

Anointing with Oil in African Christianity: An Evaluation of Contemporary Practices

By Sampson M. Nwaomah

One New Testament practice that seems to have appealed to many contemporary African Christians in their quest to appropriate the providences of God in their lives, endeavors, and in order to protect their possessions is the practice of anointing with oil. To anoint, as popularly understood, means “to smear, pour oil or other unctuous substance upon” (Horn 1979:48). Historically, the practice of anointing either with oil or other substances was widespread, and it was used for various purposes—religious or secular (Richards 1985:54). In the New Testament, “anoint,” “anointing,” and “anointed” are

usually a translation of four different word groups (*aleiphō*, *murizō*, *chrisma*, and *chriō*). Generally, these words according to Richards (1985:54) express “the same basic idea of rubbing or spreading oil or perfume or ointment” or the bequest of the Holy Spirit on an individual or community. At least four patterns may be observed.

First, there is anointing as a divine commission; and this is related to *chriō* which appears five times in the New Testament (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21 and Heb 1:9). *Chriō* is used figuratively and always in the sense of being specially appointed or commissioned by God (Heb 1:9; Luke 4:18; cf. Luke 1:9) (Richards 1985:54). Of the five occurrences, it is used only once (2 Cor 1:21) to refer to the church. Significantly, the other four refer to the empowerment of Christ by the special bequest of the Holy Spirit for his earthly assignment. In those instances, therefore, the use of oil or any external substance as the instrument of anointing is excluded. In the case of Christ, the anointing may have taken place at the baptism when God overtly endorsed

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his ministry by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit and an audible affirmation (Matt 3:16-17; cf. Mark 1:8-11 and Luke 3:21-22).

A second usage of the anointing motif in the New Testament is expressed by the word *chrisma*. *Chrisma*, as it is used in the Epistle of John (1 John 2:20, 27; cf. 2 Cor 1:21), is in reference to the privileges of being a Christian. The major meaning arising from this passage is the magnificent anointing (consecration) of the believers as a community of Christ. This anointing, as in the *chriō* word group, is actualized by the dawning of the Spirit in the life of each believer

is *aleiphō*. The word appears nine times in the New Testament and is used with various meanings. In the Gospel of Matthew (6:17), this pattern of anointing may refer to the application of oil, cream, lotion, and/or cosmetics to the body. In the Matt 6:17 passage Jesus instructs that fasting should be done pleasantly with the continuation of the bodily application of these substances; thus denouncing pretentious faith. Furthermore, Luke (7:38, 46; cf. John 11:2; 12:3) uses anointing in the context of hospitality by recording the memorable and commendable act of the sinful woman who

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and consequently, the church (Grundmann 1964:572). John implies that at the point of conversion believers are endowed with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is significant to note that as Engelhard observes: “whereas in the OT only special persons were anointed for office, in the NT all believers receive the anointing by the Holy One (1 John 2:20) . . . and this Anointing abides in the believer” (Engelhard 1979:129).

The third word used for anointing in the New Testament

stunned Jesus’ host by anointing him with oil—an act expected of the host who instead derided the woman and questioned the prophetic status of Christ. In relation to burial purposes, the intention of the women disciples of Jesus who came to anoint Christ’s body after his death (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56; cf. Mark 14:8) captures this meaning in the New Testament.

However, the fourth and most contentious pattern of the practice of anointing in the New Testament is related to its healing

purposes as recorded in Christ's instruction to his disciples and James' prescription (Mark 6:13 and Jas 5:13-16). The Greek word *aleiphō* is the word used for anointing in its reference to healing in these two passages. In this regard, opinions on the understanding and the manner in which this practice should occur among Christians in contemporary Africa are diverse. While some Christians contend that the theology of biblical anointing could be re-interpreted to accommodate all perceived disquiet of a Christian, others assert that anointing should be understood and practiced in the context of biblical occurrences. The purpose of this article therefore is to study the concept of biblical anointing with oil in Jas 5:13-18, where there seems to be an elaborate procedure for the practice. The study of this passage is undertaken with a view to assessing the practices in Africa, especially Nigeria. Thus, a synopsis and an evaluation of anointing practices in Nigeria will also be given, followed by a summary, and concluding remarks.

Anointing in James 5:13-16

Is anyone among you in *suffering*? Let him pray. Is anyone among you cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you *sick*? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, *anointing him with oil* in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will *save* the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be

forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (Jas 5:13-16 NKJV, emphasis supplied)

The importance of this passage is very critical to the contemporary practice of anointing so it warrants an extended investigation in this study. However, the method used in the consideration of this passage excludes detail exegetical processes such as the literary unit, genre, structure, and textual criticism. Instead the study shall be limited to a consideration of some key words: *suffering*, *sick*, *anointing*, and *save* to illuminate this passage.

Suffering and Sick

James begins by counseling: "Is anyone among you in *suffering*? Let him pray." The Greek word translated *suffering* in Jas 5:13 is *kakopathei*, the third person singular of *kakopatheo*. The word has been translated "trouble" (NIV), "suffering" (RSV), and "afflicted" (KJV). A careful study of this passage may reveal that James was not referring to physical ailments here but to certain external and emotional conditions that may cause discontent and grief to a person. The meaning of *kakopatheo* and its noun form *kakopatheia* in the few occurrences in the New Testament (see 2 Tim 2:2; 4:5; and Jas 5:10) is focused on suffering and afflictions that come to a Christian as a consequence

of one's faith. It is, however, probable that its usage in Jas 5:13 may include troubles or afflictions such as want, poverty, maltreatment, loss, misfortune, and such problems that are not related to physical ill-health since *astheneia* in the next verse (Jas 5:14) clearly addresses that. To persons in such circumstances, James gives counsel that the person should resort to a life of prayer. In fact, prayer is a very significant "basic expression of Christian faith and life" (Brown and Schönweiss 1986:873) and

Stählin indicates, may also mean "weak in faith;" "to doubt or hesitate" (Rom 14:1; 1 Cor 8:9, 11, 12), or to be deficient in dignity or power (2 Cor 11:21; 13:3, 9) (1964:490-493). However, the most common expression for sickness or physical malady in the New Testament is the *astheneia* word group (Moulton 1956:1). The word group occurs about twenty-eight times in the New Testament in reference to sickness; thus, it is my opinion that the idea of physical ill health rather than feeble strength or

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can bring relief and comfort or the grace of God to carry on in the unpleasant experiences of affliction that may affect a believer (see 2 Cor 12:8-10).

The second counsel given by James in this passage is addressed to the "sick" who should initiate an invitation to the church leaders to intervene on the person's behalf (Jas 5:14). The word used for sickness in this passage is the verb form of the noun *astheneia*. Principally, the word has the main idea of weakness and could actually convey the idea of being physically weak such as in strength (Moulton 1956:1). The word, as

weakness of faith is what James is referring to in the passage.

It is also important to observe that the text (Jas 5:14, 15) does not suggest an application of *astheneia* to misfortune or adversity not related to physical ill health. In fact, such adversity or misfortune or trouble had been identified by James (5:13) and he had exhorted that those who are facing such adversity or misfortune should pray without necessarily inviting the church symbolized by the presence of the elders in this passage. The fact that James chooses to identify such adversity with the Greek word *kakopatheo* implies that

he does not have physical illness in mind even though certain ill health can bring sorrow or adversity to the sufferer.

Anoint with Oil

“Anoint” in the New Testament as observed earlier is largely a rendering of three different Greek words. In this text it occurs in the nominative plural of the aorist 1 participle (*aleipsantes*) from the verb *aleiphō*, which means to anoint with oil or with ointment. The word itself occurs about nine times in the New Testament and its usage is literal. The use of oil, obtained from olives (Lev 24:2) for anointing and other purposes was quite significant among the ancient Jews. It was used in the preparation of food (1 Kgs 17:12, 13), as fuel for lamps (Exod 25:6; Matt 25:3, 4), as ointment for treating sores and wounds (Isa 1:6), and for anointing the body (2 Sam 12:20; 14:2). Furthermore, oil placed upon a person being anointed at God’s direction was symbolic of the endowment of the Holy Spirit (1 Sam 10:1, 6; 16:13) through the use of holy anointing oil (Exod 30:22-25).

Oil was also used for the anointing of kings (2 Kgs 9:3; cf. 11:12) and priests (Exod 29:7; 40:15). Thus the significance of oil was very familiar to the Palestinian Christians that James was writing to.

In the secular sphere, oil was also of great significance. According to Burdick, Josephus (Antiq. Xvii, 172 [vi. 5]) reports that Herod the Great, during his

last illness was bathed with oil with the hope of recovery. The Papyri, Philo, Pliny, and the physician Galen all refer to the medicinal efficacy of oil. In fact Galen described it as “the best of all for paralysis” (Burdick 1981:204). Thus the prescription of the practice of anointing in James with oil (Jas 5:14, 15) was in conformity with the general practices of the apostolic church and the early centuries of the Christian era. Therefore, James’ exhortation was probably made in the contemporary context of the belief in the efficacy of oil for healing (Bronette 1986:119-121).

But of what significance is this prescription to anoint the sick with oil? Various hermeneutical suggestions have been proposed for it. For instance, James Ropes suggests that James gave this exhortation for the application of oil for therapeutic purposes in order to counter the habit of Christians “seeking aid from superstitious, often heathenish, incantations and charms” in that era (Ropes 1916:305). Others posit that the passage provides priestly authority to forgive sins and the practice of extreme unction for the dying as a means for the forgiveness of their sins (Ropes 1916:306, 307). It is believed that the sacrament suffices in

the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church; the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;

the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of penance; the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; the preparation for passing over to eternal life. (Anointing the Sick 2004)

However, the early church did not attach any sacramental efficacy to the ceremony of anointing, though it later used *holy oil* as a substitute for pagan magic in the attempt to heal the sick as opposed to the Catholic's application of it as an extreme unction or a last rite of the church for the dying (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 7:540).

pecially as a means of exorcism" (Schlier 1964:230). This idea is undoubtedly influenced by the cultural conviction of that time that sickness was attributed to demonic influence. So in his interpretation of anointing in this passage he posits it has the character of a victorious action in expelling the demons.

Another idea about anointing oil as used in this passage is that it is purely medicinal and literal. This is influenced by the belief that oil was commonly employed as a medication in ancient Palestine (Brunotte 1986:119-121). In ancient thought, it was believed that anointing oil "can penetrate

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Concerning the role of oil for therapeutic purposes in the exhortation of James, some are of the opinion that the prescription of the use of oil for anointing is more symbolic than medicinal and argue that it is probably a symbol of God's protection and blessing on the patient (France 1986:712). Similarly, Ngozi Nwogwugu sees it as "representing the Holy Spirit to take over and heal the person" (Nwogwugu 2003:133). Heinrich Schlier on the other hand sees the practice as "magico-medicinally and es-

deep into the body and impart strength and health" (Gundry 1981:327). Since the anointing oil was seen in a medicinal way, James, according to Richards, may have had this medicinal view in mind which if he were to be addressing the contemporary society would have said "treat with medicine and pray for recovery" (Richards 1985:55). It is further argued that the usage of *aleiphō* in the literal sense as medicinal seems to be the more correct interpretation because the word, in its occurrences in

the New Testament, is quite literal (Ropes 1916:308).

However, this position is challenged in the sense that although the medicinal use of oil was common knowledge in the ancient world, it is hardly true that it was used as a cure for all kinds of ailments which is suggested in the case in James. Thus, the function of oil here may be more than its acclaimed medicinal properties (Easton 1985:70-71). Finally, in our review of the positions on the significance of the olive oil in this passage, Herbert Kiesler argues that the oil is not

over him . . . and the prayer of faith shall save the sick.” The anointing occurs in the participle and in the midst of the act of prayer rendering it a subsidiary act. Therefore I conclude from the preceding discussion that it seems the prescription to anoint with oil in James is a counsel to trust in the healing power of God, which the elders of the church invite through prayer, and which God elects to accomplish through the agency of the Holy Spirit symbolized by the oil. The potency for healing is therefore not in the oil but in

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used as medicine, but in the context is symbolic. In his words

it is noteworthy that anointing in Scripture is performed when someone is set apart for special service. The oil is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the application of oil to the sick is a symbolic act whereby the sick person is set apart to be ministered [to] by the Holy Spirit. (Kiesler 2008)

A careful study of the passage (Jas 5:14, 15) indicates that the main verb of this passage is prayer and thus prayer is the primary method of healing. This seems to be indicated in the expression, “Let them pray

the faith exercised in the power of God through prayer.

Save

The last word for consideration is *sōsei*, which is the future indicative of the verb *sōzō*. This word group in the New Testament has at least four principal meanings (see Brown 1986:205-216). It could either refer to (1) being saved from physical danger (Matt 27:39; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:39; John 12:27; Acts 27:20, 31, 34); (2) healing from physical affliction (Matt 9:22; cf. Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48); (3) eschatological salvation (Matt 16:25; cf. Mark

8:35; Luke 9:24; cf. John 12:25); or (4) the saving act of God (1 Cor 1:18; Eph 2:8). But in the context of its usage by James, the word is used in reference to physical healing and deliverance from the final judgment. In this case it implies that the restoration to health is not just physical but also spiritual.

Synopsis and Evaluation of Contemporary Anointing Practices in African Christianity

The understanding and practice of anointing in Africa, with special reference to Nigeria, may be broadly viewed in the perspective of two influential religious leaders whose teachings and practices of anointing largely define the practice in Nigeria. These religious leaders are Enoch A. Adoboye and David O. Oyedepo of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Living Faith Chapel respectively.

In the teaching of Adeboye, anointing is described as *heaven's electricity* working through a material channel capable of regulating the anointing (Adeboye 2003:5, 6). Normally, church members desirous of appropriating the power in an anointing as delivered through Adeboye are required to submit containers of olive oil, labeled with the owner's identity, to the office of Adeboye, who it is believed, has the exclusive spiritual mandate to pray over the oil. Such olive oil containers are then handed back to the owners.

Sometimes, the congregation may be requested to lift up their olive oil containers during the monthly Holy Ghost service for blessing by Adeboye. Adeboye has employed a strange procedure in delivering his blessings of the anointing. Describing this procedure, Asonzeh Franklin-Kennedy Ukah writes:

In a dramatic demonstration of the nature and uses of anointing, Adeboye recently declared that God instructed him to wear three shirts at the same time for an undisclosed number of days and nights so that some of his own anointing would be transferred onto the shirts. God further directed him that on the first night of wearing these shirts, he should remove one of them, fold it in a particular way, place it in a basin, and fill the basin with oil. The oil will be the transmitting medium of the anointing in the shirt to everyone in the congregation who comes in contact with it. (Ukah 2003:213)

Upon completing this ritual, Adeboye admonished his congregation thus:

When you touch the oil, you will touch your head, you will touch your mouth and then you will rub the remainder on the palm of your hand. The one on your head is going to take care of every yoke in your body. The one in your mouth is going to ensure that the prayers you pray tonight will all be answered. And the one on your hand is going to ensure the beginning of your prosperity. (Ukah 2003:213)

In Enoch Adeboye's church, anointing with oil serves several purposes which include:

1. Healing for physical ailments.
2. Protection for assets such as bags, cars, electronics, and other household items from theft or manipulative forces.
3. Protection from evil spirits and powers.
4. Power to attract good fortune (Ukah 2003:213).

This anointing pattern has become a dominant theme in the church's teachings and practices and can be witnessed during services such as the monthly Holy Ghost Night Service which is held on the first Friday of every month.

healing "AIDS, diabetes, cancer, diseases and sickness of all kinds! Also healing of businesses, homes, etc." (Oyedepo 1996:71, 103-156). The anointing oil could be applied externally or ingested to perform the function intended after it has been prayed over by Oyedepo.

It is also interesting to note the public notices for upcoming anointing services as reported in the electronic media in Nigeria by various churches that schedule monthly anointing services or hold special services for those persons seeking anointing for various purposes.

Oyedepo teaches that the olive oil transforms from "a chemical" to "mystery" in the hand of the prophet and the Holy Spirit dwells in it.

In the hermeneutics of David O. Oyedepo, the *anointing oil* was the *prescription* which Christ gave to the twelve disciples when he called them and commissioned them in Mark 6:7 (Oyedepo 1996:67). Oyedepo teaches that the olive oil transforms from "a chemical" to "mystery" in the hand of the prophet and the Holy Spirit dwells in it and the oil serves as a fan and a fire to do the work of healing on the anointed person (Oyedepo 1996:74-83).

In the practice of Oyedepo, the anointing oil is capable of

Sometimes people are required to attend such anointing services with bottles of oil, which the presiding priest prays over to give them power. There are instances where beneficiaries of such anointing services are encouraged to drink the anointing oil with the belief that internal ailments or certain spirits could be expelled. Also, people are encouraged to smear the *blessed oil* around their surroundings to avert danger or scare demonic spirits away. Those seeking traveling visas and employment and other undisclosed favors are also

anointed and even counseled to apply olive oil on their application papers.

It appears that there are three types of anointing with oil in Africa. These include (1) anointing for sickness, (2) anointing for breakthroughs, and (3) anointing of material possessions. The next section of this article will evaluate each of these types of anointing.

Evaluating the Types of Anointing with Oil in Nigeria

As mentioned above, anointing services and anointing oil is not only used for the purpose of ill health but for other purposes. In this section, the various types of anointing with oil in Nigeria will be evaluated from the perspective of the biblical examples.

Anointing for Healing

One principal usage of anointing with oil in Nigeria is for the purpose of healing. There does not seem to be any restrictions on the nature of ailments as given in the counsel of James (Jas 5:14, 15). The question is asked, "Is anyone sick?" Such *astheneia* (sickness) is a serious physical problem such as a crippling or debilitating sickness. It may also include even milder ill health that seem challenging to a person. But the word would not allow for every little ailment to warrant anointing. Furthermore, it is appropriate to note that the Scripture does not place an emphasis on the oil as the means of

healing nor does it warrant a belief in a kind of "transubstantiation of the olive oil" as suggested by Oyedepo. Rather, the healing potency is the power of God linked to the sick person through prayer as the sick person turns to God first—not just at the last moment—who may choose to heal through the process.

Anointing for Breakthroughs

Practitioners using anointing for other things apart from bodily sickness utilize anointing for finding a job, for business success, for help with examinations, for finding a life partner, and for other "forms of success or breakthroughs." There is also a case of people anointing fruit after which they eat the fruit, which will in turn give them their desired miracle, like being able to become pregnant or other forms of miracles and cures (Olukoya 2001:35). In support of these kinds of practices, the proponents teach that James' exhortation permits anything that does not function well to be considered as sickness and therefore it can be healed through an anointing.

This hermeneutical application of James' injunction is aptly captured by Fred Ado.

Sickness is not just physical, if you are in debt right now and it is difficult to make ends meet, you are financially sick. If every effort to get married or keep a peaceful marriage has failed you are maritally sick. If you have written an examination many times and still can't pass de-

spite your hard work, you are academically sick. (Ado 2003:33)

But the study of the passage, and in fact any objective study, excludes such frivolous exegesis. The Greek word *astheneia* translated sickness is nowhere used to describe such conditions. Rather, the conditions above may fall under affliction described in the word *kakopatheo* in which case they do not require anointing but prayer and hard work—a virtue that seems to be abused by the emphasis on quick prosperity that the dubious anointing practices encourage.

ken because you have grown so fat.” The context of this passage refers to the yoke of Sennacherib, and how his oppressive nature is overturned by that of Hezekiah who was said to be as mild as oil.

Anointing of Objects

As was observed earlier in this study, personal property like houses, cars, and even electronics are anointed with oil. Many times such an anointing takes place when a new house or car or expensive item is purchased, though at times the anointing

In fact, it is widely believed that even faulty equipment can become functional after the items have been anointed.

In an attempt to authenticate this practice of anointing, reference is often made to the popular expression “the anointing that breaks the yoke” as found in Isa 10:27. “And it shall come to pass on that day that his burden shall be removed from upon your shoulder, and his yoke from upon your neck and the yoke shall be destroyed because of oil.”

The contextual meaning of this passage is far removed from its contemporary application. For instance, the New International Version translates this passage as, “the yoke will be bro-

ken could take place at a later date. To those who utilize this type of anointing for their property or material goods, they do so to guarantee protection from human and demonic forces and to enhance their utility. In fact, it is widely believed that even faulty equipment can become functional after the items have been anointed (Nwogwugwu 2003:129-131).

In those circumstances where malfunctioning items or objects are anointed to recover their initial utility, there is no scriptural evidence in the OT to warrant such practices. Furthermore, in the NT the *kakopatheo* and

astheneia word groups used in the James passage for adversity or physical illness are nowhere used in reference to non-human articles supposedly considered to be troubled, diseased, contaminated, or endangered so as to need to receive the double prescription of prayer and anointing.

Consequently, I believe that the practice of anointing personal objects ostensibly to make them appear extraordinary or place them beyond the reach of supposed demonic spirits amounts to using anointing as a form of magic. I also believe that the protection that God guarantees believers, the blessings he affords them, and the watch care over their homes, possessions, and business interests are not reliant on any act of anointing but in each person's surrender to God and obedience to his express commands (Deut 28:1-14; cf. Mal 3:6-12). It is the life of righteousness, energized by God, which assures his glory and mercies in the life of a Christian (see Ps 34:15; Prov 18:10).

Self and Mass Anointing

Another type of anointing that is widely practiced in Nigeria is self and mass anointing. As mentioned above, self anointing is practiced when the olive oil of a devotee is submitted to the religious leader's office or brought to a religious gathering to be "infused with power" by their religious leaders. Such "blessed olive oil" is personally applied to

the ailing body parts or is drunk or is applied on another person. There have also been situations in charismatic circles where whole groups are anointed when the religious leader, supposedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit, splatters olive oil on the congregation or the crowd.

But even a casual reading of the James passage presents a totally different view for the procedure of anointing. There are two prescriptions: first, the ill person is to take the initiative—either personally or suggested by the elders—to call on the elders of the church. If the sick person is too ill to do this, family members and close associates may do this as was the practice in some of Jesus' miracles where friends or family acted on behalf of the sick (see Mark 2:1-5; 5:21-23). This first step suggests that the anointing is a private event—in the presence of the elders (church leaders) and the sick person and the family or associates.

The elders are to do two things upon arrival: (1) they are to pray over the sick person and (2) they are to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord. Commenting on the benefit of this procedure as opposed to unsolicited or mass anointing, Kiesler states:

First, for the prayer of the elders to be effective the ill person needs to examine his own life for any known sin and then confess it to the Lord. As a matter of fact, the forgiveness of sins referred to in verse 15b seems to presuppose repentance and forgive-

ness for sins committed. . . . Therefore confession of sin was necessary if prayer for the sick was to be effective. The sick person was not only to make confession to the elders but also to one another, that is, probably to those they have wronged. In the light of verse 15b the forgiveness of sins seems to imply that the healing process can best be promoted as the sick person examines his life for any known sin and humbly confesses it to God (cf. Psalms 66:18; 139:23, 24; Proverbs 28:13). (Kiesler 2008)

Kiesler further opines:

When a person calls for the elders to come he is to realize that such a call must not be a whim. He should earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to

one's desire for an anointing service should be initiated by the Holy Spirit who alone is able to give proper guidance and assistance in this matter rather than by a public appeal. (Kiesler 2008)

Religion, Culture, and Anointing in African Society

In my view, it seems the advocates of the practice of anointing as prevalent in Africa and especially in Nigeria, may be contingent on two principles—religious and cultural. In the Old Testament the anointing of objects was limited to the desecularization principle and

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give clear direction in this matter that God's will be done. This could mean that the service may not have a happy ending. In fact, trauma or death may follow. For example, even if the sick person's condition should take a negative turn he may then rest assured that God's will is being done. On the other hand, if the service is being conducted in a charismatic manner, not paying careful attention to the person's spiritual preparation [it] could have serious consequences. What would happen if the patient's desired restoration failed to occur? What effect would this have upon the person's relationship with God? In the light of this consideration

was applicable specifically to the tabernacle, the altar, the vessels used in the sanctuary, and the ark. No personal items such as horses, chariots, houses, vineyards, herds of sheep, goats, cattle, or anything else was ever mentioned as being anointed.

A second factor that may be responsible for the current practice in Nigeria of anointing objects and even the anointing for breakthroughs may be traced to the African Religions and cultural motif of libation and the application of certain mixtures and potions on persons

and objects for security, favor, and even healing. Normally, in a traditional African society, when a person is to embark on an important journey or undertake a significant venture such as a marriage, the setting up of a business, acquiring important items such as a vehicle, a house, real estate, or when the person is going through a crisis, an elder or the religious head of the family or his designee or a priest is invited to perform certain rituals which involves libation. In this religious ritual, a local wine or palm oil is used to invoke the blessings and protection of the gods and to insure healing in the event of ill health or to scare away the malevolent spirits that are believed to be responsible for misfortune. The climax of this event is the application of the substance on the head or body of the person or objects. Sometimes it is believed that the aroma of the mixture or substance used for the ritual is what scares away the malevolent spirits.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has shown that the biblical motif of anointing with oil for healing is a very popular practice in African Christianity. But a look at the practice of anointing in certain circles of the Nigerian Christian population as reflected above portrays gross perversion. It is also absurd theologically to see anointing with oil as a magic fix that makes everything possible. If biblical anointing is seen as

the invocation of the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to work in the life of a believer, it is curious to assume that the Holy Spirit can be so abused to be invoked into a car, a house, electronic equipment, fruit, placenta, application letters, handkerchiefs, real estate, etc., all in the name of religion. Further, it is also bizarre to emphasize that anointing oil is a remedy for all kinds of diseases. I also believe that the use of anointing oil does not prohibit the use of medication; and even at that the emphasis is to be placed on the prayer of faith as James suggests (Jas 5:13-16) and also the absolute will of God for such cases. Whether one uses anointing and medication or only medication, or only anointing, faith should still be emphasized. It is the prayer of faith that saves the sick, for restoration to health includes both physical and spiritual or may involve only physical or spiritual healing.

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