Christian Pastors and the Return of Juju Men: Contentions for the Soul of the Ordinary Man

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Abstract

Pastors stay in business through different practices. Some of these practices are not healthy. There are now many narratives about the misadventures of the followers of the religious men, who claim that the people afflicted by one spiritual problem or the other. With the economic and social nightmares, these problems drive up the demand for psychological counselling and succour which the pastors feed into. A lot of dishonesty and exploitation go on in the churches. Pastors are associated with numerous vices. Interestingly, the pastors' share of the public wealth is immense. Some individuals cannot ignore situations whereby a pastor suddenly become the owner of four or five jets. They therefore give people reasons to patronize them. In the same fashion as the pastors, the traditional medicine men proclaim themselves redeemers. The pastors have always applied the same measures as the juju priests, but on social media. Therefore, what one party does corresponds with what the other does. They all claim to dispossess the malevolent. Ironically, society is thus exposed to different fraudulent schemes. This is what this writeup seeks to expose and correct. The task was informed by various events in society. Materials for the undertaking were obtained from books, journal and newspaper articles.

Key words: religion, pastors, materialism, fraudulent, colonized

Introduction

Religion is important in many people's lives, but it leads several people astray. There is usually overwhelming skepticism of the usefulness of religion. According to Siebert et al, Georg W. F. Hegel and Meister Eckart "had looked with an abyss-like smile on theology as a small and ugly hunchback (34). " Walter Benjamin, who influenced these thinkers, is less generous with his views. He is worried that

theology and historical materialism are involved in a scheme that misleads the people (34). Historical materialism posits that all elements of humanity are determined by the economic circumstances of the environment. Mankind is therefore urged not to allow himself to be bound by religion. The advocates of this position are the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Siebert et al state that it is hardline stand, whose origin is traced to the masses of society. Clearly, with regard to the experience in Nigeria, what the Nigerian preachers do is a negation of the biblical message. The Nigerian religious men are lured by material things. They sell their souls to accumulation of wealth. From Nigeria to Britain and America, the story is the same; a type of gospel being propagated that negates what was originally intended. The priests, popularly identified in Nigeria as men of God or pastors, are obsessed with showiness. They direct their message to the yearnings of their listeners, which is to overcome their woeful conditions. Factories and warehouses are converted to massive church auditoriums, where people troop in almost every day of the week to pray for employment. The men of God revert to various schemes to keep their listeners glued to the displays.

People have strong appetite for miracles and wonders, and the pastors have to deliver accordingly. Investigations reveal that what the religious men claim to do are simply stage acts. But the followers of the religious men are blameworthy for failing to recognize how vacuous the miraculous acts are. The Covid-19 pandemic, against all situations, presented an opportunity for the pastors to silence skeptics. Strangely, the mistrust between the men of God and some segments in the society deepened, as the men of God maintained sealed lips all through the period. The men of God are moving about the stage these days with a carriage that expressly inform critics that no lessons were learned (Asadu).

Inadvertently, the religious men recite the names of traditional magicians who are thought to have spiritual powers, and can cast magic spells on people. These men are known to conjure individuals into places where the victims are made vulnerable and any type of treatment meted to them. Souls of people subjected to different acts supply the supernatural powers needed to produce a lot of legal tenders. They thus present to some fraudulent persons a realm those people can claim to inhabit, as publicized by the pastors. These people then try to outdo the pastors in all the areas that are of interest to the people. These people claim they

are traditionalists, who can free people's destinies that are tied up. The have recently effectively turned attention to themselves. With the economic hardship being experienced in Nigeria, the interest in the acquisition of wealth has been activated. The society is therefore imperilled. There is need to reorientate the public, to make them focus on worthy causes. This is a return to the messages by Horkheimer, Hegel, Marx and Walter Benjamin.

Siebert et al quote Erich Fromm as saying that the Hebrew Bible counsels people to disentangle themselves from their possessions, which restrain them continually. The New Testament of the Bible has a similar posture, expressing displeasure at acquisitions. The New Testament's position is even more severe than the Jewish disapproval that preceded it. Siebert, Ott and Byrd reveal that this is the case because

> it came from the lower social classes: from the poor and socially despised, from the downtrodden and outcasts, who like some of the old Hebrew Prophets castigated the rich and powerful and denounced without compromise wealth as well as secular and priestly power as unmitigated evils. (36-39)

Siebert et al remark that Eckart cites the The Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ as an instance in the Bible where the authority is fully demonstrated. Recounting the episode, they inform their readers that

> Eckhart does not want to speak of external but rather of internal poverty referred to by Matthew rather than Luke, in which he defines poverty by saying: He is a poor man who wants nothing, knows nothing and has nothing (36-39).

Eckart believes that being is paramount in assessing existence. He attempts to distinguish being from having, stating that

> being is life, activity, birth, renewal, out pouring, flowing out, productivity. In this sense, being is the very opposite of having, of ego boundness, egotism, egoism, and narcissism. Being means to be active in the classic sense of the productive expression of one's humanity. (35-40)

Siebert et al explain how, currently, in 2012, Catholic clergy and one Bishop Gumbleton in Detroit, USA, include capitalism in their criticism that aligns with the words of the Hebrew Bible, The New Testament, Eckart and Fromm, which is making pronouncements against the structure of having, when they call capitalism, the private appropriation of collective labor, the most morally evil economic system ever invented and developed by humanity (37). Karl Marx contributes immensely to this discourse, as he once responded to his children's question about the music he and his children listened to in a church he took the children to, saying there was a poor man who was killed by rich men. Marx accused the wealthy people in London of turning Jesus into a liar by their ways. This is the view in the critical theory of religion. This murder of the poor man by the rich still persists. Horkheimer decries the fact that the Roman Church Fathers and the Greeks crafted a religion from the name Jesus. He points out further, saying they "made out of his self-sacrificial death a teaching, which was a consolation for evil people without a conscience, or a dull one (Siebert et al 38)." The outcome for the religion has been very favorable, Hockheimer continues by saying revealing that the people, in their engagements, are disconnected from Jesus. He contends that the belief in religion has been associated with numerous indulgences that will startle observers. Quoting Hockheimer further, Siebert et al disclose that

[t]he religion that appealed to Jesus of Nazareth redirected the spiritual energies, which had been awakened through his unheard-of deed of self-giving and broke through the coldness of the ancient world, from mimesis to cult, from action to adoration. (38)

Had the Jesus story taken another course, Horkheimer is convinced that nothing about Jesus would have been remembered. The loss on the part of his followers would have been immense. Surely, they would have gone under in darkness. Instead of an economically and politically successful organization, which was also not poor in educational results, nothing would have remained. The good and bad deeds and institutions of Christianity would not have been written down in any history book. He is of the view that Jesus would have remained correct with his response (38).

There has been a revival in Christian religious worship. In the West, it is being received as 'reverse flow,' whereby the West is being swarmed by Christian evangelism from the previously colonized areas of the world, especially Africa. Those behind it are immigrants. In a lot of cases, they have altered the appearance of Christianity in the host countries. Essentially, the type of religion these immigrants come with is more rigid. They disregard the prevailing doctrines, speak their own languages, apply their cultural ways in their practice and come with their own priests. It is also included as part of the 'Second Wave' of Christianity. They are mostly charismatic and Pentecostal brands of Christianity (Kalu 187-288).

This is the type of Christianity that the Africans embraced at the departure of the colonists in the former colonies. They absorb the indigenous traditions. Recently, everything has taken a new turn, with the popularity of this movement. People flock to them. The adherents are mostly interested in their welfare, which the Christian leaders assure them will certainly be delivered to them. The priests abandon other doctrines to preach about prosperity. This is consistent with the observations of Horkheimer. The consequences have indeed been grave (Kalu 288).

These churches that preach prosperity regurgitate what brethren in the USA are fed by US preachers. These people believe that blessings, which are fortunes, will be released to them once they abide by the injunctions of the church and their church leaders. Harrison recounts adverts by the American preacher Crefo Dollar of the Word of Faith Movement. In one of the adverts, a voice tells someone,

> You already possess everything that you're trying to get ahold of. But we gotta learn how to seize it; we gotta learn how to lay hold of the invisible!" The voiceover continues: "Learn how to get what's rightfully yours with our monthly product offer Laying Hold of Your Inheritance. To order this powerful four-tape series, write to the address or call the number on the screen. (Harrison 132)

The men radiate with good feeling. They are exuberant and glow in a manner to indicate their wellbeing. They have such charm, with their attires. They have impressive images politically and financially. It is the feature in Nigeria as well. Harrison describes the American clergy thus,

> Many of today's high-profile teachers of the Faith Message are welldressed, energetic, and politically and financially savvy African American men, like Pastor Dollar, Pastor Fred Price of Crenshaw Christian Center in South Central Los Angeles, and Pastor Keith Butler of the Word of Faith International Christian Center in Southfield, Michigan. It would be inaccurate, however, to think of the Word of Faith as a Black religious movement. The movement has attracted followers from a broad demographic spectrum throughout the United States and in many countries abroad since its emergence in the 1960s and 1970s. This movement and its message have fired the imaginations and inspired the faith of thousands (and perhaps even millions) of followers the world over. (132-134)

As if describing the experience of the Nigerian preachers, Harrison has these views about the African-American religious person thus,

> The religion and religious institutions of African slaves and their descendants in America have always had to be concerned with the material, social, political, and spiritual needs of their followers. To limit ministry to the spiritual realm was a luxury they could not afford, given the legacy of slavery and their post-Emancipation experience of discrimination. It was the role of Black churches and other religious institutions in their communities to take up the prosperity in African American religion slack and meet the needs of the people. (132-133)
> The subject matter is a pack of 'belief system' which leans on the idea of being born again and a life driven by biblical injunctions. Connected to its course of conduct is, as Harrison puts it, is the charismatic movement's free operation of the gifts of the Spirit, based on the biblical account of the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. (134)

The church enterprise requires a lot of capital. The Bible itself makes a lot of provisions how the money can be generated. Among them are tithes and offerings. Tithe-giving entails a member setting aside 10% of his monthly income for the church or God. It is in addition to the general offering, and is mandatory; though members are only made to feel guilty for not giving. The money is meant for God who sustains the life of the member. This is why one Pastor Ibiyeopmie says it is a criminal act to fail to pay one's tithe. Not giving is thought of as the member denying God's role in his life. The monies are used for the church's physical facilities and running costs of the church. Many churches had simple and small beginnings, but have risen to complete financial empires. During a church service, offerings may come in phases like church building offering, pastor's special offering, bazaar offering, wedding offering, etc. But people are becoming vocal, accusing churches of exploiting members, especially as the special offerings are unending. Sometimes, a pastor of a church swarming with quite poor people, beckons on 'any 20 people to make donations of one new car each.' Churches are opening their doors where previously existed warehouse. It means that churches are feeding fat in an economy where factories are disappearing. Some wonder if it is not recklessness whereby a society closes warehouses to set up praying platforms to pray for jobs. It is surprising how they are taken away from a place where they can be productive and placed where they give out the little money they have for their spirits to be lifted. Surprisingly, an army of people keeps turning to these churches as hope diminishes daily in the country (Usulor, Ohuabunwa, Ajom).

Religious Control

The religious gentlemen engage bodyguards or armed policemen or soldiers as security outfits. Also, they seek the best medical care overseas, while they inform their followers that there is no substitute for praying and fasting if anyone wants to be healed. Any departure from the two is effort in futility. The development leaves people asking questions. These pastors have been accepted to be representatives of God on earth. Therefore, they are gifted with prophesies. Thus, a pastor can foretell events in the country occasionally. He has seen some future images and, as a result, tells the people to use prayers to divert a mass killing; so that it will come to pass that God's people will be spared. He also says a politician whose career has been built over forty years will lose his life soon. The way

revelations work, he might be specific about who will win the presidential election coming up in five months. When a politician does or someone wins the presidential election or something that makes a strong impression on the minds of the people happens, people run through prophesies of thousands of pastors to pin it down to a particular matching prophesy. In most cases, the prophesies are seen as items of entertainment, or they are often off the mark. The ministers of God are visionless, with regard to their deaths or deaths of spouses or their children. The size and the huge noise of the demolition of part of his church building was not made known to one Pastor Odumeje, as he was helpless at the site. A security official even reacted to Odumeje's query and interference with the act by manhandling Odumeje (Olowolagba, Odunsi).

Many pastors undertake various experiments. Some are moved by the spirit to ask their members to chew grass. Some wave multitudes to the ground using handkerchiefs. Some attempt to flog the devil out of their followers. Some recruit actors to recreate in church what had transpired in the Bible or the various claims these pastors make. As anointing flows and a sick person announces she cannot tell what happened to her and took away her illness, the church goes wild. These days, it can be captured on video or people hold up their phones. People raised concerns when some people got monies transferred divinely and instruction by a pastor. As the social media enables people to dig up old prophesies, people scrutinize the prophesies and the miracle acts. The mistrust gets worse when a pastor is caught with drugs at an airport. In fact, the society is overwhelmed by these happenings, which smear Christianity (Olowolagba).

Many people discovered that the churches are not healing houses, as Covid-19 clearly proved. Sick people who resort to church prayers succumb to their illnesses a lot of times. It is revealed in the lives of the ordinary people. This is also a big blow to the church, which claims to have solutions to all diseases, curing them as Jesus did. Besides, Nigeria is a country where one can fall out of favor with a community for church truancy. Fatal accidents, child mortality rate, life expectancy rate, poverty, stealing, dishonesty and many others give figures that show that Nigeria is moving in the wrong direction in the world *system*. When these things contemplated in the negativity, people cast their minds on Nigeria. Where you find Nigeria, you do not find countries like China and Saudi Arabia

with minimal Christian presence. People question the inability of Christianity to eradicate these problems. What is the impact of this religiosity in the lives of Nigerians? Criminals and murderers live in a golden age in Nigeria (Olowolagba).

Religious Leaders Silent on Christian Persecution

It is clear that, in Nigeria, Christians have given up any challenge contest for control of power, they have been excluded from power by Moslems who have been in charge since the British physically left in 1960. The fate of the Christian in a country where they are not a minority, does not gladden the hearts of the adherents. When they are the majority in some northern states, they have not been able to stop the feared arrangement of a Moslem governor and a Moslem deputy. As days go by, Islamic fundamentalists murder Christians as they please, leaving many Christians puzzled. (Chimtom).

What pastors are not going to tell their followers is how copies of the Bible and churches get burnt in the process. Recently, pastors of high standing are kidnapped routinely. The head of the Methodist church of Nigeria was kidnapped and taken like any other fellow by some Moslems and made to wander in the bush until the Methodist church responded with the N100m ransom. At least, he should have been entitled to a rescue by an angel from heaven. It ended just the way kidnappings in Nigeria end. When Christians are killed, their brethren remind them of the injunction in the New Testament of the Bible to go on their knees in prayer for the criminals and also the beauty in forgiving. It becomes difficult to believe anything as people can also turn to verses in the Bible that contradict the instruction. But the Christians are not safer since the kidnappers are emboldened. Nowhere are Christians hounded down because of their religion like in Nigeria. Christians are not found in any of the 12 security institutions in Nigeria. Like it is at the top, security formations, other political positions are exclusively the preserve of northern Moslems (Ufor).

Many Christians in Nigeria were excited that power resides in the West. They think of NATO and EU countries. With regret, they later realize these communities see the world differently. If not, power in Nigeria would not have tilted where it

is, contrary to these people's views. The West would not have passed over the south to show so much bias, Nigeria's loyalty to the West has hardly been in doubt, Do Christian leaders speak out when Christians are maltreated in Nigeria? Their reactions have been weak and disappointing. When their kind face annihilation, they are either wary of annoying the government in power or they are forced by personal interests to remain silent.

The average Christian in Nigeria has to transact any business on his own. The Vatican does not refer to Christians in Nigeria covertly or overtly. The attitude changes when dehumanization of Moslems takes place in Myanmar or China. Christians in Nigeria are ashamed to admit these things are true. It will be hard for Nigeria Christians to know that, in the West, people do not distinguish between a Christian and a Moslem population. The Pope may be shy

The Islamic world is attracted to a place like Nigeria where there is a religious wrestle for power. They want to be close enough to that government in power, which has to be friendly to me (Chimton).

The government has to believe in the Islamic cause. Nigeria being a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) better explains this. To the Islamic world, Nigeria is a battleground of the two religions. This is what Nigerians have come to know, but which the Nigerian central government and the leaders are not telling the world. The West is willing to accept the exclusion of the column for religious affiliation in the Nigerian census from something that is done differently in their home countries. The West broke the Christian opposition to the idea, thereby taking sides with the north. The EU' decision to support the Nigerian head count with $499m made the Nigerians think of how the West cared for Nigeria's welfare.

The Coming of Jesus Christ and the Helplessness of the Church

Every end of the year, Christianity gets involved in activities pointing to the birth of Jesus Christ. They remember his death at Easter. It is believed that with Christ's return to the earth, billions of Christians will wake up from the dead; the righteous will be separated from the rest and will join Jesus. It will mark the end of a phase, which is life on earth. According to Christian watchers, this will happen 2000 years after Christ's first departure. Instead of being hastened, there is unexplained delay,

as the 2000-years' wait is over. Yet, Jesus has not come. It means that Christianity has not kept its own promise. The Christian religion is intolerant to lateness to church service or misconduct in the house of God. Why then has the religion defaulted?

The church is helpless over hunger that is ravaging the country. People live in appalling dwellings. The resources are not there to keep children in school, as parents do not have enough for house keep. Moral decay, for which the church is not left out, is eating up the country. Born again Christians do not enjoy the type of honor they used to in the past; because they no longer live by the standard they set for themselves. A born-again is no longer expected to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. People go to the usual places to ask the church the plan it has for these problems. Some assume the churches in Africa misapply the injunctions of the Christian religion.

Turning Point

Today, many Igbos are associated with Judaism. Several others declare the religions are foreign religions. With these questions, people would not be expected to continue on the same path. It brings the message home. Many persons believe every people have their type of culture and ways. With rationalism, they want to have less to do with foreign religions. It will not be the same again with Christianity. The grievances are too many for the youth to listen to further Christian preaching. The love for their roots compels them to fill the spiritual void in their lives with home-grown religions. What the youth need to do is to make the indigenous religions adorable, fleshing out some areas, for instance.

Some people saw new opportunities of fleecing people. The church has led the way in giving people the orientation that the traditional ways are efficacious. Several men of God succumb to the belief that the traditional ways can boost their powers. This is hardly the case, but it helps the image of spirituality. Many preachers drop by at the juju man's shrine, shopping for more powers. A lot of what the preachers say have the ring of the supernatural. Every so often, people notice that one who comes before a religious man is told that an adversary is on the offensive after consulting a traditional medicine man. The local movies are obsessed with this narrative as well. It has gone to a stage where people can no

longer ignore the traditional ways any more. Since these traditionalists are in short supply, when the demand for the work is quite high, a lot of young people now espy an avenue for making money. With the revival on social media, several young men and women are full of claims that portend that they have answers to issues that ail people. Some of the ladies hint that their powers come from water bodies. As their needs come, the water priestess has solutions with powers that are derived from the water. She reactivates the old practice of ministering to souls in turmoil. The rural stream setting is featured to authenticate her claims. She needs to be very vocal, chanting in the fashion of the priestesses known to the people (Kalu 186-287).

These are men and women who provide solutions to issues of marriage, illnesses and disputes with family members and acquaintances. They interpret dreams to people in open sessions. Surprisingly, someone proclaims he or she cannot keep away the forces calling him or her to duty. This is how some people inform their Facebook friends that they have abandoned everything else to serve their people. Some demonstrate their practices in the most hideous ways. It can be the decapitation of a cock or hen. They encircle one eye with chalk, which is a sign of divination often seen in local movies. All the paraphernalia of the business are displayed. A new person throws open his doors to welcome people with their woes. But the dibia is friend to the person in crisis,

People who preside over these schemes have only seen business opportunities. It can be said that Christian preachers opened these channels, as the traditionalists try to provide the same services as the church is in a period of desolation. Thus, it is a resurgence of the traditional ways. In Achi Mbieri, the traditional shrine Akuba gives hope that they are still in business. A red cloth banner is hung on plants, fading as it is exposed to rain and sunshine. What it looks lacks is open acknowledgment by people. The time is not from hence (Okeke et al, Akah).

There is renewed interest in the traditional religion, prompting people to look inward. Soon, when a hut, which is as sure as a shrine, springs up, it will be difficult to destroy, as has been the practice of many Christian preachers. The pastors have gotten many trees out of the way in the guise that the trees take away the destinies of the people. Places of traditional worship have disappeared

through the actions of these Christians. With Christianity falling out of favor with the people, the new bride is the traditional religious way.

Christianity is surely facing challenges from this area, but this will hardly give the people what they really desire outside spiritual upliftment. They can still get spiritual upliftment through a working system. In Germany, majority of the residents do not miss the traditional ways. The people seem to have taken a break from Christianity, which had been a way of life for centuries. The new religion people have taken their commerce to the social media where it is easy to hold people's attention, and where when people actually think that they are spoken to about their ailments, they pay happily for the service. People book for ointment that will make their lovers to suddenly throw money at them or to keep a rich man and to have all their needs taken care of. People have spoken well of such ladies, transforming them into newspaper personalities. They are different ways of defrauding the people.

Conclusion

Scholars like Georg W. F. Hegel, Meister Eckart and Walter Benjamin seek to know the benefits of religion were unconvincing. they seek to know the merits of religion, arguing that people should not encumber themselves with religion. In Nigeria, the majority of the masses are led astray by prosperity preachers. Efforts should be made so that ware houses should serve the purposes they were set up for, and industries should keep their machines and retain their workforce. People should join hands to build industries and manufacture goods, and not to build the largest churches in the world. This is how to make a mark in the world. It is the best way not to be left behind in the world. The physical and mental energies of the young people should be channelled into productivity. True prosperity will not take place without people being guided properly.

They should be taught that murders in the name of ritual killings, as inadvertently being promoted by many pastors do not turn blood into money. The Christian pastors are getting competition from numerous young people who have noted the imperfections of the pastors, making a lot of people to be split between the African traditional religions and the Christian religion. Traffic in the social media posts of the traditional religion is worrisome. This new vocation needs to be to be stopped.

Any society where either of the two flourishes or the two engage the time of the youths is doomed. Writers and the people in government have to combat these two problems. In as much as there is freedom of worship, methods should be devised to shield people from some of these individuals. There are selfless people who try to persuade people to consider the traditional ways. Some of these people produce scholarly works

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