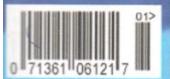
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The Social Challenges of Witchcraft in African Christian Experience

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Abstract

Witchcraft has been a prevailing belief in African cultures and has continually posed problems for the people. The aim of this article is to express the African Christian experience within the scope of the belief in witchcraft thereby illustrating the social issues in this belief system. Epidemic, diseases, natural disasters and widespread political and social destruction are often connected with witches. People exhibiting unusual personal features, extraordinary behaviour or excessive power, in other words people who disturb the balance and harmony of power relations, which are so important in African society, are easily accused of being witches. It is a tragic fact that the procedures to defend society against the evils of witchcraft quite often lead to witch-hunts and killings. Many innocent people are often killed. An alternative disposal for witches is burning. It is recommended in this work that any spiritual church noted for having tendencies for 'smelling out witches' should be scriously sanctioned. It closure may also be recommended because most of the roots of killings originates from the prophesies they give to their clients. These issues should be taken seriously. Religious groups and religious leaders should collaborate with Government agencies to check abuses of the human person.

1. Introduction

At the turn of the millennium it was observed that the centre of gravity of Christianity is shifting from the West to other parts of the world including Africa. In Nigeria the reasons for this shift are varied and complex including the way the people have attempted to deal with their threatening fears, especially witchcraft. Witchcraft has been a prevailing belief in African cultures and has continually posed problems for the Annang people of Nigeria. In his influential book on Bantu philosophy Placide Tempels had fifty years ago already developed the theory that the basic structure of African thought is formed by the idea that the totality of reality consists of the interaction of forces or powers. Tempels views have been criticised by various authors like Dammann² and Mbiti³ as being too generalizing in nature, while others like Brandel⁴ are of the opinion that his theory is helpful in supplying a practical hypothesis in terms of which a variety of phenomena in African culture can be explained. The aim of this article is to express the interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion found in African Christian experience within the scope of witchdemology as interaction of forces. This work is a case-study of an African tribe: the Annang people of southeast Nigeria.

TEMPELS, P. Bantu Philosophy (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959) 43

² DAMMANN, E 1963. Die Religionen Afrikas (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1963) 54

³ MBITI J S, African Religions And Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1970)10

BRANDEL-SYRIER M, Black Women In Search For God (London: Lupperworth, 1962)

2. Worldview

African culture and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have long been acknowledged as the womb out of which African Christian theology must be born. From various fronts, African Christians insist that the Church in Africa and its theology must bear an African stamp. Given the vastness and diversity of the continent's peoples, this is justifiable. Although African Christians have not allowed this concerns to dampen their spirits. African theologians have generally been wary of generalisations about 'Africa' and African culture'. Special efforts have been made to speak in contextualised and specified terms, such as 'the Akan Doctrine of God', "Concept of Sacraments in Boki", 'the image of God among the Sotho-Tswana', 'Oludumare', and 'West African Christianity'. In her book on African women and patriarchy, Oduyoye⁵ is at pains to demonstrate that the primary context of her reflections is the Akan of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria. Even Mbiti, who has been accused of making generalisations and reductions about 'Africa', is careful to contextualise his research and findings in terms of tribes, at least in his work *Concepts of God in Africa*. Although generalisations are still made, but mostly on the basis of well-focused contexts of research. In that way, therefore, serious attempts have been in what follows to limit our discourse with special emphasis on the Annang people of Nigeria.

3. Challenges of Witchcraft

Confronted with new epidemic diseases, natural disasters and widespread political and social destruction, generally Annang people seek new religious concepts to regain moral control over their lives. Witches and sorcerers have powers that come from their aberrant personalities; they perform antisocial magic. In their work, witches employ the assistance of animals or humanoids as servants or messengers. Although most Annang communities, some witches are males, most are females. They meet around fires to promote their interests and eat the revived body of someone they have destroyed by supernatural powers.

This phenomenon, which is of course by far not only found in Annang, can in the African context be related to the African life and world view according to which the totality of reality consists of the interaction of forces and powers. In terms of this world view, witchcraft can be described as the activities of witches and sorcerers who are people with the mystical ability to manipulate the forces of life to do harm to human beings or their property ⁷

One should distinguish between witches and sorcerers. Witches who, in African awareness, are mainly but not exclusively older women, are credited with the ability to free their spirits from their bodies at night and in this disembodied form harm people by magic procedures of various kinds, either by directly causing illness or death or by using animal familiars like baboons, owls, snakes or cats to effect their evil purposes. These evil deeds are usually not performed by solitary individuals but by groups of evil spirits acting in unison.

Two remarkable things about these witches are that they are often not aware of what they are doing, on the one hand, and that they do not use medicines or other magic objects like charms or amulets, on the other. The usage of these kinds of objects is characteristic of the work of sorcerers who are mostly men performing their evil deeds during daytime with deliberate intent. This implies that a

ODUYOYE M, A. African Culture And The Gospel. Inculturation From An African Woman's Perspective. In: M.A. ODUYOYE & H.M. VROOM (eds.), One gospel many cultures. Case studies and reflections on cross-cultural theology (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2003) 39-62.

THOMAS, S, 'Towards the History of African Christianity' in SPEAR & KIMAMBO, eds., East African Expressions of Christianity. (Oxford, James Currey, 1999) 3

VAN BEEK, W E A 1994. The innocent sorcerer: coping with evil in two African societies (Kapsiki and Dogon). In: T. Blakely, W. van Beek & W. Thomson (eds.), *Religion in Africa: experience and expression* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994) 197-228.

sorcerer would be able to stop being a sorcerer while witches who are under control of their evil spirits cannot do so of their own accord.

Characteristic of witches are that they are usually not publicly known. This complies with the general insight in the science of religion that the "evilness of evil cannot be identified". The implication of this is that quite often a certain fatalism in connection with witcherast develops in African society. When evil is among you, but you do not know what it is, then nothing can be done about it.⁸

However, this does not mean that no attempts are made to identify and climinate witches. The result is that people exhibiting unusual personal features, extraordinary behaviour or excessive power, in other words people who disturb the balance and harmony of power relations, which are so important in African society, are easily accused of being witches. Annang society develops various agents whose task it is to defend society against witcheraft. These are known as herbalists, witchdoctors and diviners. Natural and supernatural means are employed to counter witches and sorcerers. White magic is used to conquer black magic. It is a tragic fact that the procedures to defend society against the evils of witcheraft quite often lead to witch-hunts and witch-killings. In this way people who are presumed to be the friends of society are "the very people responsible for maintaining a vicious circle of revenge and counter-revenge."

Individuals and communities within Annang use various means to protect themselves from the dangers of witches. Individuals may wear amulets, take medicines, or rub medicines into incisions in their skin. In some areas, a diviner can "smell out" a witch. If the tribe accuses someone of witcheraft, the person is sometimes forced to drink poison. If the poison is vomited, the person is innocent; if it is retained, the person is guilty and dies. An alternative disposal for witches is burning. In places where the colonial occupiers prohibited punishment for witcheraft, members of tribes often formed antiwitcheraft societies to deal with the problem.¹⁰

Among peoples of Annang, witches and witchcraft cannot be easily expunged. Ghosts are witches that have been refused admission into the village of their ancestors. These souls are condemned to anonymous wanderings in trackless grasslands between forests and cultivated valleys.

4. Witchcraft Emancipation

The positive aspects of 'witchdemonology' are seen in several ways:

It offers its adherents the opportunity to oscillate between the traditional and Christian beliefs and practices. Here people are able to express their fears in witchcraft and other life threatening forces and seek protection from them. For those who think that ancestral spirits are hampering their progress in this modern world, they have the opportunity to be 'exorcised.' Some people see this way of 'deliverance' as cheaper than the expenses incurred in counselling that will be offered in the Western concept.

2 It offers women equal access to places of leadership within the classical Pentecostals, who have refused to ordain women into the pastorate. Women who exhibit some charisma can establish prayer centres.

3 The proliferation of the deliverance ministry has caused Classical Pentecostals and other churches to reconsider their beliefs and practices. The prayer centres are characterised by many reports of miraculous phenomena over against few in the conventional church services. Fourth, many new people, from top government officials to the very low in society, join the Pentecostal churches and other churches through the 'witchdemonology' ministry.

9 Ibid 219

⁸ Ibid 212

Interview with Mr Udosoro Akpan, an eyewitness of the events that occurred at Ikot Inyang, 24th April, 2006

5. Witchcraft Servitude

The positive side of 'witchdemonology' does not, however, preclude a negative assessment of it.' The negative aspects include the following.

- i) Accusations of witchcraft relinquish people from acknowledging the responsibility for their wrongdoing, their sins and their inadequacies, and putting them on someone else, often a poor person, who becomes the enemy of the whole community. Yet Pentecostals claim to support the oppressive and the poor in society. Thus Shorter rightly sees witchcraft accusation as "autosalvation or self-justification."
- ii) Teachings on witchcraft and demons, coupled with testimonies from 'exorcised witches' subject the congregant to pressures quite disproportionate to the phenomena described. Thus people are psychologically led to confess antisocial behaviours and nocturnal issues which baffle their understanding as witchcraft activities. These confessions can attract stigmatisation from other members of society, and thus instead of deliverance and healing leading to liberation, the physical and psychological conditions of such people worsened and in extreme cases lead to death.
- iii) Many of the symptoms taken as witchcraft or spirit possession can be explained away by medical sciences. In such cases repeated deliverance worsen the person's condition.
- iv) The socio-economic factor in Africa causes many people to begin prayer centres just as means of financial support. Since it does not need any training, certificate, or formal recognition from a body of Christians to begin a prayer centre, charlatans and the unemployed who have strong personalities can easily claim spiritual encounters and begin centres with a profit motive in mind. Linked with this socio-economic factor are the deliverance teachings at the centres, which consider health and wholeness as the result of obedience to biblical principles on blessing, at the neglect of biblical principle of suffering (e.g. 2 Cor. 12:7-12; Lk. 13:1-5; Rom. 8: 35-39). This causes people to strive after modern riches at their own peril.
- v) By the demonisation of all other faiths apart of the Evangelical/Pentecostal, in this pluralistic world, neo-Pentecostals deter healthy ecumenism and often cause unnecessary tension between Pentecostalism and other faiths.
- vi) The process of deliverance which often involves breaking links with families eventually divides the traditional extended family system and promotes individualism.
- vii) The theology of 'witchdemonology' reinforces the 'primitive animistic belief system that keep communities in servile fearfulness and hampers progress. During my fieldwork there were many instances where people had stopped building houses in their hometowns for fear of witches.
- viii) The uncritical approach adopted by both proponents and adherents of this ministry encourage dubious people to deceive others with their exaggerated or fabricated testimonies. People who attempt to challenge some of the testimonies are branded as sceptics. Beside, it is assumed that theologians cannot understand 'spiritual things,' and by implication cannot teach such people. The major problem with this is that such exorcists can lead genuine people to doom, just like the massacre of over 780 members of the Church of the Ten Commandments in Uganda in the year AD 2000 and other cult-inspired deaths elsewhere in the world.

Aside from this, the most serious problem in the suffer not the witch to live episode lie in the many independent churches and Nativistic Religious Movements in Akwa Ibom State have become centres of diagnosing witches. These categories of religious leaders and adherents do not hesitate to quote Exodus 22:18 to support their stance on witches detection and elimination. The untold social problems these bring to the people are too awful for words.

Response to Witchcraft by New Religious Movements

The issue of witchdemonology is dealt with in the modern African theological discussion in various ways. The first approach radically rejects the traditional African reference to the Spirit world while the

second approach attempts to reinterpret the traditional African position so as to provide an intelligible witness to present-day Africans. The first approach then is that of radical rejection. This tendency started developing as a mechanism by which the initial Christian missionaries, especially those influenced by revivalist theology, attempted to distinguish Christianity from traditional African religion. The initial form that this distinction took was the demonisation of traditional African religion.

Missionaries spoke about the devil and the demonic realm as a way of setting Christianity apart from traditional religion. To them Christianity was good, while traditional religion belonged to the devil11

This approach was not restricted to missionary theology, but happens quite often to be characteristic also of some present-day Charismatic churches in various African countries. They also tend to demonise and then exorcise traditional spirit beliefs. It is a development, however, that renders an unexpected result. Reacting from the other extreme, the big emphasis that the Charismatic churches put on the devil creates what can perhaps be called a "cult of devotion to the devil". And in the African context this awakens the need in traditional African circles to re-employ the mystical procedures that they used to protect themselves with in such circumstances. In this manner, these Charismatic churches paradoxically stimulate a response that they originally intended to prevent, while it furthermore stimulates the development of a dualism that is traditionally alien to Christianity in that it devaluates the power of God as it puts the devil's power on a par with that of God.¹²

A third dimension in the rejection of the traditional African spirit beliefs is supplied by allowing modern Western secularism not to explicitly deny these beliefs but to simply ignore them, presupposing that witchcraft related issues are merely developmental problems which could exclusively be solved by processes of educational and economic development¹³. Without a doubt development in these fields are of vital importance, but whether a total neglect of the religious and theological aspects of the problem is conducive to its solution is doubtful. 14

This could suggest that a solution to the persisting scourge of witchcraft related catastrophes in Africa should not exclusively be expected from secular processes like educational and economical development, but that well founded and responsible theological considerations and corresponding pastoral procedures should at least not summarily be discounted 15

In the 1980's, a self-acclaimed messianic prophet, Akpan Ekwong, stunned most part of Akwa Ibom State with his witchcraft eradication movements. His mission was to sanitized the entire society of witches. He soon gathered followers and moved from village to village to eradicate witches from the communities. The suspected witches were forced to confess their evil acts of witcheraft and were often lynched to death. Many lives were lost. He welded enormous power and influence around the entire area. He apparently won the admiration of many people who were willing to attribute every ill to witches. His 'messianic' ministry did not last long. He I met one of his Aid-de Camp, who is still privately helping clients to detect witches. Like Akpan Ekwong, he claims his authority is biblical. He proudly quotes Exodus 22:18: Thou shall not suffer a witch to live16, to justify his reason for continuing in witchcraft eradication movement. He preached from Isaiah 9, 1-3; a text that fits perfectly into the missionary world-view. The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; 17

AKRONG A 2001. Towards a theology of evil spirits and witches. Journal of African Christian Thought 4(1):18-21, 18

AKRONG A 2001. Towards a theology of evil spirits and witches. Journal of African Christian Thought 4(1):18-21,20

SANPAD 2003. Crossing witchcraft harriers in South Africa. Exploring witchcraft accusations; causesand solutions. Utrecht; Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University. (SANPAD is the South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development.)

¹⁴ VAN WYK I W C 2004. African witchcraft in theological perspective. IITS 60(3):1201-1228.

LAGERWERF L 1985. Witchcraft, sorcery and spirit possession: pastoral responses in Africa. Exchange 41:1-62.

Text from King James Version of the Old Testament.

And the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali rushed forward [toward their destiny, and their consternation grew deeper -- the sea route, the crossings of the Jordan River, Galilee of the nations. The nation that walked in darkness saw a great light shine upon them, and those who sat in the land of the shadows of death, the light shined upon them. The nation

6. Literary Reading of Exegesis of Exodus 22:18

The Statement "thou shall not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18), falls within the social and religious regulations in ancient Israel. This law indicates that the knowledge and practice of witchcraft, magic and divination was common in ancient Israel as was in most ancient communities at the time. It is a major reference in the Old Testament prohibition of witchcraft which was against the true worship of Yahweh

This ancient Israelites law is to be understood in it proper perspective. This text is not to be used as a yard stick for gruesome murder. Offenders could be put away from the society, ostracized and banished. It is not to be interpreted literally and suspected witches arbitrarily killed as we currently experience in Annang communities in Nigeria. This Exodus text does not say how the witches are to be known and sorted out. It leaves room for present day self-styled prophets to take laws into their hands and eliminate people without reason or for the subjective reasons of being a witch.

We are beginning to realize that during the missionary period the foundations of a vigorous African Christianity were laid. We are also beginning to realize that these foundations were laid in a concealed and mysterious manner. Very little developed as the missionaries planned or hoped or feared ... The emergence of an African Christianity was a dialectical process, an interaction between missionary and African consciousness. The result is a constantly shifting and negotiated synthesis. At any one time, and even today, popular

Nigeria has a legal provision against the practice of witcheraft: Section 210(a) of the nation's Criminal Code expressly states that: any person who by his statements or actions represents himself to be a witch or have the powers of witcheraft is guilty of misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment for two years. The Nigerian law does not permit the taking of life of suspected witches. It is therefore illegal for any Nigeria to destroy live and property for mere accusation of witcheraft. But the literally interpretation of this biblical text: Exodus 22:18: is still the major cause of so many deaths of adult, stigmatization and rejection and abandoning of children who are believed to be witches today in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Many leaders of the witcheraft eradication movements, certain categories of self-acclaimed spiritualists and leaders of religious movements have often referred to this text as their spiritual authority to kill and rid the society of supposed witches. The gruesome, shocking and repugnant murder cases in Southeast Nigeria traceable to the literally interpretation of this text is incredible, astonishing and mind-boggling. The various murder cases have led to unprecedented social problems in Southeast Nigeria: lost of lives and property, displacement of families, children orphaned and left vulnerable, culprits spend endless years in jail, persons stigmatized and scorned in the society, victims are also psychologically destroyed.

7. The Problem Restated

The dawn of the 19th century, A. D. witnessed the arrival of Christianity into the soil of Southeast Nigeria. The people who received this new religion were not spiritually vacuumed. Their traditional religious beliefs and practices of consulting oracles, diviners, seeking the help of mediums, witch-doctors, rainmakers, fortune-tellers etc had been the preferred way of life of the people. These traditional practices got deeper in the lives as a result of experienced insecure social conditions, lack of free or affordable medical services, economic regression, poverty, sickness, misfortunes of life, accident, injury, stillbirth, barrenness, internal pains etc that needed explanations. These social problems are often left at the door steps of witches and Satan. This is to say that most social issues found explanations through their religious experience. In the religious tradition of the people, witches are mostly feared. These thought pattern and traditional beliefs of the people progressed into a substantial creed that all manners of evil, accident, deaths, still birth, sickness, internal pains,

barrenness, deaths, injury etc are attributed to malficences spiritual powers. Of all the spiritual powers that can cause human problems, witcheraft was mostly feared among the people. Witches are believed to prey nocturnally upon human soul and cause untold social problems for the people. All the misfortune listed above are most often believed to be caused by witches. The traditional religious functionaries: the priests, mediums, diviners, sooth-sayers, fortune-tellers, rain-makers, witch doctors, herbalists and others were often consulted and they were expected to give solutions to all these problems of live. The traditional witch doctors that are believed to be the chief agents in curative campaign against witches were greatly valued and respected.

The spiritual dichotomy created has manifested itself today in the 21st century in unprecedented social problems. Christian teaching is that every good or bad act should be received joyfully from God.

As the various forms of Christianity spread through the southeast of Nigeria, at a glance, one would think that Christianity has succeeded in uprooting the traditional religious practices of the people. This is because in a very small town or village, one can count so many churches that sometime seem to out number the adherents. In the 21st century, this is far from the truth. Rather the religious movements that abound in the area have attempted to maintain the practices of the traditional religious system especially in the area of witch-hunting, spiritual diagnoses of sickness and determining the causes of death etc.

In our present era, a lot of human problems are associated with the activities of witches. Today, many issues, problems and sicknesses are raised to the spiritual level. Among these are:

1. HIV/AIDS

I once organized a workshop on HIV/AIDS at Uyo and was shocked at the input of one of the Participants: HIV/AIDS is caused by spiritual agents- the witches. Further, she explained how this works: the witches use spiritual syringes in the night to siphon blood from infected persons and inject same into and uninfected persons. Globally, the cause of HIV/AIDS is known and there no absolutely no reason to raise the HIV/AIDS pandemic to the spiritual level of witches being involved. This explains why spiritual solutions are sought in that circumstances, This is a clear example not all accusations of witches activities has basis.

2. Illness/Death

Most often than not, many illnesses, complicated health cases, miscarriages, barreness, and death are associated with the malice of the witches. Accused person have been arbitrary killed without authentic medical verification to ascertain the cause of death. This is to say that Postmodern is almost not carried out ascertain the causes of illness and death. Causes of illness and death are multifarious:

- a. The medical care services in a third world country as Nigeria is not at it best.
- b. Coupled with that, the poor attitude of our people in not having the culture of regular medical check up is another cause of death. Medical conditions that could be arrested early and on time can develop into bad complications due to irregular medical check up. For instance, a person with a very high blood can drop dead with any notice. Often this situation of sudden death has been ascribed to witches.
- c. Poverty: Many people and families in South East Nigeria live below poverty level despite the oil wells. Poor nutrition is also a big problem to health for this class of people. The importance of proper and good nutrition to health cannot be overemphasized. Due to poverty, although some may wish to have medical services but may not be able the cost of it. Many resort to spiritual prayer houses for spiritual solutions for cases that are clearly medical. Poverty is a vicious circle: those who are poor are deprived of information on proper health care like the importance of physical exercise for health and vitality.

d. Government Policy: The government need to intervene in the health issues of the people. As much as possible, health care services should be made available to the poor people. Education on healthy living is very important aspect of the government care for the people. Aside from this.

3. Naturally Occurrences

In 2005, I visited a family to show my solidarity to them when I learnt of the flood disaster that damaged their fence and followed through their leaving room. I was shocked when I observed that their elder brother was serious beaten and locked up because he was accused of using his witchcraft powers to pull down the fence. He went through incredible ordeal in the hands of his siblings and other family members. Eventually, the fence was rebuilt, but the very next year, a torrent of flood water pull down the fence again. By this time, their elder brother was ostracized and banished from the family house. It was then obvious to them that a more concrete fence was the answer to the constant flood problem.

Numerous cases of this nature abound everywhere and every time. Another mind-boggling also happened to a family well known to me. Mrs. Akon Akapan (not real name), was diagnose of cancer of the womb. She was booked for surgery but after consulting with her spiritualist, she preferred to believe that her health condition was caused by her brother. Subsequently, she was admitted into a spiritual church for spiritual healing. She eventually died of cancer in the spiritual home.

8. Problems Associated With Literary Reading of Exodus 22: 18

A close study of the activities of the witch-doctors, religious witch detectors are to the sanitize the society of witches and give deliverance and salvation to the victims of these malevolent powers. They rely chiefly on the very subjective methodology of the reception of 'heavenly spiritual messages' from the 'spirited' members whose psychological state are never verified. Within this religious tradition, they act as intermediaries between God and the rest of the members. During the prayer sessions, these 'spirited' members appear to be in a state of trance and semi-unconscious and prophesy to the clients the source of their problems or sickness. Having studied a number of these religious groups, a common denominator in their prophecy circles around the activities of witches and other evil forces and the problems these forces cause to the human beings.

Throughout our field work, we were unable to record spiritual prophesies that centred around means of progress, scientific discovery or way of improving governance for common good. But nearly every prophesy was around witchcraft activities. The detected 'witches' are always close family members: parents, brothers, sisters, mother-in-law, father-in-law, old people in the kindred etc. Our extensive field-work on the subject matter revealed that the social problems caused by these self-styled 'spirited' people and religious leaders in Southeast Nigeria are enormous.

This moving story of a child is an example of the many numerous situation of the social problems in Southeast Nigeria:

I was attending a fasting and prayer service at Church with my parents when the pastor identified me as a witch. He then beat me in front of the congregation and sent me out from the Church. When I got home my father also beat me and then sent me away from the house. I wandered the streets for more than a month surviving on stream water and scraps from the market. I felt so sorrowful and sad. Eventually my father came and took me back home where he locked me up in a room with some goats. He then tied my arms and legs with twine rope and scriously beat me for weeks on end telling me to confess to being a witch. When I refused the beatings continued. I often begged him for food and drink but he refused. Eventually on day, my brother set me free. I ran to the village where someone took pity on me, feed me and took me to CRARN to avoid being murdered.

This is only but an iccberg at the tip of the ocean. Many such occur everywhere in many communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States . Our field staff recorded the following incident at Okpok Ikpa Village in Cross River State:

There were two brothers who both owned their families. One of them was unable to secure any employment and had no training in a trade. Maintenance of the family was pretty difficult for him with no steady income. He consulted with his pastor in the spiritual church and his other brother was detected a witch. The spiritualists in the church further told him that the brother was hindering his progress in life. Early on one fateful morning he got his machete sharpened and proceeded to his brother house. Fortunately for his brother he was not at home to get a fair share of the 'suffer not a witch to live'. Unfortunately for the brother's wife, she was matched to death along with the baby at the breast. The eldest son was also matcheted but cheated death because he was able to run swiftly for rescue. The young boy is severely deformed from the cut he sustained. The culprit is cooling his feet in the Police custody.

Our team visited the Prison at Uyo and met a young lady who was serving a life sentence for killing her mother in cold blood. According to her, the prophecy that the mother was a witch and marring her progress angered her to the point of murdering her mother. Another victim serving a life sentence too was interviewed at Ikot Ekpene prison, like the first case, he murdered a relative whom a religious movement prophesied to be a witch and had tied up the man's fortune in the witch-world. In April 2006, our team was briefed of a pathetic incident about witchcraft accusation. Our informant told us that the men of the Police force swept through the sleepy village of Ikot Inyang in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area and made a number of arrests in connection with the murder of a man, accused of being a witch by a church in the village 18.

We have interviewed many young wives who are completely cut off from the marital families for fear of being bewitched. Children are known to abandoned their parents when they have been prophesied to be witches

Apart from these first hand information on these issue, a there are lots of information in the periodicals. The Insider: a Nigerian weekly magazine of September 1, 2003, No. 35 P. 18 records blood chilling murders that have accorded in South East Nigeria as a result of the prophecies from Religious Movements and witch doctors. These murders have cost untold social problems for the victims families. A following episodes is just but a tip of the iceberg in the ocean.

- a) In Afaha Atan, in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area, Innocent Edem Effiong, 29, hacked is aged father Donald Edem Effiong to death and latter hauled the corpse into a wheel barrow and emptied it into a deep well near the village primary school and took to his heels. The police arrested him later. When our team visited him in the police custody, he confessed that he received the prophecy from a spiritual church that his father was a witch.
- b) In June 2002, Effiong Akpan, 33, from Obong in Abak Local Government Area murdered his 70 year old father in cold blood prophesied by a Church to be a witch.
- c) Also at Ibiakpan Nto Akan village, Ikot Ekpene LGA, a middle aged man Archibong Udo Essien, was picked up by the Polic in June 2002 for causing an 80 year old woman, Nkwa Nkwo Inyang, after cutting off her right hand, and inflineing two deep cuts on her head for being a witch.
- d) At Mbak Etoi in Uyo LGA, a 30 year old man hactched his grey haired old mother to dead and also killed his younger brother, who were both accused of being a witch. He received the prophecy from a spiritual church.
- e) A 15 year old Enefiok Sylvester of Utu Ikot Ekpenyong in Ikot Ekpene LGA according to Police report was tied to an electric pole and burnt to death in 2001 by his uncle. Udeme Akpan Adiauke on accusation of being awitch.
- f) In February 2002 at Obio Etoi in Uyo LGA, where Sunday Edo. 50, reportedly tied his son to a stake, poured petrol and set him ablaze. The reason for his death is that the deceased became a 'born again Christian' and was fond of accusing his father of practicing witchcraft.

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Mrs Alice Udo, Mrs Imaikop Udofia, Mrs Arit Effiong, Mrs. Uwem Udom in interview sessions on 15th March 2006, 3rd June 2007, 11 August 2007, 1st December 2007 respectively all shared their experiences of suffering with accusations of Witchersts in their marital.

- g) Markson Akpan Udom, 67, of Ikot Idiong village in Ukam, Mkpat Enin LGA was accused if being a witch and that he was responsible for the death of his step son. He was abducted from his village by youth to a distance bush where he was severely beaten and injected with a lethal substance suspected to be acid on the neck and on other part of the body which resulted in his death.
- h) Again in 2002, in Abiakpo Ikot Essien in Ikot Ekpene, LGA, the Village Head reported to the Police how 20 irate youths stormed the village hall where a meeting of the village council was going on, dragged out three young men whom they had previously accused of being witches stabbed them continuously, before setting them ablaze.
- i) A house -to- house search for witches took place in 2002 at Ikot Ewang in Ikot Ekpene was ignited by the mysterious death of a child, the third to die within a year in one particular family. In a suspected sanctuary of a witch, some pictures, under wears and other fetish items were discovered. The suspect was a brother to the father of the deceased child, he was lucky to have escaped unhurt to the police station. Another suspect of this case was apprehended, cut into pieces and his remains exhibited alongside the sancturary which was publicly displayed before it was burnt.
- j) In 1997, the state-owned Weekend Pioneer published an incredible story of how an aged woman was lynched to death in Uyo, the State Capital of Akwa Ibom State, on Suspicion that she was a witch because she merely strayed into an unfamiliar residence to request a cup of drinking water ' the Residents of the compound, a superstitious set having heard of a roving sorceress with the power to kill through accepting drinking water from somebody' the paper wrote, raised an alarm 'witch', 'witch' witch...', minutes after that, the innocent woman lay sprawled on the road side, lynched to death'.

9. Psychological Killings

It is worth noting that some killings on the accusation of witcheraft are not mere physical but psychological. Issues and examples abound where people though left alive have been psychological tormented because they have been accused of being witches. Mr Jones (not real name) whom we contacted during our field work informed us that for he has not had contact with his mother for the past ten years because his Pastor prophesied that his mother is a witch. One can only imagine the agony of a mother not having contact with a son she brought up and educated only to be abandoned at old age just for being accused of being a witch without basis. Mrs. Isiona (not real name) also told our team of field workers that she has succeeded in stopping her husband from seeing her mother whom she said was prophesied to be a witch.

Aside from this, younger people also suffer a lot, Mrs Ekaette (not real name) sent away her house maid because it was prophesied in her Church that the house maid is a witch. Again, Mr. & Mrs. Shadrach (not real name) refused to let their in-law into their house because of a prophecy they received in the church that he was a witch.

10. Conclusion

According to Tempels (1959:39), life consists of the continual increase or decrease of one's vital force. And the aim that one has for one's life is to develop the optimal vital force that one's location in the hierarchical order of reality allows. It is important to realise that African societies do not operate along egalitarian lines but according to hierarchical structures. Finding one's rightful place in the hierarchical network of powers between God, spirits, deity, ancestors, chief, means to be in possession of force. To be displaced and in disharmony with this network implies decrease and eventually loss of vital force. The main and vital aim in life is to find your allotted place in the total scheme of things.

J.V. Taylor in his well known book, The primal vision19, depicted this state of affairs as follows: Man is a family. The living chain of humanity, in which the tides of world-energy ebb and flow most strongly, stands at the heart of the great totality of being. The underlying conviction remains that an individual who is cut off from the communal organism is nothing. As the glow of a coal depends upon its remaining in the fire, so the vitality, the psychic security, the very humanity of man, depends upon his integration into the family. There are many who feel that the spiritual sickness of the West, which reveals itself in the divorce of the sacred from the secular and in the loneliness and homelessness of individualism, may be healed through a recovery of the wisdom which Africa has not yet thrown away. What should be taken note of is that religion in the African context is not something supra-natural or metaphysical but something which is part of the natural scheme of things. It is therefore understandable that Mercy Oduyoye describes the pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religion of Africa as a cosmic religion with the premise that it does not claim a single revelation, nor a special messenger from God, but has grown as part of being human.20

Jon Kirby, who is both a Catholic priest and an anthropologist, puts it more strongly:

Throughout its history, Christian missionary work in West Africa has displayed little cultural sensitivity toward Africann society. Catholic missionaries, like their Protestant brothers, were appallingly ignorant of African institutions and did not care to investigate them. Indeed, they were too busy suppressing traditional rituals and beliefs, thereby preventing an objective, balanced view of African traditional religions. With few exceptions, missionaries saw African traditional religions as a 'morass of bizarre beliefs and practices' ... As a general principle we can say that before 1960 all mission founded churches insisted that their converts abandon all contact with African Traditional religions and cultures. These churches were poorly prepared theologically and culturally to accept any alternatives to their own way of praying, thinking, believing or behaving. 21.

The killings that have occurred in Akwa Ibom State under the guise of witcheraft is enormous. The social problems compounded by these issues are indescribable. Children have been orphaned, families separated, parents and children part ways for life, wives and husbands separate and lots more. This situation should not be allowed to continue. The Government can set up a monitory and supervision unit in groups of villages to concretize the people on the ills of arbitrary killings going on in the state. Any spiritual church noted for having tendencies for 'smelling out witches' should be seriously sanctioned. It closure may also be recommended because most of the roots of killings originated from the prophesics they give to their clients. Preliminary legal curriculum can be included in our educational system at all levels. Also, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should take this issue serious and collaborate with Government agencies to check abuses of the human person.

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