

## **SEARCH FOR SECURITY**

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### **“CATHOLIC PRAYER HOUSES AND HEALING MINISTRY” –THE OLD AND NEW – A MEETING POINT: CAUSE FOR CONCERN**

The spread of these neo-Christian movements has continued unabated since the early seventies all over Nigeria. Like wide fire there is no nook and cranny of communities and cities that has not been affected. The number of Pastors, prophet-healers, evangelists, exorcists, prayer-warriors, miracles workers and seers has equally continued to grow every day. Formerly the dominating theme was “prayer” and “conversion”, hence “Prayer House” (Ulo Ekpere) or “Uka Nchehari”. “My House should be called House of Prayer” – “Aga akpo ulo nnam ulo ekpere”. Today the emphasis has shifted to “Miracles” and “War against devilish forces”. The theme “Ekpere” – Prayer has continued to feature, but the concept has almost changed. This time miracle-seeking and troubled Nigerians don’t really devote time to prayer. The look for Pastors, Priests and Spiritualists believed to possess all the powers to reach God and deliver the packages, hence IME EKPERE.

People go to the “Men of God” who promise to do the wonders. Immediately these spiritualists finish assembling the materials and various spiritual and occult items, they deliver them to their anxious clients who hope to receive the answers to their petitions in matters of months, weeks, days or even hours. Provided clients complete their own spiritual and temporal assignments and with meticulous alacrity, these are more than 100% of positive answers to petitions.

A little mistake on the part of the petitioner can cause an irreparable damage and misfortune, hence an explanation to unanswered petitions. Examples abound. A petitioner, for example must adhere to the minutest rule DRY FASTING. He or she may not taste even a drop of water until the official time of end of dry fasting. A serious petitioner may not even take bath or shower and observe simple rules of hygiene until the petition is answered. A petitioner may have to be reciting some incantations, psalms and other forms of ‘prayer’ until dust.

Some of the incantations and ‘prayers’ may include verses like: “Death to those who seek to end my life; Let them stumble and confess their sins, those who are responsible for my failure to get a good husband. Most of the abandoned Old Testaments psalms that have the death of an “enemy” as their themes or that pour and terrible curses on the seen and unseen enemies are becoming popular again in the neo-Christian assemblies. Other incantations include verses and rhymes like “Holy Ghost fire! Holy Ghost Fire! Back to sender! In Jesus name alleluia!

The evil forces that menace lives in families and entire communities can only be handled by powerful “Spiritualists”, “Pastors” and “Priests” with hindsight. In Nigeria people must travel to Lagos and other big cities to get their problems resolved by powerful spiritualists like TB JOSHUA, PASTOR CHRIS and other Prophet healers of international repute. The presence of White and Brown people from Europe and America are sure proof that the wonders that take place there are real. White people are thought to be less gullible by Black people. It is claimed that Whites, especially European Caucasians don’t believe in “African” witchcraft and “medicine” whose characteristics or features are described by the term “abracadabra”. Do White people believe in (African) poison?

### **Poison or “Bad Medicine”.**

This is a very important point theme in our discussion, namely the strong belief in (African) *poison* in most parts of Africa. This is specifically speaking ‘African type of poison’ sometimes described as ‘bad medicine’. There is much confusion caused by European authors in their attempt to describe this phenomenon. The usual terms used, sorcery, witchcraft, etc., do not describe well what the African means by poison (in Igbo, for example, *’nsi’* or *’ogwu’*

The Yoruba word for medicine, *ôgùn*, covers not only herbal and similar remedies, but also *poison*, spells, and charms, thus revealing how difficult it is to separate the good from the bad; it is also used for Western scientific medicines, and for occult and magic importations from overseas, especially from India and other Near East regions.

The same applies to the Igbo situation. The word *’ogwu’* is used for all types of medicine as well as for poison. To indulge in the act of ‘poisoning’ is called *’iko-nsi’* or *’iko ogwu’*.

Both the poison and the medicine-men who compound the substances are very much feared. Poisons are normally used for offensive purposes, and can be made from many materials – human parts, hair, nails, clothes, leaves, liquids, powder, etc. It can be deposited on anything belonging to the enemy, who is immediately affected by contact with the poisoned object. It can be thrown on the enemy, put into his drink, or transmitted to him by mere shaking of hands. It is generally believed that illness or death or some other calamity is either sent or “thrown” by an enemy during the night or else transmitted by some poisonous substance, which having been duly treated is brought into contact with the victim’.

In Nigeria every type of death is generally attributed to the work of an enemy. Death caused by heart attack, diabetes, liver or kidney problems can always be traced to the handiwork of an enemy. The case of a man who suffered from tuberculosis, and whose wife was totally convinced that the illness had

actually been ‘thrown’ by night by one of their enemies is one out of thousands of such stuff. In one community in Oru East Local government area, one blind man who had suffered from eye problem, glaucoma, was hundred per cent sure that his brother’s wife, who had been nursing grudges against him was responsible for this calamity. A ‘Christian pastor’, a Catholic priest who runs an Adoration Center and another traditional occult healer confirmed the fact! The blind man’s aggrieved family never left any stone unturned to discover the ‘enemy’ They had visited many ‘Pastors’ to unravel the mystery of the blindness.

## **The Problem of Evil and Suffering**

Among Africans, as among peoples all over the world, the problem of suffering remains a mystery. Why should one person suffer and another not? Who is responsible for misfortune in the world? These are some of the perplexing questions. As far as the African is concerned, God is good. He cannot be responsible. Who then? An *enemy* is often the assumption. The belief in *poison*, witchcraft, charms, and magic, is still very strong all over Africa. Christianity or modern discoveries in medicine and psychology may not succeed in eradicating this belief, for it is embedded in the minds of many, no matter what their status in society or even in Church circles. Even where the ‘Western’ diagnosis may be clear, it does not explain the ‘why’ or the ‘who’. The *who* is particularly important for the African and must not be overlooked. Since the ‘unknown’ enemy is held responsible for almost every type of disease, misfortune, sickness, and death, the culprit must be unmasked by all means, in case he has decided to continue with his evil intentions. The ‘Western’ doctor here has nothing comparable to the prophet-healer’s offer, and thus must give way to the one who claims supernatural authority for his activities. Often his prophetic call begins with a divine order to go and heal a particular person suffering from an incurable illness. He, the prophet alone, claims to work by the power of God.

The healing message is the pivot of the activities of most of the Independent Churches, and the emphasis on ‘faith’ has its own impact on the sufferers, since probably their ailments would not be cured elsewhere. ‘There is absolute faith in God,’ writes Iwuagwu. ‘This is because the average African looks to religion for the solution of nearly every problem in his life. There is also that sense of absolute dependence upon God for final succour.’<sup>1</sup>

Some fundamental questions arise: ‘Why the African prophetic Churches are primarily linked with healing activities? What is the role of healing in these Churches? Is it only a recruitment technique invented by the leaders? There are no specific records in the biblical tradition, that the Israelite prophets and charismatic leaders were specifically given the mandate, during their inaugural visions, to go

and *heal*,’ or that they ever engaged in massive healing activities. From where, then, does this ‘healing drama’, characteristic of nearly all the African Independent Churches, derive its foundation and support, and what is its relationship to the prophetic mission?

There is no doubt that the numerous miracles of Jesus, the healing activities and exorcisms reported in the New Testament, have influenced and encouraged the faith-healing mission in the Independent Churches. Certain biblical passages, including Mark 16.17ff; Luke 4.18ff; Luke 10; James are often cited as support, Jesus’ power over demons and over sickness, and the same supernatural power conferred on his disciples, the coming of the Holy Spirit, are but clear manifestations of God’s intervention in history, an intervention by which, at last, an envoy of God is able to confront all the evil and spiritual forces causing man so much anxiety in this life. Often, it may not be necessary for the new ‘man of God’ in Africa to be aware of the specific complaints of suffering individuals or to go into diagnostic complexities – the patients are healed by the power of the Spirit and by faith. It is the same Spirit promised by Jesus, which not only transformed the timid Apostles into new men, imbued with new powers to preach the gospel without fear, but also gave them power to cure diseases, and to drive out devils and all malignant spirits by mere command, also by laying on of hands on the sick ‘in the name of Jesus’.

## **The Concern for Healing**

The concern for healing in most of the prophet-healing Churches certainly reflects the problem, unresolved for much of the population of Africa, of securing a healthy existence. The complex causes of sickness include the activities of enemies, sorcerers, witches, and evil spirits. This raises the important question of ‘African’ versus ‘European’ categories of illness, observes Martin West. This has to do with the ‘European diseases’ which respond to Western scientific therapy, and ‘African diseases’ which are not likely to be understood or treated by Western medicine.<sup>2</sup> These include many psychological conditions caused by superstitions, anxiety, and fear among Africans, which are not undestroyed by European doctors, and which African doctors can and do cure. But greater than both is there! He is in the person of the ‘prophet healer’.

## **Evil Spirits**

A short survey of the spirit world in Africa reveals a deep belief (in spite of the influence of Christianity) in vital forces or spiritual powers which operate in secret.

Generally these evil forces are believed to dwell in bushes, dark places, market places, odd corners, where they wander about aimlessly. It may be dangerous, therefore, for anyone without a resisting spirit to approach such places at odd hours. The spirits of those evil and wicked men who 'died bad deaths', are believed to wander about, and if they happen to attack the living, there is normally an immediate death. In Igbo language this is called '*mba-mmuo*'. There is usually no adequate remedy for such a misfortune.

### **Man craving for security**

Man's life in society is not always secure. He lives in perpetual fear of evil spirits and mortal enemies. So also do most of our Christians find themselves in this situation. There is a general sense of insecurity and for this reason the African desires protection from God, from the good spirits of ancestors, and from his fellow man.

Some of the believers trust in God and entertain no fear whatsoever. Others use certain mixed religious means to support what they gain from Christianity. There are yet other groups of Christians who believe that security will come from a religious movement. And yet another group gets into other occult societies and some traditional secret societies. In these places they are looking for protection and for occult secrets.<sup>5</sup>

African society is one where man always craves for security! A little quarrel with a neighbour, a money squabble with someone, a land dispute will often immediately generate suspicion and a sense of insecurity. One disputant fears he will be poisoned by the other. Both may run to the diviner for protective medicine, or even look for offensive ones. If anything is lost or stolen what is important is the knowledge of *who* stole it, and not so much the restoration of the property. The diviner's word is final, and he is regularly consulted by people from all walks of life at one time or another, especially during important crises in life.

### **Psychological Illness: Causes and Cures**

The claim made by many authors, that 'African sickness' is largely psychological or 'spiritual' in origin, is not without foundation. In general, an average villager believes that any type of tablet or herb can relieve his headache, backache, pain in the stomach, the eyes, or other parts of the body. The only important thing is that

he succeeds in getting hold of one, and one should not be surprised if the sick man claims to have been cured after a short while. The uncontrollable sale of patent medicine is alarming. This is true also of the number of fake 'village doctors', whose only medical instrument is often a crude injection-syringe. Like our prophet-healers, they are doctors of all diseases, and as far as they are concerned the word 'diagnosis' does not exist. Any type of liquid or powder will serve for filling the syringe, and the stuff is directly injected into the aching part of the body. In the past, stories that these crude village doctors injected liquids directly into the heads and stomachs of their victims were not without foundation. For their impatient victims, what mattered was that something was done to the sickness, and quickly! Little wonder that in a few days' time the patients claimed to be all right again!

One can generally assume that most of the maladies successfully treated in this way are of a psychosomatic nature. Psychological disturbances are usually ascribed to evil spirits, and devils are cast out through exorcism. Evil spirits are generally regarded as responsible even for bodily aches and pains in the stomach, possibly caused by bad food or drink. The types of sickness frequently treated by the prophet-healers include, 'evil spirit possession', respiratory troubles, gynecological problems or inability to conceive, worms, bad dreams, insomnia, internal pains, loss of appetite, epilepsy, etc., etc. 'All this is of course self-diagnosis by symptoms', observers Turner, 'and illustrates the medical problem of Africa as much as the achievements of the Churches.'<sup>6</sup>

## **Forms of Treatment**

The success of the prophet-healers of the independent Churches lies largely in the fact that they share completely with their fellow Africans their dread of witchcraft, poison, charms, and the influence of evil spirits, and the belief in their terrible realities. No doubt, the psychological side of the prophetic treatment has a salutary influence on many of the patients who suffer from these types of illness. Sometimes compromise solutions are sought in serious cases.

Membership in the Independent Churches comprises a considerable number of young women who claim that they owe the conception of their children to the Church. 'This has been supported by African doctors who recognize the crippling psychological effects of an African woman's anxiety over her sterility, or the slightest delay in conception.'<sup>7</sup> This chief medicament, the panacea, is water, supported by extensive prayer, good advice, and sometimes fasting. Oils, enemas, candles, ashes are often used or recommended. Visible physical treatment includes the imposition of hands or iron rod, beating with open palms, and rubbing the patient with potash or oil.

In the Church of the Holy Chapel of Israel, prophet John Mmuo-Nso beats his patients with the open palm all over the body, shouting at the same time: '*Ka O Puo! Ka O Puo!*' (Let it [the spirit] depart!), and taking no heed of the patient's discomfort and pains. Often the patients are given castor oil to drink or are 'powdered' with potash or oil. When potash is used, to behold such a patient is a sorry sight and ugly spectacle! Sometimes after the 'beating' the sick people are exposed to the direct rays of the sun.

Another method of healing is by strange symbolic actions. The above prophet used this method one day in a typical dramatic healing of an epileptic girl of about fourteen years old. In an ecstatic fit, he brought the girl to a public square, and pulling off her clothes, he left her completely naked. Then stooping down, he began passing between her legs to and fro, and after the exercise shook the girl violently, blowing air into her ears and eyes. Questioned about this shameful public show and magical symbolism by the curious and angry native bystanders, the prophet was infuriated. He was only obeying the 'divine voice', he explained.

Martin West cites some interesting samples of treatment prescribed by a prophet-healer in Soweto, South Africa. A patient troubled by evil spirits or devils would be prayed for, while those with marital disputes would be given holy water. People looking for work are generally made to wash and are given water to drink. If a house has been bewitched, water and ash and salt would usually be sprinkled around.<sup>8</sup>

During exorcism in the Church of the Lord, the evil spirit is addressed with authority: 'Come out! Come out! In the name of Jesus, loose your hold, you cruel devil. Today terminates your existence in N... in the name of Jehovah, the Superior Spirit. This is the property of my Father. N ... you are healed.'

## **The Old and the New – A Meeting Point?**

### **The Priest/Pastor – Healer – A Neo-Traditional Diviner?**

Has our 'prophet-healer' succeeded in replacing the old traditional diviner and fortune-teller? To describe our honourable prophet in such terms does not destroy his position as a 'messenger of God'. It is by no means a derogatory term, since in fact that is the role he assumes in his mission, a healer of mind and body.

Like the traditional diviner who smells out the witches who have cast spells on a person, the prophet is able, thanks to the supernatural powers he has received, to counteract diseases and death. He has already demonstrated the impotence of the most feared charms and shrines by destroying and burning them. But he is careful not to fall into the old mistakes of the missionaries, who destroyed, but offered

nothing in substitute. It is here that he surpasses them by providing his new converts with new elements which reassure them of their security. While his new remedies do not represent an exact 'photocopy' of those of the traditional diviners, they adequately serve his ever-superstitious clients.

Since diseases are seen as having a religious nature, they can be cured by prayers, mere laying on of hands, or through purification rites, confessions, and exorcisms. Sometimes the prophet may be required to demonstrate the cure symbolically, or at least to convince his patient that there was something really going on, something more than the human imagination could reach. No medicine, strictly speaking, is required, since the emphasis is on faith and on God's power to succour and to heal. This answers a crucial religious question which the missionaries neglected to answer. It is an offer of divine help, in this world; an offer which provides a functional alternative for the activities of the traditional spirit-diviner.

## **Fasting and Prayer**

In the neo-Christina and Catholic religious movements fasting and prayer have lost their biblical flavor. Both used to be a usual form of attracting God's forgiveness and mercy. When one engaged oneself in prayer and fasting, it used to be a serious sign of reparation. But Christ warned his followers never to pray or fast like hypocrites. One who prayed and fasted like Scribes and Pharisees has already received his earthly, surely NOT the intended heavenly reward, which only God distributes.

In the Old Testament, trumpets and horns were blown to announce impending calamities and disasters that awaited sinful nations and peoples. Prayer and especially fasting was prescribed to avert the impending doom. Blow the trumpet in Zion for vultures hover the house of Yahweh. Even kids and mothers feeding babies as well and kings and princes must join the event. It used to be a collective event and the disaster that would happen might not spare anybody.

In both the New and Old Testaments fasting and prayer were meant to prepare those who take up the burden for serious spiritual engagement. Fasting and prayer would discipline the body and attract God's mercy. It leads to holiness and complete break with the sinful past. God's grace flows in abundance and takes possession of a converted sinner, a friend of God.

In the neo-Christian and neo-Catholic revivalist religious movements fasting and prayer are seen by both healers and clients as the easiest way of getting the earthly rewards and not necessarily a way to holiness and spiritual healing.



## **Prescriptive Prayer ‘Drugs’**

In the “Eucharistic Family Prayer Group and Adoration center run by one Catholic Priest in Imo state, the following circumstances and situations in the lives of visitors and the needy followers receive the priests “prescription drugs” facilitated by fasting and prayer. Let us first examine some of the situations and needs that push thousands of Nigerian Catholics and non-Catholics to Catholic healing centers, Prayers Houses and Adoration Centers. Some of the expected miracles are believed could take place also during all-night Vigils and Crusades. The complainants and clients include the following:

- (1) One who claims he had been bewitched or poisoned.
- (2) One suffering from failures in business ventures
- (3) One whose future and progress had been blocked by powerful rich members of families with powerful occult portions. The dangerous occult materials prepared by great medicine men are usually buried in the ground in forms of coffins. In the coffins can be found names of young men and enemies who must not “see light again”
- (4) Ladies and women who claim that enemies had been responsible for their calamities and misfortunes, namely ‘inability to find life-partners’ or ‘bear children’.
- (5) Those suffering from some diseases and ailments whose origins ‘can never be traced or known’. It must be a result of poison. Whether it is blindness caused by late treatment of glaucoma or cancerous lacerated ulcers of the body and skin (‘acha ere’), an enemy is responsible for the misfortune.
- (6) Young men and women who had failed many times to secure visas to fly abroad trace their misfortune to the work of sworn enemies of their progress.
- (7) Young men and women who fail to get job and admission into higher and lower institutions of learning must approach a Man of God to procure solution to their problem.

### **Some Forms of Therapeutic ‘Prayer Drugs’ – “Packaged Prayer” – “Ime Ekpere”**

Some usual prayers-drugs prescribed by men of God for clients are familiar and spectacular. At the end of the administration and application the client or petitioner is assured of success, the end of his suffering! He could go for thanksgiving and send gifts to the Lord for the marvels done for him and the entire family that had borne the burden of misfortune for years!

In one Catholic Prayer House run by another Catholic clergyman the following prayer-drugs are carefully enumerated in the flyers the priest distributes to clients:

- (1) Rosary 20 decades every day. (Petitioners are advised never to rush the rosary), otherwise the drugs would not produce the desired effects.
- (2) Recitation of the following psalms are recommended: Psalms 1,3 5, 60, 88, 103, 121, 135, 42: 9-10, 35, 45, 64, 69, 112, 124, 27, 24, 126, 128, 132, 114, 55, 94, 109.
- (3) Everyone must fast for 9 days ( 6.00 a.m to 6.00 p.m.. participants are advised to take light meals in-between to avoid ulcer.
- (4) White blessed candles should be burnt inside the compound for 9 days; (one candles everyday
- (5) Burn Gravel Incense inside the compound for 12 days.
- (6) Sprinkle Holy water all over the compound and rooms once in a week for 7 weeks. You recite “Jesus I love you” 7 times. At the end of the sprinkling read Ezekiel 36:25-28.
- (7) Each person must visit the Blessed Sacrament once in a week for 3 weeks
- (8) Every Friday – Stations of the cross around the compound for those at home; others to do it in their rooms wherever they are. This will last for 7 weeks.
- (9) Gift to the poor every week for 5 weeks. Give anything you like.
- (10) Water + Salt + Psalm 29 or 121; bathe in salt water, once a day for 9 days.
- (11) Memorare (Cheta) 9 times; We fly to thy protection (Anyi agbaba) 9 times.
- (12) Read: Eph 6: 12 – 14; Jer. 29:11-14. Is. 53: 4-6; Jer. 20: 11 – 15; Is. 54: 17- 20, Exd 14: 14 – 18.
- (13) “Holy Ghost Fire” 7 times wherever enemies are gathered. “Holy Ghost Fire! Pursue them”! 7 times.

The list of the recommended prayers ends with the priest’s prayerful wishes: “May God help you and answer your prayers – Amen!

## **Hurrah! It is done!**

Those who claim they have finished their ‘assignments’ and ‘medication’ do not fail to ‘see’ the priest at the end of the exercise. Like a student who finishes writing his assignment or examination, one is free to wait patiently for the results. Where

prayers are said to have been answered, thanksgiving service is prescribed. If God takes time to consider the petition, clients are made to wait patiently.

One hears clients who take a deep breath and announce the end of the exercise. “I have finished the spiritual assignment. It was a month ago I went to the man of God who prepared the ‘package’ – ‘Ime Ekpere”. “I have to wait for the results!” Perhaps the sworn enemy may die in an accident. Possibly a desired suitor will report. Expectations are high!

## **Reconciliation Services – Liberation from bondage.**

Among the many services which the modern priest-healers who run healing services and Adoration centers “Reconciliation Services” feature in abundance. Warring families and parties flock these centers and request the Man of God to help restore peace to their families and communities. They believe that their problems have roots in the activities of evil persons in their families and communities. These evil people who ‘plant’ concoctions and devilish materials that cause various misfortunes must be made to confess their sins, hence the concept of “Igba Ndu”, “Idu Isi” etc.

The Eucharistic Adoration Family, one of the most famous centers in Imo state, specializes in “Reconciliation Services”. Clients who visit this center usually beckon on the priest, the Man of God, to come to their families and communities personally to effect the ‘cleansing’ of their environments that have been polluted by poison (nsi) and other activities of evil persons who through their devilish and nefarious activities have kept many unfortunate people in bondage. There is need for liberation and freedom from the menace of evil persons.

The above center distributes the following flyer to clients who want Village/Community Prayer/Reconciliation. The monetary and other demands include the following”:

- (1) Letter from the parish priest
- (2) List containing names of villagers and families.
- (3) Orientation cause – Seven thousand naira (N7,000)
- (4) 120 days Novena masses/Preparation – Ninety thousand naira (N90,000)
- (5) 3 days dry fasting/confession before the time with Psalms 51, Matthew 18:15-17, Ps. 32, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Joshua 6:20-21, Joshua 1: 1-9, Joshua 24:15.
- (6) 15 bottles of Olive Oil – Four thousand five hundred naira (N4,500)
- (7) 2 crates of Can malt
- (8) 1 carton of biscuits

- (9) 9 days Novena mass for peace and progress – Nine hundred naira (N900)
- (10) Get-together meal for the village
- (11) Appreciation to the parish priest of the village – five thousand naira (N5,000)
- (12) Thanksgiving (to your home parish or any place of your choice)
- (13) Provision of Sound System

## **Holy Water**

The frequent use of holy water is common in many Independent Churches. It may be given to members for specific cures, or else it may be drunk to purify and protect against illness and misfortune. One often sees members carrying bottles, buckets, and tins of water to the prophets for blessing. Many cannot stay or sleep in their houses without blessed water. They are advised to sprinkle holy water in their homes to drive away evil spirits. With faith, holy water sprinkled on charms and poisoned materials renders them ineffective. It is used to consecrate otherwise profane places. Sick people are advised to drink blessed water regularly, as an antidote against all diseases which drives away the demons of asthma, stomach gas, and fever, ear-ache, influenza, weakness, and general pains. Turner reports the case of a boy with eye trouble, in the Church of the Lord, who had consecrated water poured into his eyes.

The Nkamba-Jerusalem in Zaïre has its ‘Pool of Bethesda’, a reference to the sacred spring through which many believers have been healed (John 5). The frequent use of blessed water in the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through Simon Kimbangu also catches the attention of Dr. Martin when she asks: ‘What does this water mean today? Does it have a purifying, magic power so that it works automatically, *ex opere operato*, in healing and blessing?’ Meanwhile, ‘not only is the Nkamba water used symbolically, but soil, too, is taken from Nkamba as a kind of pledge that the events of Nkamba, which took place here on earth, will also have their out-working at home in the daily needs of life. There is a biblical parallel to this in the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5.17).<sup>9</sup>

## **Holy Oil**

### **Destruction of ‘fetish’ trees and planting of Crucifixes**

Most Nigerians, Christians and non Christians strongly believe that evil spirits dwell in bushes and large local trees, hence the war of destruction of large village trees by the new spiritual evangelists. In the past twins and people who died from

dangerous deceases were said to have been buried in evil forests. A lot of pagan sacrifices were believed to have been carried out on foot of large village trees at village squares. To cence an entire community who claim that their lives are being menaced by modern evil people, a powerful man of God must be invited to visit the community and restore wholeness. The polluted atmosphere must be cleansing and re-dedicated to God. All such trees must be cut down, whether any dissenting voices and heart or not!

Large crucifixes are planted by our priests and pastors to scare evil and assure security of families and communities whose compounds and farms are claimed to be menaced by seen and unseen enemies. These crucifixes and other 'amulets' are said to offer protection to people whose lives and property are threatened by wicked enemies. Like modern hidden video cameras they can keep records of bad visitors and evil people. Therefore evil people should keep off if they would not like to be exposed! They are like trained dangerous backing dogs that keep watch of the home when owners are away. These very large crucifixes mounted at the entrance of large compounds or villages, as protective instruments against evil spirits too.

Among pagans, public magic is seen in the charms used to protect houses, compounds, fields, and villages. One sees bundles of feathers, bunches of leaves, packets wrapped in cotton thread, or great 'parcels' hanging from the ceilings of rooms to protect their occupants. Shops have packages or magic brooms nailed above the door to repel burglars or to attract trade. Fields are protected by anything from a wisp of straw to a complex package containing teeth, blood, and other organic substances.

To an outside observer, these are often the most obvious signs of heathenism. But it is these magic instruments and charms which our prophets, priest-healers and pastor claim to have come to destroy. Most of them they claim they have 'smelled out', attacked, and destroyed. Their mission, however, does not end there. They must provide 'substitutes' or 'alternatives'. Replace what they have destroyed, that they must do!

But danger! Have the crosses become new fetishes for the followers of our prophets? Was this what some of the earliest prophets set out to fight against? It is known that as the seventeenth century, the prophetess Dona Beatrice ordered her followers to destroy crosses. She wanted to see crosses, crucifixes, and images of the crucified Christ destroyed because the cross had become for many a new, more powerful fetish (*nkisi*). Pierre Mpadi (founder of the 'Mission des Noirs') and his disciples also preached against the cross and images.

## ***Conclusion***

We have seen that healing plays an important role in the Independent Churches. Whatever may be the objections to the ‘supernatural’ aspects of our prophet’s power to heal, it is evident that in this healing context he has to a large extent succeeded in replacing the pagan diviner. His achievements lie primarily in his personal charisma and ability to understand his followers’ predicaments. He has no intention of reintroducing paganism or any other form of traditional religion, which has been condemned by Christianity and which he personally has fought against. His achievements in the ‘rehabilitation’ of mentally deranged persons or his successes in sickness of psychosomatic nature have been tacitly recognized even by his strongest critics. The ‘prayer-healing Churches’ are surely responding to the problems and needs of most Africans.

As a recruitment technique, healing has of course its vital role, but most important is the prophet’s conviction that the prophetic mission includes the liberation of man from bodily hindrances. There is no dichotomy between body and soul. Whether his success comes from the enlightenment of the ‘Holy Spirit’, or merely from his own ability in pastoral counseling, what is very important is that in the midst of his followers he stands now as a man who has openly declared war on sickness and evil.

### ***From our present studies and analysis the following “facts and figures” have emerged:***

- (1) Miracles: There is not much of the “miraculous” in the activities of the new generation pastors and priests who claim to have the gift of the hindsight, namely special type of perception behind the natural events. Any of these ‘wonder workers’ and spiritualists who claim to read minds, interpret dreams and the mysterious are fakes.
- (2) Natural wisdom vis-à-vis hindsight: There are no facts to prove that they can perform nature miracles, like walking on the sea, raising the dead, making the blind see, the lame walk multiplying loaves of bread and fishes. Not T.B. Joshua, Pastor Chris, or any of the founders of Adoration centers and Prayer Houses. Their powers don’t go beyond the gift of natural wisdom and psychology.
- (3) Autism: Studies have shown that most of these ‘prophets’ are suffering from autism spectrum disorder, in a simple language a mild form of insanity or any other form of mental ailment. It has been proved that some pastors take sedative drugs or tranquilizers which help them

- perform their so-called ‘miracles’. Some have been caught with marijuana and heavy alcoholic drinks that help induce the state of madness. So these help them to address large crowds and perform strange movements, usually described as ‘abracadabra’.
- (4) Miracles vis-à-vis the “psychosomatic”: Psychosomatic has to do with bodily symptoms caused by mental or emotional disturbance. Our pastors and healers. Most of Nigerians who claim they had been cured of their ailments by the Man of God they visit suffer from fears, always linked with poison – nsi, aja and evil spirits. They believe that a simple verbal threat from an enemy produces some mysterious effects. So the ‘heart attack’, stroke, heart failure, blindness. The fellow who died from the disease of the blood (leukemia) or cancer, was killed with poison deposited by an enemy.
- (5) The pastor, the priest or the healer’s ‘success’: The “Man of God” claims success in his ministry because he agrees with his clients that every death, evil, illness and misfortune has deep spiritual or hidden cause – the blindness, paralysis – result of stroke or heart failure – can be traced to the evil machinations of an enemy. No medical explanations or causes of e.g ‘Acha ere’, partial stroke and others can be entertained by superstitious minded Nigerian. It has already some therapeutic effects on the client when the Man of God confirms that the ailment that brought the sufferer to his center was result of poison.
- (6) His Successes” The Man of God registers ‘successes, even 100% in his ministry when he engages in “Reconciliation Service”. He draws a great fanatical crowd when he identifies and associates the problems of his clients and warring families and communities with ‘poison’ and other forms of satanic attacks. If he succeeds in naming the culprits (result of informants’ stories and reports), he prescribes reconciliation service through swearing ceremonies – ‘Igba ndu’. The people like it. This calms down the fears and worries of those who claim they had been bewitched. Maybe the culprits would swear before the Blessed Sacrament or the Bible, commit themselves and die eventually.