a people, a race, distinct from other peoples and endowed with attributes unique to themselves. Christianity per se, Johnson was convinced, was a culturally neutral ideology which was capable of growing in different cultures and environment without losing its sublimity or compromising its tenets.

Conclusion and recommendations

The evidence for the persistence of traditional religious attitudes in Awka is overwhelming. Some resisted the incursion and stuck to the gods of the fathers. Others wavered: first parleying with the missionaries and later recovering their balance and bolting back to the ancestral gods. Some accepted literally what they had heard, being especially frightened by the doctrine of heaven and

hell which was emphasized in the preaching of the early missionaries. Of course, there were variations of an instrumental approach to religion: some converted so as to gain wealth, new status, knowledge, security, exemption from forced labour, safety and success in competition either at a personal or communal level. For example, Agulu accepted Church missionary society to help it in its war with Amikwo. Christianity sits lightly on Awka people. The failure of the gods in crises opened the traditional cosmology to the co-option of new gods.

The Bible recognizes that spells and curses and people such as witches and sorcerers do have power. But their power is nothing in comparison with the power of Almighty God (Is. 47:9). This gives us a clear hint that the Christian does not need to fear the spells or curses of a sorcerer or a witch, no matter how strongly they are applied. Jesus Christ, who lives in the heart of a Christian, is infinitely more powerful than the power of any sorcerer, witch, evil spirit or evil power in the universe. Indeed, such persons and such powers are terrified in the presence of Christ, who dwells in the heart of a Christian. This was seen in the case of Simon the Samaritan sorcerer, who was humbled in the presence of the apostles Peter and John (Acts 8:9-24). It was seen in the case of the Gerasene demoniac, who was humbled in the presence of Christ (Mk. 5:1-8).

Sorcery and witchcraft are severely condemned by God as wickedness (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10). King Hezekiah's son Manasseh was severely condemned by God for his practices of sorcery and witchcraft (2 Kings 21:6, 2 Chron, 33:6). The flying by night and eating of human flesh are issues of traditional belief. The Bible does not address these beliefs. Evil eye is a demonic power which some traditional people possess. When a person has the power of evil eye, they can stare at people and cause severe physical or mental disorders.

According to O'Donovan (1996), a traditional healer may also have demonic powers. It can happen that the traditional healer will be able to remove (appear to heal) the sickness caused by demons through a sorcerer, a witch, or a person with evil eye. In this way, Satan can strengthen both the belief in witchcraft and the belief in traditional healers and witch-doctors at the same time. By doing this, Satan draws people away from trust in God and tempts them to trust in things which God has condemned.

But God has given us the spiritual weapons through the promises of his word to deal with such attacks of the evil one. The Bible tells us to take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one (Eph. 6:16). Since witchcraft, magic, spells and curses have power because of the power of Satan and his demons, a Christian who is walking in holiness of life has authority from the Lord to overcome the power of such magic, spells and curses in the name of Jesus Christ.

Note the warning which God gave to the Israelites about being deceived by such spirits: "They have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed" (Amos 2:4). This is not surprising, because people feel a strong emotional attachment to their ancestors and relatives. Traditional religions throughout the world which seek the help of ancestral spirits, reveal a

consistent pattern of belief which has very effectively deceived people. Such beliefs have kept many people from finding a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, making disciples from all groups of people on earth is a priority for the church. The church must finally include people from every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth (Matt. 28:19, Rev. 5:10; 7:9). The great commission will not be completed until believers have been discipled in every ethnic group. There is therefore no value in speaking with evil spirits who possess people and speak through their mouths. It is also clear from the titles given to the fallen angels in Daniel 10:12-21, that demons attempt to influence and even control human governments for evil purposes (Rev. 16:14).

The Bible says, "The god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers" (2 Cor. 4:4). This is probably an important reason why we are specifically commanded to pray for government leaders (1 Tim. 2:2). The prayers of God's people help to free the minds of these leaders from the strong suggestions being made to them by Satan and demons. In summary, demon activity includes deception, murder (Jn. 8:44), torture (Matt. 12:22; Luke 13:11-17), physical sickness (Job 2:7, Acts 10:38), and mental illness (Luke 8:27-29). Other activities include sexual uncleanness and violence (Matt. 10:1; Eph. 5:5; Rev 17:14; Luke 8:2; Ecc. 2:8— King Solomon with his 1000 wives and concubines was clearly preoccupied with sex-hindrances to the work of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:18; Eph. 6:12; hindrances to prayer (Dan. 10:12-13; Matt. 26: 38-43), general harassment of the people of God (2 Cor. 12:7; Luke 22:31), promotion of idolatry, witchcraft and various pagan and occult practices (Psalm 106:35-37; Deut. 18:9-12, 32:16-17; 1 Sam. 15:23; Rev. 18:2), the working of strange occurrences and deceiving miracles (2 Thess. 2:9, Rev. 16:13-14) and so on.

Confessions, stories and experiences of sorcery, idolatry, and witchcraft and so on are a clear demonstration of what people believe based on their cultural experience. As Christians, we need to address our culturally postulated reality of witchcraft pastorally with seriousness, sensitivity and respect. We should not live as if there are no evil spirits and witches, but should live with the full conviction that God is in control of every situation.

If the mainline churches want to regain their vitality, their first step must be to address theological issues head on. They must listen to the voices of lay liberals and provide compelling answers to the question, "What is so special about Christianity in Awka?" Christianity is, however, intended to be the religion not of one particular race of people only, but of the whole world. But in different countries it will wear different types, if it is to become indigenous to every soil.

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