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## CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN ANYIGBA COMMUNITY, DEKINA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KOGI STATE

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### **Abstract**

This work focuses on an explanatory discourse on the attitude of some contemporary Christians towards African medicine in Anyigba, Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State. Traditional medicine consists of the use of herbs shrubs bark of trees, root and animal substances as medicinal recipes for the total restoration to health of an individual. Thus, for the total restoration to health of an individual, some traditional medicine men and women rates such practices as divination, oracles, and rituals. Owing to the above practices, some contemporary African Christians have developed a very negative attitude to traditional medicine and branded as juju, paganistic, idolatry, magic, fetish and witchcraft. As a result, some contemporary African Christians hardly subscribe to it publicly, because of ignorance and shame, thus resulting to some forms of hypocrisy. The work adopts the historical analytical and hermeneutical methods in achieving the aim of this paper. The aim of this work is to refute wrong and extreme practices conceived by some contemporary African Christians on the use of traditional medicine. Findings from this work show that the Church can help to address the issues of ignorance and hypocrisy among her members on the use of traditional medicine through hermeneutical study of the scripture. The paper calls for attitudinal change by some Christians towards the practice and use of traditional medicine, calling to mind the fact that some illnesses defy the conventional orthodox medical practice. Moreover, the Bible recognizes the efficacy of roots, shrubs, herbs, which are the major components of traditional medicine.

**Key Words:** Attitude, Traditional, Medicine, Contemporary, Christian.



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## Introduction

Throughout the ages, the consumption of traditional medicine has been one of the problems of some Christians. It has affected some Christians at some stage of their life. The concept of traditional medicine which is also known as alternative medicine involves the use of shrubs, roots, bark of trees and animal substance as medicinal recipes for the restoration of an individual to full health. Most importantly too, it should be noted in restoring an individual to full health Africans take cognizance of the physical and spiritual aspects of man. This invariably makes it expedient for the involvement of certain practices like divination and sacrifices for the total restoration to health of a sick person.

The use of divination for instance as noted by Apenda and Adegba becomes necessary in the process of healing in African Religion because in the absence of laboratories in the African health care delivery system, divination becomes panacea for getting to the root causes of illnesses (83). However, the above procedural practices employed in traditional medicine for the total restoration of health of the individual have come under great scrutiny and ridicule from some Christians who ascribe derogatory names like *juju*, magic and idolatry.

Sequel to the above, Christians have tended to despise traditional medicine, thus developing a very negative attitude towards it. Most Christians on the basis of faith and ignorance of the biblical analysis concerning the consumption of herbs, shrubs, bark of trees and root do not seek this medical system. Those who however muster the courage to patronize this health care system are seen as non-conformists and those involving themselves in heathen and idolatrous practices like charms etc. As a result of this negative outlook, some Christians who cherish and value traditional medicine sneak to their villages and their journeys shrouded in top secrecy to obtain traditional medicine to cure their illnesses.

The paper therefore examines the African world view of traditional medicine, Biblical world view of traditional medicine, factors behind Christian negative attitude towards traditional medicine and other related phenomena and culminates in the call for attitudinal change on behalf of the Christians towards traditional medicine and medical practice even as the Bible consciously and



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explicitly recognizes and acknowledges the efficacy and use of herbs and shrubs for food and medicinal purposes. This paper studies the subject of traditional medicine from the view point of Africans and Christian Religion using historical analytical approach.

## **African World View of Traditional Medicine**

The constant and general foundation of African tradition is its spiritual view of life. The visible nature is closely linked and interconnected with the world of the invisible and the spiritual. The concept and significance of health and sickness in African tradition is best seen when examined against the background of the world view. Metuh as quoted by Shishima argues that:

Health for an African is not simply the absence of illness or the perfect functioning of all the organs of the body. But health is being whole which results from harmonious relationship with all the beings with whom man is linked to God, deities, the spirits, other men and nature. Disintegration of this relationship results in sickness which might require medicine and healing (73).

The African concepts of medicine include drugs for curing or preventing disease as well as objects or recipes with magical effects. The essential ingredients of medicine are trees, plants or herbs, sometimes animal's matters are added. The power of medicine is derived from the proper processing and mixing of these ingredients. Thus, medicine are thought to derive from the power put by God into some herbs and other substance which those who know the right formula can tap and use (Shishima, 73).

The administration of medical treatment takes a wide variety of forms depending on the nature of ailment. Given the closeness of traditional Africans to nature, extensive use is made of vegetables, either single or as a mixture. Whole or parts of animals and mineral substances are utilized. Traditional African healing also makes use of a wide range of other methods and techniques. Such methods include fasting and dieting, hydrotherapy diagnosis etc. Faith is a major ingredient in traditional herbal medicine. There are few mysteries to which we cannot adequately provide answers. For instance, there exists in the profession a few plants and herbs whose efficacy is



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beyond question. But the mystery is that these plants can only be effective in the cure of ailments if harvested at a certain times of the day. Some can only work if plucked in the early morning hours or late evening, others at noon and no other times (Ejizu 54). From the foregoing, it can be said that traditional medicine does nothing strange. There are things of nature which are God given and attaches to faith for effective utilization and the resultant consequences in cure just as Christianity does.

### **Biblical World View of Traditional Medicine**

The use of traditional medicine is justified by the Holy Bible, the Christian sacred and referral text which recognizes and acknowledges the use and potency of shrubs and herbs for food and medicinal purpose. In fact the Bible has clear passages which support the above view point (Genesis 1: 29-30; 2Kings 4:39; Psalm 104: 14; Jeremiah 8:22; Ezekiel 47:12 and Hebrew 6: 3 etc.). For instance, the Bible states:

I give you every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it, they will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground everything that has the breath of life in it I give every green plant for food. And it was so (Genesis 1: 29-30, NIV)

Furthermore, Psalm 104:14 observes that God made grass to grow for the cattle and plants for man to use so that man can grow his or her crops. Similarly, God blesses the soil which drinks in the rain that often falls on it and which grows plants and herbs that are useful to those for whom it is cultivated (Hebrew 6:7). The usefulness of these plants, shrubs and herbs to man has no limitations as it could be for both food and medicinal purposes. Adegba and Apenda opines that “text in Ezekiel 47: 12 is more explicit on this issue when it states that the trees will provide food and their leaves will be used for healing people”. They further stressed that; “It can be clearly seen that, the above biblical passages do not only lay credence to the use of herbs and roots for food and medicinal purposes, but equally justify the importance and efficacy of traditional medicine” (8).

### **Factors Affecting the Consumption of Traditional Medicine by some Christians**



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Many Criticisms have been levelled against African Traditional religion for quite sometimes by some Western investigators and missionaries. In the same vein, traditional medicine is facing many challenges in this era of rapid growth in science and technology due to strong influences from western cultures and Christianity. Some of these factors are examined below.

### **i. Erroneous Assertion**

Some of the derogatory terms used on African traditional religion by the Western investigators and missionaries also affected the consumption of African medicine. The indigenous methods of healing that the western investigators and missionaries met were looked upon as “barbaric, fetish, primitive, diabolical, juju, crude and unscientific” (Erhagbe and Ehiabhi 150). Owing to the above mentality, these exists that long brewing controversy on whether a Christian should use traditional medicine or not. The reason for this attitudinal behaviour is not farfetched as Christians complain that traditional medicine involves such practices as divination, rituals and sacrifices which are inimical to their faith. Some Christians categorically but rather erroneously assert that traditional medicine is juju and would not have anything to do with it (Apenda and Adega 84).

### **ii. Unhygienic Preparation Medicine**

Some Christians complained that the preparations of African traditional medicines are done in unhygienic environments and as such, they should not be administered to people. It is however gratifying to note that the said unhealthy environments are rapidly paving way for hygienic ones. This is consequent to the present focus or interest on indigenous medications as complementary source of healthcare delivery system by various levels of governments in Nigeria. By this renewed interest, Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association in some states in Nigeria are educated periodically by National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) on environmental hygiene (Iyere 195).

### **Lack of Precise Dosage**

Lack of precise dosage is another problem besting the consumption of African traditional plants. The critics maintain that lack of precise dosage often results in overdose which leads to health



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complications (Edemode 270). This accusation is correct within the level of synthesized extracts as medication. However, when herbs are used as food or supplements the issue of over dosage may not necessarily occur to the extent of causing health problems to patients. Adodo in Iyere clarifies the issue thus:

The idea of precise dosage only applies when dealing with chemicals or synthesized plant extracts. In dealing with such substances, precise dosage is vital to avoid over dosing. But when herbs are used as food or as supplement precise dosage does not really apply. The body simply takes the amount of nutrients it needs and the rest are excreted through the various body organs such kidneys and the skin. It is therefore wrong to impose a chemical mentality on the use of herbs generally (141),

### **Attitude of some Contemporary Christians towards Traditional Medicine in Anyigba Community**

The attitude of some Christians to traditional medicine in Anyigba is comes from both positive and negative perceptions. The fact is that some contemporary Christians in Anyigba have a very negative view and attitude towards traditional medicine. They despise and treat traditional medicine as if it is infested with leprosy. Owing to the above mentality, there exists that long brewing controversy on whether a Christian should use traditional medicine or not. The reason for this attitudinal behaviour is not far-fetched as some Christians complained that traditional medicine involves practices as divination, rituals and sacrifices which are contrary to their faith (Apenda and Adeg, 84). Some contemporary Christians categorically but rather erroneously assert that traditional medicine is juju and would not have anything to do with it.

Some Christians affirmed that subscribing to traditional medicine should not be a matter of compulsion. These Christians are of the opinion that there are some health challenges where it is a matter of compulsion to see orthodox medical practitioners and other health workers in hospitals and clinics. They believed that emergency causes requires the services of professional health care providers because the indigenous method is gradual. Aside from being compulsory, many of the Pastors also stated that they do not like going to traditional herbal homes because of their status,



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beliefs, faith and some past experiences they have had in those herbal homes. Pastor Dominic Adejoh in Anyigba stated that:

I have never visited herbal homes for traditional medicine in my entire life. I don't believe in them because illness are not artificial and as such, they cannot be handled by traditional medicine practitioners. I consult western health workers to know what to do and what not to do so as to stay healthy (Field Work 2025).

Indeed, Pastor Dominic Adejoh's stance affirms the argument that the diagnosis of illness in traditional medicine is normally in accordance with the patient's cultural milieu but also brings to the fore the main line of divergence between traditional medicine and orthodox medicine. Still another brother, Awulu Baba Matthew affirms that consuming traditional medicine amount to denial of the work of the Holy Spirit to heal people when he or she prays. He also went further to say that one of the reasons why he would not like to consume traditional medicine is on the issue of having capacity to heal all diseases.

From the above analysis it can be inferred that Christian negative attitude towards traditional medicine is not for its want of efficacy but strictly on the properties of faith. As a result of this attitude Christian brothers and sisters who wish to patronize traditional medicine are placed in a great dilemma and the risk of being ex-communicated for daring to involve themselves in traditional practices which are parallel to their faith. Those who muster the courage to obtain and use traditional medicine do so in top secrecy, sneaking out to villages to obtain same from medicine men and women. The above scenario discourages and scares most Christians away from traditional medicine, just to maintain their credibility, reputation and faith.

Reacting to the above negative attitude towards traditional medicine, Shishima explains that traditional medicine does nothing strange in its practice hence, it only makes use of the ordinary things of nature which are God given, and the attachment of faith for effective utilization which results in cure (74). It should be said at this juncture that traditional medicine does not just incorporate such practices as divination and sacrifices for the fun of it as earlier seen in the



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introductory part of this paper as some of the factors that hindered some contemporary Christians from subscribing to traditional medicine.

The simple fact is that, without medical laboratory to carry out tests divination becomes imperative in unveiling and getting to the root cause of illness for effective and the total restoration to health of an individual (Apenda and Adega, 360). Furthermore, as regards to sacrifice Gbenda correctly notes that there is no living religious tradition which does not practice the ritual of sacrifice, hence it occupies a central position for instance in the Judaic old Testament and Christianity today (50). Thus defining sacrifice, Gbenda states that it is a material oblation made to a deity by means of a consecration and consumption of the thing offered. He notes in conclusion that: "Sacrifice is a deeply religious phenomenon in which an animal or cereal is made to an object of worship to get in touch with the sacred, to establish, sustain, restore relationship and for communication" (50).

Subscribing to the above view, Kayode itemizes five motives for sacrifice as; adoration, thanksgiving, bargaining (i.e motive), propitiation (peace offering) and explanation or reparation (8-9). Drawing inspiration from the above explanations especially, from the fact that all religious traditions including Christianity practice sacrifice it would amount to cheap blackmail for Christians to give the dog a bad name just to hang it, that is by likening traditional medicine and its usage as juju, magic, witchcraft, sacrifice, rituals, idolatry amongst other derogatory concepts and nomenclatures.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made within the premises of the paper objectives and findings.

- i. Christian leaders should explain and understand biblical passages on traditional medicinal substances as gifts from God for the consumption of mankind.
- ii. The utilization of traditional medicinal therapy to meet the healthcare requirements of the people should be encouraged as a way of promoting the welfare of Christian's life.





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- iii. There should be a complete reorientation and attitudinal change on the part of Christians towards traditional medicine. Once this negative behavior is changed positively and the faith of the Christians restored in traditional medicine, the first step towards a productive health for the people would be enhanced.
- iv. Collaboration between traditional medicine practitioners and Christians should be encouraged. This is because the traditional medicine practitioners are closer to the people and from this study, they are contacted first because they are accessible and their practices are affordable. The synergy between the traditional medical practitioners and Christians will bring about the systematization of indigenous health care practices. This will further reduce the issue of fear and shame experienced by some Christians. It will also help in ascertaining the long term safety and efficacy of traditional herbal medicine.
- v. Church leaders and Christian ministers should discourage the act of slamming excommunication as a punitive action on adherents who obtain and use traditional medicine by likening it to juju, witchcraft, rituals, primitive and sacrifices etc. This punitive measure and debasing concepts discourage and scares most Christians away from traditional medicine and by implication depriving them of the cheapest form of medication in the fact of sky rocketing orthodox medicine which most Nigerians are unable to afford.

## Conclusion

Having examined both traditional method and healing and that of Christianity in line with their faiths, it is observed that their relationship is so close. The basic belief system (God) is one and the same in both Christianity and traditional religion. Thus, it is recommended that both have a lot to share. Therefore they can interrelate and co-exist. This is why some Christian patients simultaneously take treatment from western health institutions and from traditional medicine practitioners. On the other hand, it was established that, traditional medicine does not do any strange thing in its practice, but make effective use of herbs and roots which are gifts from God. If seen from the perspective of their different world views, both approaches are valid. Although,



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we believe in the usefulness of traditional therapy and Christian healing, our Lord God is able to make good all the two medical systems. The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 17: 16) is a good example of the merits that can be derived from neighbourliness between people of different religions and cultures (Shishima 77). Christianity and traditional religion should co-exist in harmony and avoid erroneous words regard each other's claim. Apenda and Adega warn that:

Mutual co-existence and fellowship between practitioners of African religion and Christianity be encouraged. Adherents of the two faiths should respect each other's faithful and avoid making provocative, inflammatory and scandalous remarks regarding each other's absolute claim over certain practices and religious beliefs in general, they further says that this point is made against the back drop of Christians making derogatory remarks on African religion in general and traditional medicine in particular as being juju, charms and witchcraft amongst other such concepts (86).

This negative attitude and remarks do not encourage a healthy or peaceful co-existence between groups, meanwhile the two faiths are to co-exist in harmony for a better Nigerian society and to ensure health for all.

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