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Socio-Missiological Significance of Witchcraft Belief and Practice in Africa

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Abstract

The fact remains that most Africans, especially Nigerians living in urban centres or outside their immediate villages, dread going to their home towns for fear of being bewitched. This study, "Socio-Missiological Significance of Witchcraft Belief and Practice in Africa" discusses in details the nature, and activities of witches and wizards and reveals, firstly, that the Western explanation of this phenomenon is diametrically opposed to the African one; secondly, witchcraft accusation is a safety valve or mechanism of releasing tension inherent in the social system of social relationship; thirdly, the concept of witchcraft is not unique to African communities;

activities of witchcraft are noticeable in the West. The study further examines the characteristics and categories of witchcraft, mode of initiation, modus operandi and measures of protection against the activities of witches and concludes that witches, wherever they exist, are anti-thesis of proper behaviour. Hence, the phenomenal increase in the emergence of healing homes, prayer ministries and Neo-Pentecostal Churches, as we witness in the country today.

Key words: Witchcraft; Neo-Pentecostal; Initiation; Healing Homes; Prayer Ministries

Introduction

Witchcraft is an aspect of African Indigenous Religion. In most African societies possessors of this power are the most feared. That most Africans dread to go to their home towns for fear of being bewitched, suggests that the belief and practice of witchcraft is alive and well, despite modernity and social change. It is on this premise that some African Instituted Churches (AICs), Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal Churches and Charismatic organize prayer revivals and deliverance meetings to counter the effect of witches and occult power. This paper, therefore, x-rays how the belief in witchcraft articulates with the churches in Nigeria in the formation of African Christianity.

The Concept of Witchcraft

Etymologically, the word "witch" is from the Anglo Saxon "*witan*" which means to know. And "craft" means skill; witchcraft could be said to mean the skill/craft of the wise (Ilega, 2001, p. 4). Olusakin (2013, p.165) asserts that a satisfactory and an all-embracing definition of witchcraft are difficult to arrive at. This is because of its relationship with sorcery. Some societies and scholars do not see any difference between the two, but to some, the two have areas of divergence. Mbiti in Olusakin (2013) does not see any difference between the two. This may be because; the old English word "*wicca*" from which the term "witch" was derived means a person who practices magic. Also, both witches and sorcerers tend towards the same end; they are workers of evil. The Yoruba, however, though recognize the difference between the two; but still group them together with all evildoers. Both are given the general name *aye* (the world). The world in this context is the concentration of the powers of evil in the world (Idowu, 1976). Parrinder (1954, p. 123), however, records that even the societies that see the two as one, still believe they have areas of divergence. For Alana (2002:209), the two are not the same. The one who practices witchcraft (a witch) is called *aje* among the Yoruba, while a sorcerer is *Oso* or *Ologun Ika* (the one with wicked charms).

Discussions on this religious phenomenon are polarized within the framework of western and African scholarship. The Western explanation of this

phenomenon is diametrically opposed to the African one. The former presents a distorted and disoriented view of the reality of witchcraft in Africa. This is not unrelated to Western prejudice and bias to African cultural and religious practices; African belief in the reality of witchcraft is relegated to the background. However, there are scholars of African hue who have attempted to place this all important phenomenon in a proper perspective.

Pritchard (1937) asserts that witches cannot exist. He sees witchcraft as an imaginary offence because it is impossible: a witch cannot do what he is supposed to do and has no real existence. He further explains that those acquainted with the life of the African people will realize that there is no end to possible misfortune in routine tasks and leisure hours alike, arising not only from miscalculations, incompetence and laziness, but also from causes over which the African, with his meager scientific knowledge, has no control. The Africans, according to him, attributes all misfortunes to witchcraft. Field (1949) in Parrinder (1949) adds that there is no palpable apparatus connected with witchcraft: no rites, ceremonies incantations or invocations that the witch has to perform. It is a simple projection from the mind, and that the confession of witches that they have eaten people, sharing different parts of the person, all sound like secret orgies of simple cannibalism, but it is not. She further postulates that witches suffer from obsessions; that they have power to harm others by thinking harm.

Anne Marie (1968: 243) adds that witches utter no spells and possesses no medicine. These scholars were products of Enlightenment and evolutionary conception of witchcraft which misinterpreted the belief in witchcraft in Africa an evidence of primitive, mythic and pre-logical form of thought that will fade away as African culture evolved or become "civilized". Another Eurocentric dismissal of the reality of witchcraft belief is that of Parrinder (1963, p. 16) when he posits that, "The belief in witchcraft is a tragic error, a false explanation of the ills of life and one that has only led to cruel and baseless oppression in which countless people have suffered". Most recently, in the 20th century, Donoran (1992) states that witchcraft is a convulsing evil and that most people suffer from psychological defeat of which they attribute to witchcraft attack. This assertion reduces the belief in witchcraft in Africa as a mere psychological matter.

From a theological perspective, William West in Parrinder (1963, p.13) defines witches as people who had made a league with the devil not only to cause tempest and ruin crops, but to fly to distant places to spend all night in devilish lusts. In this same vein Middleton and Winter (1963, p. 273) refer to witches as personification of evil and as a group of an innate wicked people who do harm. In this context, witches are portrayed as anti-social and immoral. Offiong (1991:59) describes witchcraft as the natural exercise of evil by persons who are possessed with

malevolent innate powers which can be employed to hurt people. He states that a witch has a physical substance innate to the body wherein lies their mystical power, which according to Harwood (1970, p. 69) is morally neutral. Among the Azande, this psychic organ or substance is said to be oval in shape located somewhere between the breast bone or the sternum, the intestine or liver. Offiong (1991) claims that the substance is reddish, blackish and hairy. Witches are said to have hairy faces, blood shot eyes and bearded. Talbot (1968:109) wrote that, "The Ijaws believe that witches are lame, deformed, haggard and impoverished persons, especially women". This witchcraft substance among the Ibibio is a special concoction made up of red, white and black thread, along with needles and other ingredients which a witch swallows (Offiong 1991:83). With the help of this substance witches can turn themselves into any bird or animal they wish such as a cat, a dog, an owl, a frog, a bat, or a spider.

Yet other scholars hold the view that witchcraft acquisition may be hereditary; some may buy it with their money or acquire it through food either knowingly or unknowingly (Ilega 2001, p.210). Those who buy it with their money believe that if they possess same, it will stop their being harassed. Ikenga-Metuh (1999, p.129) states that while some persons are born witches, others acquire it by swallowing or eating a chemical substance which imbues them with the psychic insight or power. Witches live normal social life. It is impossible to know who a witch is. A man's parent, friend, wife or child might be a witch or wizard without his knowing it. Sometimes, the individual witch might not know that he/she is a witch. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, p. 248) opine that witches are predominantly women and that men are the head of the witch guild. Parrinder (1969, p.167) recording about witchcraft among the Nupe says that though men are in their coven, women are always the leaders and that the male witches are not as violent as women. Before now, the craft was common among old women, but now they are also found among children. The ugly, the crippled, children with stunted growth, the sick, barren etc. are often accused of witchcraft; it is believed that their enjoyment and comfort are in their covens (Ilega, 2001, p. 6).

Categories of Witches in Africa

There are two kinds of witches. They are the black witch who is evil and the white witch which is harmless. Although the later are truly witches, they do not kill and do not participate in the witches' cannibalism (Offiong 1991, p. 86). White witches known as (*aje funfui*) according to Yoruba tradition, are humane and more powerful than the black ones. This is so because they follow justice and light, which Yoruba believe, will always prevail over evil. It is this type of witches that normally raise good families. Their husbands and children always succeed in their endeavour. They also use their powers for the good of their society and to neutralize the powers

of black witches. They are called *aje olomo* witches who raise children or who are mothers. They are always at loggerheads with black witches. Ilega (2001, p. 7) posits that among the Urhobo white witches are found among many medicine men, witch-doctors and some women who are believed to have raised successful families. Unlike the Urhobo where white and black witches hold meetings together, Olusakin (2013) states that the Yoruba believe that the two do not have communication. It is normally said that light and darkness do not meet. The bird of white witches is white in colour.

Although white witches could be violent if offended or not treated well, they can be good sometimes if well treated. Olusakin (2013, p. 168) relates the story of a man whose wife was eventually known to be a white witch. It was believed she was responsible for her husband's serious financial problem despite his struggles. Before then, he was a successful man before things turned around. In the course of finding solution to his problem, a diviner told him his wife was the cause of his misfortune. The wife had asked him for some money, but he refused. It was his refusal to give his wife the money that made her to punish the husband. When the wrong was corrected as directed by the diviner, things changed for the man. The point here is that all this while, she has been using her witchcraft power for the benefit of her husband, but when he refused to grant her request, she was angry. Among the Emu in Ukwuaniland, such a white witch transfers the success or good luck of another person to his or her family. It is believed that they blow evil winds against their victims' affairs while attracting their success into the witches' families. Thomas (1973), in a similar vein, classifies witchcraft into "cunning folk" that help their clients to triumph over cases and sicknesses and the "malevolent folk" who cause misfortune on their victims. He was apt to state that both categories of witches sometimes do overlap in their activities.

Witchcraft Activities in Africa

According to Olusakin (2013) witches are highly organized in their guild. The leader is always a woman while the executioner is always a man. Apart from the leader, there are other officers and messengers. He reiterates a story of a lady who was said to have been given the assignment to inflict sickness and misfortunes on people's houses on their way back from a meeting. Promotion is based on merit and the most important criteria are the number of relations donated for feasting and the number converted into the guild. Although witches operate in guilds, they sometimes operate singly (Awolau & Dopamu 1979, p. 248). Parrinder (1958) explains that witches are believed to walk about naked at night, and hold orgiastic dance. Their meetings are spiritually attended only by souls or spirits. Their souls leave their sleeping bodies at home on their beds. Among the Yoruba, when a woman sleeps with one leg on the wall and the other on the bed or mat (as the case may be) she is believed to have gone to a witchcraft meeting. In their meetings they

discuss their families' and societies' affairs and whose turn it is to donate blood or human parts. Witches are believed to donate only members of their families. If there is need for them to donate somebody from another family they would consult the witches in such families. They may also decide whether a government project in their communities should be allowed to be executed or not. There are confessions in certain African communities where witches are said to have terminated community's development programmes such as roads, schools and electricity.

Witches are said to fly either on the back of animals or birds they choose to turn into to their meeting venues. Sometimes they ride on human beings. If by chance the metamorphosed witch is killed while in the bird or animal form, the real body of the witch dies at the same time. The Yoruba connect birds with witches to the extent that when birds cry at night, the conclusion is that the birds belong to witches who are going to their meeting. Witches hold their nocturnal meetings on tree tops in the forest and secluded places. Witches also meet in places like river banks, on top or at the feet of trees like Iroko, Bamboo, silk, cotton, market square, mountain, hill, in between plantain or banana trees and crossroads. They paddle to their covens by using agents like broomsticks and empty shell of groundnuts. Witches can fly to anywhere in the world within a very short period of time. They use groundnut shells to travel across water bodies such as oceans, sea, rivers, lakes, lagoon, etc. They fly on broomsticks. Among the Yoruba, it is believed that very powerful witches can fly during the day. The Yoruba also believe that they walk upside down in the spirit. They meet at covens and dance naked around people's houses, they are said to have more powers at night. The Ijaws believe that if a person meets or sees a witch at night dancing naked or performing her psychic act and the person calls the witch by her name or first throw sand on the witch before she recognizes the person, the witch becomes powerless and is unable to harm the person.

It is the psychic power (Alana 2002, p. 211) that enables a witch to leave her body while she is asleep to inflict injuries on their victims. Witches sometime use faces familiar to their victims to harm them. Witches attack their victims in many forms. They may carry the soul of their victims away to their covens to be devoured at their nocturnal meetings and symbolic cannibalistic feasts. The victim wakes up weak, falls sick and eventually dies after his or her soul has been eaten. The psychic power of witchcraft enables a witch to remove the soul of her victim and transform them into goat, sheep or cow, which they later slaughter on a stipulated date and eat. The staple diet of witches is the blood and souls of their victims, which they suck and eat. After sharing their victim's body, everyone goes home with his or her share. This is the reason why if an old woman in some Yoruba communities roasts meat for a long time and does not eat it or allows any body to touch it, the people believe it is her own share of their victim in the coven. The reason why some of them keep

such meat cannot be ascertained, but the confession of a woman some years ago as Olusakin (2013, p.171) suggests gives a clue. According to Olusakin (2013) she did not donate anybody when it was her turn. But when she was threatened by the guild, she gathered all the shares she had been collecting and returned them. Unfortunately, one thumb was nowhere to be found. What she did was to cut off one of her thumbs to add to the shares, and physically one of her thumbs was not there. It is believed that when meat shared has not been eaten, it could be withdrawn through a herbalist's plea. The operational act of witches is soul to soul. They attack the ethereal bodies of their victims, who pines and dies.

The mode of operation of witches varies, ranging from physical contact, invisible charming with eyes to the pronouncement of curses. Witches possess black magic and are credited with valiant powers. Besides sucking their victims' blood, they are able also to extract the sap and juice of crops, thereby causing crops to wither and die (Summer 1973, p. 2). Witches soothe their victims to sleep by calling their names, fall on them and try to stop their breath with their (witches') crushing weight. Witches may cause madness on their victims by spitting into the victim's eyes symbolically. They also cause barrenness to women by tying up the victims' wombs. Their activities may lead to hard and delayed labour. Lehmann and Myers (1985, p. 205) opine that in every preliterate society, a vast number of daily crises are attributed to witchcraft. Witches donate close relatives and children to the guild for their cannibalistic feasts. The victim dies when they eat his or her heart or liver. It is against this backdrop that Comaroff & Comaroff (1998, p. 91) assert that witchcraft is a social phenomenon and that its efficacy hold by direct function of the intimacy between the victim and the witch, the corollary being that, the greater the social distance and contact the more decline the effects, a sort of out of sight, out of mind.

It is also believed that one can be a witch and not be conscious of it. Such a one is among those who dream but not remember when they wake up (Olusakin 2013, p. 171). Psychologists may give explanation to such, but the Africans believe that the initiation into witchcraft that has prevented him or her to forget his or her dreams so that he or she will not remember the places he or she visited in the dream and the wicked things he or she joined witches to do in his or her waking state. There are some people that witches would want to initiate but will refuse. They will make life unbearable for such persons. Generally, it is often suggested that if in the dream somebody sees herself fly with wings, hold meeting with strange faces, where meat is shared, eat or make love, the person is either a witch or stand the risk of being initiated or attacked by witches (Olusakin 2013, p. 172). It is also believed that when a person feels pressed down in the night or wakes up and sees marks like razor blade cut all over his or her body, make love and eat in the dream, it is witches who come to either deposit misfortune or steal good virtues from the person. In

some African societies, it is believed that there are some persons who cannot be initiated nor harmed by witches. This is because the heads (*Ori or Chi*) of such persons are strong: they are divinely fortified.

The activities of a witch can be check-mated if the witch attempts to kill somebody with “a strong head” and it backfires. The people believe that there are some individuals whose blood is bitter and when witches taste it, they will begin to confess. It is believed among the Urhobo that a confessed witch will become powerless since she will not be welcome again in the guild, even if she wants to (Ilega, 2001, p. 11). Another means of check-mating the activities of witches is the interference of the Supreme Being and the ancestors. Among the Urhobo cutlass can be buried at the entrance of a house to ward off witchcraft activities (Ilega, 2001, p. 9). *Egungun* and *Oro among the Yoruba* are used to detect witches (Alana 2002, p. 212). There are organized movements in various parts of African society whose duties were to detect and eradicate witches. Examples include the use of Eni Lake in Isoko, Ugo cult, Enuwha and Igbe cult. Witches wherever they exist are anti-thesis of proper behaviour; they are anti-social act and are uncontrollable. However, that they have no power over those who have no faith in them and do not fear them sounds absurd; even those who refuse to acknowledge their existence are still affected directly or indirectly. Omoyajowo (1974) is apt to remark that witchcraft belief and practices are a great challenge to the Christian faith in Africa.

The Socio-Missiological Significance of Witches

Lehmann and Myers (1985) see witchcraft as a staggering reality in Africa. According to them

Witchcraft serves so many functions, that it is hard to believe its importance can be whittled away by the difficulties involved in trying to prove its existence and in distinguishing it from sorcery (p.205).

In the same vein, Idowu (1973) asserts that, “One important human spirit with which Africa had to reckon with very painfully, very disastrously is the spirit of the witches” (p. 175). In many African societies the existence of witchcraft is inevitable and ubiquitous. Olusakin’s (2013, p. 169), in his study on witchcraft and sorcery, remarks that the reactions of the people to the question of witchcraft show that witchcraft is real to them. Some do not even like to mention the word “witch” or talk about it in the night for fear of being heard and later attacked by them. No wonder Idowu (1976) asserts that it is idle talk asking the question of whether witches exist or not, because it is an urgent reality. Awolalu in Ilega (2001, p. 1) also argues that there is no belief more profoundly ingrained in the Africans generally than that of the existence of witchcraft. Omoyajowo (2006, p.1) touts the same line when he

asserts that witchcraft belief is real not only in Africa but even in Europe. These assertions show that witchcraft is real in every society. Even the Bible recognizes their existence and says they should not be allowed to live (Ex. 22:18). Witches operate in the secret. In some African societies the presence of a wizard as a figure of authority in the family or society have the power of mysteriously wading off the malignancy and the danger that are sent from witches of other families or communities, thereby becoming a source of protection to the family or society.

From the sociological perspective, Marwick in Aula (1975) asserts that among the Ijawa people witchcraft is an index of social control and is a vice supporting competition which tends to occur between persons in a social relation if their native statuses are not ascribed by the social structure. And that this competition will develop into tension and conflict if the desire for the object or status competed for is intense and or if the social structure does not eliminate or regulate the competition this tension will project into belief in witchcraft. He further states that witchcraft tends to sustain the social systems of values and thereby making the social system cogent. Among the Nupe, witchcraft accusation or practice is a safety valve or mechanism of releasing tension inherent in the social system of social relationship (Aula 1975:261). The above scholars are speaking from the characteristic bias of western view point.

Klukhohn and Leighton (1962) evaluating witchcraft belief among the Navaho postulates that the belief have more positive effects than negative effects in respect to economic, social control and the psychological state of the people. They argue that witchcraft act helps to balance the economic differences or imbalance in the society. This is exemplified in the Navaho belief that the rich man gains his riches through secret supernatural techniques, which they ascribed to witchcraft. In such circumstances, the suspected person redistributes his wealth among relatives and friends to quell the suspicion. Furthermore, witchcraft belief helps to reinforce social values among the Navaho. There is a common belief among the people that the uncared for, particularly the elderly ones in the family and society, would turn into a witch and bewitch their people. This belief demanded that the Navaho treat the aged ones with proper care. Hence, anxiety and neglect are accommodated through the belief in witchcraft.

From the socio-economic point of view, Olusakin's (2013) study on witchcraft and sorcery would be very instructive. He explains that the economy of many African societies has experienced a serious retrogression due to the operation of witches. These anti-social agents are known to have caused business failure. There are cases of witches who confessed to have killed rich young persons in their communities. Many of these were philanthropists, who would have helped some sons and daughter of their towns or villages and thereby bettered the lot of such. In some

societies witches have confessed to have done everything possible to make sure progress is far away from their communities. Closely related to this is the fact that some rich sons and daughters of some African societies abroad have refused to come home and develop their towns for fear of being killed by witches. Instead of developing their towns, they invest in other towns, where they feel they are safe.

Another effect is in the area of false accusations. No doubt, many have been falsely accused of witchcraft. In the past many innocent people have died for what they never did. Many women who suffered a lot to raise their children have been left to suffer until death by such children due to false accusation. Many children have testified seeing their mothers in the dream with cutlass wanting to kill them, and because of this, have refused to help their mothers or give them money for fear of such mothers (now seen as witch) using the money as a point of contact to attack them. Most of such incidence could be traceable to the activities of prophets and “visioners” in prayer ministries littered like fast food joints in every nook and cranny of African societies. Sometimes the interpretations of these prophets and “visioners” are false and misleading. Women have been seriously discriminated against due to witchcraft belief. If a woman's husband does not succeed in business endeavour, is suffering from a chronic disease or dies, the wife is always the prime suspect whereas, it is not always the case with men when their wives are sick. In a polygamous home, the first or the second woman as the case may be, is always a witch especially if one has children and the other is barren. An aged mother-in-law is also a suspect by her daughter-in-law. In another dimension, especially in polygamous families, witchcraft belief has scattered many homes. Many, who are supposed to be of help to each other in the family, are far away from each other due to the belief in witchcraft.

Consequently, most Africans take measures to protect themselves against their attacks, heal those who have been attacked and to reduce and, if possible, stop their operations. African not yet converted to Christianity use charms, incantations and amulets to render witches powerless or to fortify oneself against their attack. Certain incision could be made on people's body or individuals to ward off evil of witches or other wicked people. For example, among the Yoruba, certain incisions called *Madarikan* about one hundred can be made on a person's head. A certain tree called *Igi obo* is believed to be imbued with powers to render witches useless or make them confess. Witches do not go near such trees. The tree trunk if soaked inside water and given to a witch to drink, is believed to elicit confession. Herbalists and medicine men that are powerful also check the operations of witches and even detect them. Olusakin's (2013) study reports that among the Urhobo, ordinary herbalist cannot toy with them. They can attack even the powerful ones.

When the above traditional means of checking the activities of witches fail, most Africans find solace or seek for the much needed protection from African Institution Churches (AICs). It is against this backdrop that some scholars refer to the AICs as protectionist groups because according to them, adherents of AICs are first and foremost in the movement for protection (Turner 1967; Peel 1966; Sanneh 1983). Indeed, the fear of falling victim to witchcraft and the need for deliverance from witchcraft power are the two strongest motives for most Africans who join AICs. Olumba Olumba Obu (n.d:189), the founder and leader of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Nigeria, clearly assents to this fact when he asserts that, "Many people are rushing into the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star with the intension of being healed of their sicknesses or to have an improved condition of life". One of his members similarly points out why people join the movement:

In the whole Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, the World over, there is no single man who goes there on his own simply because he has love for the church as it is in many other cases of one attaching himself to a church, but must be there after all available measure to free himself from the entanglement and ordeals of persecution of evil spirits had failed. Sometimes he is brought unconscious. Some come because of sickness of wife, husband, brother, sister, child and what have you. And in less than no time all these evil devices get clear (Bassey n.d. pp. 4-5).

Ndiokvvere (1981:279) expresses much the same opinion when he says:

The sense of insecurity is perpetuated in the African milieu by fears of evil spirits, the phenomenon of poisoning...the unlimited anxiety over fruitfulness in marriage....It is the urge to have these problems solved which drives people to the doors of the Aladura prophets (p. 279).

We also agree with Ndiokwere (1981) when he goes on to say that:

If there were no healing missions there would be no meaningful independent churches; if there were no sick people or individuals craving for security, there would be no followers (p. 256).

Omoyajowo (1970) comments rather trenchantly on the same situation:

Africans generally fear the power of witches and the evil spirits, who beset them in their dreams; they worry about their future and want to know what it has in stock for them. In the traditional society, they consult the diviner. Orthodox Christianity repudiated this practice and substituted abstract faith for it. The Aladuras take the problems as genuine and offer solutions in the messages of the Holy Spirit

given through the prophets and blessed water for healing purposes. Consequently, the Christian suddenly finds himself at home in the new faith, and Christianity now has more meaning for him than before, for it takes special concern for his personal life, his existential problems and assures his security in an incomprehensibly hostile universe. This is what has endeared the Cherubim and Seraphim to the hearts of the cross section of the society, irrespective of creed, status or class (p. 134).

In Nigeria today, most Christian would dare to attend a church void of signs and wonders. Kalu (2005, p. 390) has stated that the precursors of Pentecostalism in Africa were indigenous prophetic figures, many of whom were persecuted out of historic mission denominates for pursuing spirituality sometimes perceived by church authority as belonging to the "occult". Many of the nineteenth and early twentieth century revivalist and prophetic campaigns resulted into independent churches when the prophets had left the scene. The prophetic movements were followed by the emergences of the popular spiritual, Aladura, Roho or Zionist Churches known collectively as "African Independent Churches" or "African Instituted Churches". The emphasis of the AICs on healing and other worldviews of mystical causality in etiology and diagnosis are retained in the healing and deliverance sectors of African Pentecostal ministries and churches. They are also considered important for challenging the mission denominations into rethinking their resistance to charismatic renewal. It may seem as though contemporary AICs have been losing members to the newer type of charismatic and New Pentecostal churches mushrooming all over Africa, the spiritual AICs' appeal to an older generation clientele make them still relevant. Some have charismatised in order to sustain the appeal to the youth.

Conclusion

The reality of the belief in and practice of witchcraft in Africa is undebatable. The illusory view of witchcraft as postulated by Western scholars who know little or nothing of African world view is responsible for the non-challant attitude of mission churches to the African need for deliverance from witchcraft powers, and their lack of interest in faith healing during the first fifty years of their emergence in Africa, especially Nigeria. With the advent of African Initiated Churches, and their emphasis on the power of God over witchcraft, the African found relief from the fear of witches. As have been illustrated, most adherents of AICs are first and foremost in the movement for protection of their lives and properties and their beloved ones. These churches mediate faith healing through fasting and prayers and as they cast and bind witches and wizards. The practices of casting and binding of witches and wizards and faith healing is certainly one of the most outstanding features of popular religiosity in the contemporary Nigerian scene. This phenomenon

of binding and casting off witches is quite spectacular. People want wealth and health and to avoid suffering of all sorts, which is, attributed to witches and wizards, hence, the prominence of binding and casting. This is also responsible for the phenomenal increase in the emergence of healing homes, prayer ministries and Neo-Pentecostal Churches, as we witness in the country today.

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