A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF YORUBA SUPERSTITIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELLING

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by

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ABSTRACT

This work has been developed on the understanding that the Yorubas, like other African people, are superstitious. Superstition manifests itself in all areas of their socio-psychodynamic life. Following this submission is the understanding that fear and guilt seem to usually accompany a superstition. An example is when a taboo is broken. The question is, are fear and guilt invariably related to superstition? Similarly, since the Yorubas have continued to be superstitious, are there any didactic values in superstition? This work is set to address the stated problems.

In an attempt to address the problems raised, chapter one of the paper introduces the topic and how to go about it. It contains the background to the study based on the researcher's accumulated background experiences which include his hospital based clinical experiences. Some superstitions are cited as illustrations of the concerns of the paper. The chapter also contains the statement of the problems, such as to find out whether fear and guilt are related to superstition or not. If found related to superstition, what are the implications of the relationship for pastoral care and counselling
ministry? The purpose and significance of the study and research questions are also contained in the chapter. The same chapter has the definitions of superstition and pastoral care and counselling. It also has the delimitation as guidelines for the scope of the study.

Chapter two is a review of related literature. The concept of myth, folklore, beliefs in divinities, ancestors, mysterious powers and the concept of taboo as ramifications of superstition are discussed. The didactic factors of superstition are discussed as well. Along with this is a brief discussion of the history of superstition. Chapter three contains a critical evaluation of Yoruba superstitions. Yoruba superstitions are classified and some are listed. Also the chapter discusses the origin of some superstitions. The chapter is somehow closely related to chapter two.

Chapter four is a work on the field study. It restates the research questions, analyses them and reports the findings. Some statistical tables are drawn to explain the findings.

The last chapter contains various implications emanating from superstitious beliefs and their link with fear, guilt, and didactic elements. Following this, some appropriate pastoral care and counselling methods are proffered for wholistic healing. The conclusion is a brief overview of the subject. The researcher's recommendations are also contained in this chapter.
c. Teach the Bible very well;
d. Encourage the person(s) to see beyond the fragments;
e. Organize group counselling.

3. Rev. Simon Kolawole says he would: (a) Teach the Word of God and (b) Counsel the person(s).

E. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has vividly brought to the fore, the fact that within the Yoruba context, at least, superstition is related to fear and guilt. It has also been discovered that some elements of teachings are inherent in superstition. This implies that despite the emotional problems of fear and guilt in superstitious beliefs, their didactic values cannot be ignored. Doing so will be equal to throwing away the baby with the bath water. Superstitious beliefs therefore, pose some challenges to churches and pastoral care and counselling ministries among the Yorubas. In view of these challenges, the writer hereby recommends the following for pastoral counsellors working in Yoruba and similar cultural contexts:

1. Recognize the worldview of the counsellee. The presenting problem of the counsellee is likely to be coloured by his/her worldview. A good counsellor in

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56 Interview with Rev. Dr. S. A. Ishola, Ogbomoso: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, 18 October 1996.

the African context should therefore recognize the world-view of the counselee. For emphasis, many Africans attach much importance to the belief in witchcraft and regard it as a fact in their sickness. A counsellor should lead the counselee from the known to the unknown.

2. Reinforce healthy or positive behaviour. The possibility of eradicating superstitious belief lies much on the counsellor. He is to be able to detect the behaviour and feelings of the counselee, whether they are verbal or non-verbal. He is to reinforce a character trait that is to be encouraged. This could be by praising, affirming, or a pat on the back.58

3. Have teaching programmes for children. Superstitious belief is usually passed from the elders or parents to the children. Some of these beliefs are found in myths, folklore and riddles. A Bible-based teaching for children in the church setting will help children detect truth from falsehood.

4. Expose the adults to scientific discovery. This may counter superstitious beliefs. Often times the Yorubas for example believe that sickness is due to the wrath of an ancestor. Scientific discoveries have however shown that poor sanitation, poor feeding, lack of exercise, and rest among other things, can cause sickness. Adults should watch television programmes on scientific discoveries.

5. Have discipleship training programmes. This enables old and new members to grow and mature in the Word of God and even to disciple others. Spiritual growth can eliminate superstition as people learn how to be real and practising Christians.

6. Give or provide a substitute. The African believes in ancestors. For example, his/her thoughts are based on what is believed the ancestors can offer. The church should present Jesus as man's sacrifice for liberation. The researcher agrees with Jean Ela that "where the ancestral religion still controls agriculture, Christianity must take into account the aspirations of men who need water and millet."\(^{59}\)

7. Help change pathogenic beliefs. Superstition seems to breed low self-esteem, dependency, inferiority complex, non-assertiveness or loss of self worth. These do not augur well for wholeness. The pastor should motivate parishioners to self-realization as intended by God (Genesis 2:7).

8. Establish a counselling ministry and tell members about it. Many pastors do not have a counselling ministry, or do not tell the church they have it. This is an anomaly.

9. Teach counsellees to learn to give thanks to God always, even in times of despair. This will ever make one be aware of God's presence in diverse situations.

10. Teach clients to put on the whole armour of God. Witches and/or demons cannot withstand the power of God in His people (Ephesians 6:10-20; II Corinthians 10:4). So there is no need for believers to fear them.

The importance of pastoral care and counselling among people of various beliefs cannot be over-emphasized. There is no doubt that what people believe always affects them. Consequently, pastoral care and counselling is relevant in any culture. Although this study is on Yoruba superstitions and their implications for pastoral care and counselling, other Africans will also find the study very helpful. This is because Africans share common worldview. Also this writer reiterates that despite the inherent emotional problems in superstition, their didactic values should not be overlooked. Therefore, the pastoral counsellor is to lead counsellees from the known to the unknown and thereby bring about wholistic healing.