

MANIFESTATIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Abstract

Manifestations of mental health in Christian religion and performative arts have inspired several scholarly conversations. Existing studies on the nexus between religion, performance and mental health have concentrated mainly on the theatricalities, causes, remedies and representations of mental health with scant literature focusing on the manifestations of mental disorders in the Old Testament doctrine. It is against this backdrop that the current paper examines manifestations of mental disorders with particular reference to the Old Testament. The paper deploys textual analysis to examine major ceremonial characters in the Old Testament, but with emphasis on King Saul and King David. Furthermore, the paper identifies possible causes and remedies to mental disorders as prescribed in the Old Testament. It was established that mental disorders occur when certain factors alter the well-being of people and also that anxiety, fears, depression, anger, fame, sin, amongst others were mental disorders manifested in the Old Testament. It was also found out that King David was acknowledged as “a man after God’s own Heart” but suffered depression, fear, and diverse anxiety disorders. In addition, Saul was also chosen by God to lead the affairs of the Israelites and by virtue of disobedience, the spirit of God departed from him and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him with schizophrenia. It was also discovered from the Old Testament narratives that the presence of God, trust in Him and the peace that He offers can eradicate all forms of mental disorders.

Keywords: Manifestations, Old Testament, Mental Health, Mental Disorders

Introduction

The concept of manifestation is deeply rooted in religion and performative arts; being that it advances interpretation of metaphysical or transcendental subject matters such as emotions, perception, and virtually, all forms of mental disorders. In recent times, concerns

arising from mental disorders have attracted global attention and have led to numerous interdisciplinary scholarships. One of such issues is “manifestations”; observably, in Literature, Medicine, Psychology, Psychiatry, etc. Some of the aforementioned disciplines have had scholars interrogating performance and mental health, poetry and medicine, mental health from the Christian perspective; representations of mental disorders engendered by injustice and infidelity; Neurosis from patriarchal suppression in African women, among; Clinical implications of spirituality to mental health; etc. (Omobowale, 2001; Kekeghe (2016); Obot, 2022, Hambrick, 2023; Kehinde, 2006). However, it seems that studies on manifestations or representations of mental disorders in respect of the Old Testament theology seem insufficient. It is against this backdrop that the current paper examines manifestations of mental disorders with particular reference to the Old Testament theology.

The paper deploys textual analysis to examine major ceremonial characters in the Old Testament generally, but with emphasis on King Saul and King David who seem to have experienced manifestations of one form of mental disorders or the other. The choice of the two Old Testament characters may be linked to Aristotle’s concept of tragedy (the rise and fall of men of noble status). The essence is for the stimulation of cathartic effect necessary for further interrogations of the subject matter under discourse. Furthermore, the current paper identifies possible causes and remedies for mental disorders as prescribed in the Old Testament.

Conceptual Clarifications

Manifestation is the public display of emotion or feelings or, something theoretical that is made real. The concept of manifestation is apt and often applied to spiritual exegesis (Harold, 2001). Here, the idea is to explain spiritual, emotional and psychological phenomena becoming materialized in the physical form (Moreira-Almeida, Koenig & Lucchett, 2005). Many believe that mental disorders have spiritual inclinations and that the application of medical procedures might not be productive in the long run (Harold, 2001). Contrary views situate factors that contribute to the emergence of mental disorders and possible cures to only clinical origin (Keyes, 2002). Another set of people agree that mental disorders seem to have both spiritual and clinical implications. However, this paper unravels various manifestations of mental disorders in the text under review. This is predicated on the basis that humans are capable of manifesting subconscious traits through actions and reactions; and, it is common knowledge that dramatic arts is a viable tool for such rendition. In other words, drama, consciously or unconsciously portrays human characteristics as a direct influence of the subconscious mind in what is referred to as dramatic impulse (Lehmann, 2005).

Mental Disorder

Mental disorder is a term that is often contextualized within mental health discourse. Mental health itself is a broad spectrum which means “a state of well-being in which every individual can cope with the normal strains of existence. It also refers to a state where an individual is productive in a given society (WHO, 2007). Furthermore, the concept is directly related to the enjoyment of life, ability to cope with stress and sadness, the fulfilment of goals and potential, and a sense of connection to others. In the actual fact, mental health is more about wellness than illness; and, it is not simply the lack of a mental health conditions.

In concise terms, Keyes ((2014) identifies three components of mental health to include: emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. He stated that emotional well-being includes happiness, interest in life, and satisfaction. In the case of psychological well-being, he made mention of the ability for an individual to appreciate one’s own personality, be good at managing the responsibilities of daily life, maintaining decent relationships with others. For social well-being, he posited that there must be evidence of productive contributions to society and the ability to be a part of a community (social integration, coherence and actualization),

However, the whole idea of mental disorder occurs when the mental-wellbeing of a person is threatened by clinical, psychological, environmental, economic, social or spiritual factors (Hatch & Harvey (2010); Olatawura (1982); Baxter (1998). Succinctly, the American Psychiatric Association (2014) explains the hallmark of mental disorder to be the inability of an individual to participate meaningfully in day-to-day human activities. Therefore, it could be said that mental disorder is related to ailments capable of provoking dysfunctional or unable behaviours in people.

The Old Testament

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the Old Testament is “the first part of the Christian Bible that talks about the history of the Jews and God’s plans for them before Jesus Christ was born. Grabbe (2007) explains that the Old Testament is more or less a direct history of the Jews. In contrast, Jones’ (2000) perception of the Old Testament (OT) as embodying the Christian canons; way beyond a historical material of the Jewish extraction. In addition, he stated that OT is primarily a collection of ancient religious materials, about 24 books of the Hebrew which were written by various authors over centuries (Lim, 2005). Smith (2019) added that:

The Old Testament is important because it shows us who God is. The Old Testament is where God first introduces himself to the world, where he first communicates with

mankind. And the Old Testament shows God to us in so many ways. God's holiness, justice, faithfulness, love, wisdom, and power was demonstrated in story after story throughout the Old Testament.

Laney (2015) supports the argument that the Old Testament is the revelation of the truth about God and humanity and in Romans 1:16, it says that the gospel is "*the power of God for salvation*". The gospel as mentioned above represents the Bible (Old and the New Testament) which has been adjudged as the most widely read religious books as of now. In addition, it is a significant manuscript and seemingly acknowledged to harbour the creation myth of the world and scores of life-changing narratives.

Manifestations of Mental Disorders in the Old Testament

A close reading of the Old Testament reveals characters that experienced various mental disorders such as Cain, King Saul, King David, Herod, Hannah, etc. Cain manifested extreme jealousy and killed his brother Abel. King Herod showed some kind of inconsistent character and killed John the Baptist by beheading him. Hannah in the book of I and II Samuel suffered from depression resulting from bareness. Despite the numerous characters went through various experiences, this study focuses on two principal characters namely: King Saul and King David. Both characters were highly revered in the Old Testament and stories surrounding their exploits are recurrently used for teaching morals across different denominations of the Christian religion. The popular narrative is that King Saul was rejected and then possessed by an evil spirit; while King David was acknowledged as the man after God's heart despite numerous sins he committed before the Lord. Furthermore, King Saul was an epitome of disobedience; and King David was aptly known for repentance.

Several Bible passages indicated that King David was afflicted by some mental disorders such as major depression; fear, anxiety, and minor depression. Some schools of thought are of the opinion that major depression was the mental disorder that King David suffered the most. Others seem to agree that anxiety was the height of his disorders. Many argued that out of all the people in Bible history, there was probably no character that was more afflicted by fear and anxiety than King David. In other words, fear and anxiety were regular companions for him. The book of Psalms affirms this point vividly. For instance,

Furthermore, the Old Testament Narrative states that King Saul was the first King of Israel who reigned in Jerusalem from c.1029–1005 BCE (Oded 2007:78). 1 Samuel 9:1 recorded that Saul was the son of Kish who; a wealthy and influential man from the tribe of Benjamin in Israel. Also, Saul was tall and well-built for the kingship role. Many have also argued that at the beginning of Saul's reign as King of Israel, there were no traces of mental

disorders. However, during the course of his reign, he exhibited extreme jealousy towards David, which, perhaps heralded the extreme manifestation of Schizophrenia. The Old Testament acknowledged that Saul's was pre-occupied with David's increasing fame in the later part of his reign and from there depression took a strong hold of him, which severely affected his reign (1 Samuel 18:9, 28, 29). Based on the foregoing, it could be inferred that the primary reason for Saul's mental disorder was God's departure; arising from his bitterness and disobedience (Samuel 16:14).

Causes and Remedies to Mental Disorder: The Old Testament's Perspective

Biblical narrative suggests causes and cures to mental health disorders. In this regard, two causes have been established. One, disorders come from the departure of God's presence from any individual. This was recorded in 1 Samuel 16:14. When the spirit of God departs from a man, a vacuum is created which must be occupied and often times, an evil spirit takes over as in the case of King Saul.

Another, source of mental health is anxiety; This is found in Philippians 4:6-7 the Bible states thus:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The above passage reveals anxiety as one of the manifestations of mental disorder. This disorder emerges as a product of yearnings and expectations. That is to say when an individual is expectant of something, there possibility of anxiety is certain and it has the ability to destabilize the mind. The level of anxiety increases when there is an eminent delay in the materialization of what is expected. It has been argued that anxieties, worries and fear are open invitations to the evil spirit that destabilizes the human body. Based on the foregoing, the panacea for anxiety disorders is thanksgiving, contentment, appreciation and prayers. Here, the old adage that says “expect nothing and you would not be disappointed” becomes a vivid illustration of the

Also, loneliness has been chronicled as a possible root cause of mental disorders. For instance, the Psalms of David portrayed extreme loneliness for David during the period King Saul because of the realities of that period. Within that period, David was able to draw strength from the presence of God that was with him. In Psalm 34:17 David was recorded to have said that “the righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles”. Also, in Psalm 42:1, David asked a significant question “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise

him, my Savior and my God”. It is pertinent to note from the above that the presence of God is capable of eradicating all loneliness.

Furthermore, fear can bring about various manifestations of mental disorders. Perhaps, that is why the bible admonished “fear not for I am with you always”. In other words, the presence of God drives away fear and brings calm. The Bible also asserts that fear is a negative spirit and capable of igniting an emotional experience in anticipation of some specific pain or danger. Explicitly, 2 Timothy 1:7 “For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind.” Furthermore, Deuteronomy 31:8 states that “He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. “Also, Isaiah 43:1 says “Don’t fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine.” Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”. There may be several reasons people succumb to the spirit of fear such as rejection, ridicule, failure, heartbreak, imprisonment, harms, something, disease, death, and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, eternal peace is a cure for mental disorders. Once there is peace, there seem to be a balance between the three tier of human which is body, soul and spirit. To buttress this point, the end of the above passage which says “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”, speaks volume. The implication of not being thankful and dependent on supernatural peace and guidance seems to be the source of mental health challenges. John 14:27 “Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.”

Conclusion

Based on the discussion so far, it could be deduced that mental disorders occur when certain factors alter the well-being of people. The discussions reveal anxiety, fears, depression, anger, fame, sin, amongst others as sources of mental disorders overtly manifested in the Old Testament. The paper also established that King David was acknowledged as “a man after God’s own Heart” but suffered depression, fear, and diverse anxiety disorders. Also, it has been acknowledged that Saul was chosen by God to lead the affairs of the Israelites and by virtue of disobedience, the spirit of God departed from him and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him with schizophrenia. It was also discovered from the Old Testament narratives that the presence of God, trust in Him and the peace that He offers can eradicate all forms of mental disorders.

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