CHAPTER FIVE

Healing Practices in African Indigenous Churches of Nigeria

5.0 Introduction

Christianity in Nigeria is widely acknowledged to be among the fastest growing in the world and exhibits different strands ranging from missionary established or mainline churches to wholly indigenous (Aladura) prophet-healing churches and a plethora of Pentecostal churches that emerged in recent times. As seen in the previous chapter, one chief characteristic of indigenous churches in Nigeria is the emphasis on healing and prayer as actual signs of intervention of God in human affairs. Healing became an emphasis largely because on the one hand, the health and healing process is regarded as an integral part of the African traditional religion, and as such native Christians tend to have the same perception carried over from their former religion into their new-found faith. Secondly, healing is intractably linked to their religious belief and practices owning to historical antecedents as many of the indigenous churches owe their emergence to the healing feats of their founders in the second decade of the twentieth century, as noted by Isichei

It is no coincidence that a number of Christian prophetic movements were founded during the 1918 flu pandemic, which made the limitations of both western and traditional medicine painfully apparent. Kimbangu had his first vision at that time, which was the year when in western Nigeria, the future Christ Apostolic Church was founded.

This historical factor which became recourse for denominational healing emphasis and practice in some of the indigenous churches like the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Church will be elaborated upon subsequently in this chapter. As previously noted, the Christ Apostolic Church mentioned above is one of the foremost indigenous churches, and the MFM church is an offshoot of this church. This is why healing and deliverance are regarded as one

2 E. Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa –From Antiquity to the Present, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 199. Simon Kimbangu was the founder of Eglise de Jesus sur la terre par le prophet Simon Kimbangu, (EJCSK) in Congo, who died in prison on account of his popular movement which he began in the early part of the twentieth century. These revivalist movements happened simultaneously across Africa in a quest by native Christians to make their faith respond to need of healing in their context.
of the cardinal emphasis in the MFM church, although the MFM has gained popularity and acceptance by Nigerians over the years largely because, unlike the CAC that is localized to the western region of Nigeria in most case, the MFM church has branches across Nigeria and internationally. Another difference is that the CAC is a wholly indigenous church, with lay leadership and an ethnic orientation, but the MFM has within its fold elites and members from diverse ethnicity and though began as an AIC, has grown to be Pentecostal in outlook. As noted earlier, the founder of the church, Dr.D.K Olukoya, is a microbiologist and a doctoral degree holder of molecular genetics from the University of Reading in the United Kingdom. Unlike many leaders of the CAC, Olukoya’s education served as leverage in attracting people from different strata of the society. Moreover, Olukoya did not attend any theological institution, but his teachings are a reflection of popular theology of the grassroots (often seen in literal translation of the Bible and drawing from perceptions in African religious philosophy or worldview); and a reliance on his educational background as a microbiologist. Sometimes as seen in his numerous publications, his profession and experience as a microbiologist are frequently cited in the course of his sermons.

In this chapter, attention will be focused on healing practices in the African traditional context, some of the Nigerian churches, and the MFM church in particular. Healing practices in the MFM church is significant in this study because of its Christological association. Before consideration of healing emphasis in the MFM, a review of historical antecedents of healing practices in some Nigerian churches will be made. It is important for this study to know what informs the high emphasis on healing and exorcism in some churches in Nigeria and how this has projected Christianity. What do people make of the healing practices and how has this portrayed Jesus Christ in the Nigerian religious context?

There are different images used to describe Jesus Christ in African theological circles deriving from how He is perceived in a particular context. He is variously seen as Christ the Victor who has absolute power over the evil forces, Christ as the Chief who controls authority in his domain, Christ the Elder brother, Christ as the Ancestor, and more relevant to this study, Christ the Medicine man (nganga\(^3\) or babalawo ) or Jesus the healer, a couch.

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\(^3\) Schoffeleers uses nganga as a paradigm for Christological reflection in Africa. Nganga is a Bantu word for the medicine person. See M. Schoffeleers, ‘Christ in African Folk Theology: The Nganga paradigm’ in T. & O Blately (eds.), Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression, London: Portsmouth 1994, .73; just as the Babalawo or Maraba apply to the same person in Yoruba and Hausa tribes of Nigeria respectively.
popular among the Pentecostals. Jesus the healer or medicine man may be captivating in the African setting because of the ordinary African’s quest for health and well being. It is a paradigm that resonates with the aspiration of the people.

5.1 Healing in African Traditional Society

The quest for wholeness has always been the desire of man in every culture. It is a universal concept that exists in all facets of human existence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is a “state of perfect physical, mental, and social well being.”\(^4\) Cece Kolie, a Guinean theologian elaborates on the social dimension of this definition. The individual who is the focus of the World Health Organization’s definition lives amongst people in a given socio-economic and political context. Kolie attempts to give this definition an African coloration because the individual is affirmed positively or negatively by the social grouping he belongs and this tend to affect his standing in life. ‘Fundamentally, for the African person, being ill is an alteration in the equilibrium of the human organism, but it is also, and especially, a rent in the social fabric.’\(^5\) Kolie reasons that when health is defined this way, it becomes less abstract, more dynamic and easy to grasp especially in the African context.

Aylward Shorter, a Catholic missionary theologian, agrees that health should be defined to include its social dimension. According to him, ‘Wholeness is experienced by human beings at various levels—in rapport with nature, in bodily health, in expectation of survival after death, in social and psychic integration and in the sphere of human morality and the world of cosmic forces. The ambivalent experience of health and sickness at all these levels beckons us to final wholeness proclaimed by Christ.’\(^6\) By implication the individual’s health goes beyond his physical well being, but also with the natural and social order including the cosmic world. The later is of particular interest to the African who believes sturdily that the physical world of the humans is primarily influenced or dominated by the world of the spirits beyond. This belief impinges on all facets of human existence in Africa. Shorter acknowledges different levels of human existence. These include the physical, the

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\(^5\) C. Kolie, ‘Jesus as Healer?’, 132.

psychic, the social, the moral and the spiritual. Illness in one of these affects the other. Schoffeleers cited Victor Turner’s view on Ndembu of Zambia’s perception of health for the generality of Africans: illness is conceived of as a kind of misfortune similar to bad luck at hunting, reproductive disorders, physical accidents, and the loss of property.\(^7\) This reiterates earlier view that the African sees wholeness much beyond the physical well being to include issues that affects his/her community and environment.

As wholeness is considered as peace within oneself and his environment, therapy in most cases is aimed at restoration of harmony between one and his environment. In the account of David Tuesday Adamo, a Nigerian theologian, healing practices of Africans predated the colonial era. He stated that ‘before the advent of Christianity and Western medicine, Africans developed some effective ways of rescuing themselves from certain types of diseases. These ways included the use of herbs, mysterious or potent words, animal parts, living and non-living things, water, fasting, prayers, laying on of hands and other rituals for restoration of harmony between people and the environment.’\(^8\)

The African adopts an all encompassing approach to healing. An illness or disease may have spiritual, psychic undertone as much as it is physical. This is a singular reason why African indigenous churches thrive in these settings because of their claims that individual misfortunes may be traced to ancestral spirits in his or her lineage. John Mbiti, one of the foremost African theologians from Kenya claims that the African ‘is notoriously religious.’\(^9\) Africans view everyday occurrences from the perspective of their religion and interprets all of life as a function of same. ‘There is absolute faith in God, because the ordinary African looks for the solution to almost all his/her problems in religion. Here too, he/she absolutely depends on God as his/her final refuge.’\(^10\) Since it is assumed that all human problems have spiritual undertone, solutions must therefore include the spiritual. The end of all religious activities in African religious system is for the individual to live well, have good health, to be prosperous and to be at peace with himself and his environment. Religion for the African, as stated in the previous chapter is utilitarian. Asamoah-Gyado, a Ghanaian theologian links the

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\(^7\) M. Schoffleers, ‘Christ in African Folk Theology: The N\textit{\textsl{g}anga paradigm},’77.
African’s religious craving to the question of healing; ‘…healing which encompassing spiritual, social, communal and material well being. African generally search for solutions to problems within the religious realm, thus healing is broadly understood here as meaning divine intervention in human crises.’

Oborji, a Nigerian Catholic theologian, explains the linkage between African worldview and healing practices in the AICs thus, ‘The African worldview explains ultimate reality and life in terms of spirit rather than of flesh. Therefore, if one favours only the post –enlightenment paradigm worldview over and against African worldview, then we would have great difficulty in appreciating the emphasis being placed on spirit possession and healing in most of the AICs.’

Diseases that plagued communities in the past were usually attributed to the spirit world or angry ancestors who need to be pacified through ample sacrifices. In modern times such diseases may have their root cause in germ theory as stated in previous chapter. In the African traditional society however, spirit theory overwhelms the germ theory. Oborji acknowledged this, ‘Among the Africans, psychic disturbances are partly attributed to the evil spirits, the devils (demons) and require an exorcism.’ Belief in the dominance of the spirits over human affairs is pervasive in African cultures. Adamo added to this claim that ‘…the existence of evil is painfully real in the African indigenous tradition. Witches, sorcerers, wizards, evil spirits and all ill-wishers are considered enemies. The awareness of these enemies is a major source of fear and anxiety in African indigenous society. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, there is a belief that every person has at least one known or unknown enemy called ota who can bring painful consequences. It may be abnormal behaviour, sudden loss of children and property, chronic illness or even death.’

This perception of reality has hardly changed in modern times even among the Christians.

In many of the AICs, the reality of the dominance of world of the spirits in human affairs is not only affirmed through preaching but reflected in their songs of praise. In most cases, worship in this context is usually carried out in a mood of celebration because the Lord had obtained victory for His people over the evil wishes and activities of the enemies. Overcoming evil and one’s enemies is a dominant theme in the AICs liturgy and accounts for

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their numerous testimonies, songs and dance. This is a reflection of the utilitarian temperament of the African traditional religion that people worship because the gods have acted on their behalf and giving their blessings to human endeavours. Worship in African traditional religion is usually a celebration. These Christians consciously or unconsciously allow the African worldview to filter into their worship as they weave into the tapestry of these songs words that are similar to praise songs of the gods in African traditional religion for successes achieved in particular endeavour. For example, in Aladura churches, typical songs like the ones below arouse a mood of celebration because the theme dwells on God obtaining victory over the enemy.

Song 1 *Opelope re* (2ce)

*Aye iba yeye mi*

*Opelope re*

But for you God,

The world (the world of witches and the wicked beings) would have ruined my life,

But for you God.

Song 2 *Ebami gbe gba ope o, ye ye ye* (2ce)

*Nitori pe, emi leni taye tiro, wipe ko le da nkan re se*

*Sugbon mo ri aanu re gba. Olu orun, lo ba mi se*

**Meaning:**

Join me in giving thanks, yes, yes

Because I have been written off as incapable of attaining success in earthly endeavours,

But I became a recipient of your mercy (O God),

the King of heaven produced this on my behalf.

The enemy is perceived as anything and everything that makes living difficult or unbearable. It is evident from these songs that Christians in the AICs believe in the ever present struggle between the forces of good and evil and the immense possibilities of their influence on human activity. Beside this is the belief in the ability of their faith to bring about victorious living, good health and general well being. Thirdly, the belief in the dominance of the Omnipotent God is a recurrent theme in their theology. Successes and achievements are celebrated in theses churches in a manner reminiscent of worship in the African traditional religious context, where adherents dance and sing after sacrifices have been made and the gods have been appeased.
The belief in the ability of the evil spirits such as witches, demons and sorcerers to afflict the living is also apparent in the wider society. Recently, in an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign televised in a local television in Nigeria, a man living with AIDS confessed that he once believed his detractors cast a spell on him and that is why he was always ill. It took a visit to the clinic and a test to confirm he had succumbed to the dreaded disease. Before then family members had counselled that his frequent illness was the activity of witches and wicked people in his village who were envious of his progress and therefore cast a spell on him. They counselled that he visit the maraba (local priest or medicine man) to remove the spell and regain his health. This is typical of many Africans, their educational attainment notwithstanding; a derivative of their African worldview of the dominance of spirit over terrestrial existence. It is therefore easy to understand why evil–spirit possession echoes so much in the AICs’ healing practices which they also justify by pointing to relevant portions of the New Testament where exorcism was carried out by Jesus Christ and his disciples.

The medicine-man (babalawo, dibia, nganga as variously called in different parts of Africa), in the traditional setting is the chief health consultant who mediates between the worlds of the spirits and human, and versed in the knowledge and application of herbs. Foliage from surrounding vegetation, barks and roots of trees are used to prepare concussions for the healing process. The efficacy of these medicines largely depends on the knowledge, ability or power of the local medicine-man. These preparations are either taken orally or incisions are made on the body of the infirmed and the medicine is applied. In other instances, in order to make the medicine more potent, the medicine man make incantations seeking the help of the divinities to bring their power to bear on the preparations.

The line between pure herbal practice and involvement of mediums in healing practices is sometimes blurred. But one thing stands out clear, that healing is an activity carried by informed practitioners in the African traditional religion, who in most cases must have devoted years of apprenticeship learning the art and trade under the tutelage of experienced local priests and through the process of interacting with deities who are believed to give knowledge and requisite skills for traditional healing practices. Among the Yoruba of

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15 Ighinedion Television, Abuja, “Health Awareness campaign.” September 2, 2009. AIDS is an acronym for Acquired Immunity deficiency syndrome that unlike malaria, another disease killing millions annually in sub-saharan Africa, has no cure yet.
Nigeria, *Osanyin*\(^{16}\) is the local divinity appointed by the Supreme Being, *Olodumare*, to be his minister of health. Therefore all health practitioners of the traditional religion must continually consult *Osanyin*, (who himself is the younger brother of *Orunmila*, the arch-divinity and repository of all knowledge and wisdom), and make appropriate sacrifices and seek help when necessary. According to Idowu, Orunmila is ‘reputed to be a great doctor. Therefore every qualified *babalawo* must know, not only how to practice divination, but also the elaborate set of herbal remedies connected with the *Odu* corpus.’\(^{17}\) Annual festivals are held where the medicine-men and the local people pay homage to these gods in order to receive the blessing of good health and fertility in the course of the year. Among the Yoruba of Osogbo in Nigeria, there is an annual *Osun* festival where the divinities in charge of health, fertility and prosperity are implored with ample sacrifices for blessings on the worshippers. This practice subsists till date.

It is worth noting that in the traditional health practices, attention is not giving to the process of healing alone but protection from that that creates disequilibrium in life, and against perceived enemies. As earlier stated Africans believe in the preponderance of evil spirits that wreak havoc in human affairs. Ordinary events in life such as accidents or natural disasters are attributed to evil forces that one must constantly protect himself. Because of fear and insecurity, people often patronize the services of medicine-men (*Babalawo*-Yoruba, *Dibia* –Igbo, *Maraba* –Hausas, all of Nigeria) to secure aids for protection from evil attacks of perceived enemies. Adamo, said that Africans, prior to the advent of Christianity, had evolved ways of dealing with adversities like diseases, sorcery, witchcraft, enemies and retrogression in life. However, the missionaries asked converted indigenes to do away with these methods in tackling these numerous life’s problems without offering any substitute. Charms, medicine, incantations, divinations, sacrifices and other cultural ways of protecting, healing and liberating ourselves from the evil powers that fill African forests were hurriedly discarded in the name of Christianity.\(^{18}\)

Adamo stated that among the Yoruba, methods employed by the medicine-men include the use of natural materials and potent words which were put to defensive and

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\(^{17}\) E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*,'78.

\(^{18}\) David Tuesday Adamo, *African Cultural Hermeneutics*, p.74
offensive use in dealing with the evil ones. Potent words included the use of ‘powerful imprecatory spoken words (the so-called incantations) called *ogede* in the Yoruba language.’\(^{19}\) The medicine-man functions as a diviner here and teaches the one who has come to seek protection appropriate potent words in attacking the perceived enemy or warding off his threat by casting a spell or curse that will render his powers impotent. According to him, traditionally, when one identifies an enemy and does not have the potent words or medicine to deal with such an enemy, a medicine man (*babalawo*) is consulted for an appropriate remedy. Alongside other preparations, the client is taught the use of potent words that are charmed which are sent to ensnare the enemy and destroy his plans or purpose. In most cases, the enemy is made insane or mentally unfit. These words, according to Adamo, must be recited exactly according to the prescription of the medicine man otherwise it may not be efficacious.

In a similar vein, leaders in some of the Aladura churches are known to recommend the use of imprecatory Psalms as a potent weapon to dislodge the activities of the enemies. Such practices they justify as appropriate since it is an Old Testament practice,\(^{20}\) but some theologians see it as a carry-over from the African traditional religion practices.

This practice is observed also in some of the AICs that recommend imprecatory psalms to rid off stubborn relations in the family and community who are bent on retarding one’s progress in life or obstinate bosses who refuse what is due to one in the office. In the MFM for example, potent words or imprecatory prayers are offered regularly against enemies of one’s progress in their quest to prevent their evil activities or dislodge them. In worship experience in this context as said in earlier chapter, the pastor calls out the enemies in local expressions such as “house–hold wickedness”, “evil manipulator of my destiny”, “evil spiritual forces remote-controlling my daily activities”, ‘destiny-changers”, witches of my family, enemies in my family lineage” etc- and prays that they die! The people respond in unison by praying “die, die, die…in the name of Jesus.”\(^{21}\) The goal is similar to the wishes of

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\(^{20}\) The encounter between Balak, king of Moab and Balaam the prophet (Numbers 22) where the former asked the prophet to curse or cast a spell on the Israelites is a practice similar to what obtains in many African cultures. Diviners (medicine-men in African contexts), like the prophets, are believed to have supernatural power to cast spell upon people which inevitably affect the fortunes in life.

\(^{21}\) Dr. Daniel Olukoya, the founder and General Overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles church claims that the goal of such prayer is the death of the spirit behind such wicked activity and not the person per se.
the Babalawo or diviner who desires the death of the enemy of his client. Although many of the newer Pentecostal churches readily condemn and disassociate themselves from any practice linking them with African traditional religion, (often describing them as demonic or syncretism), they have however unwittingly borrowed some concepts and practices from these traditional religion. This is because this practice resonates with the cultural mind set or world view of the people.

The other use of potent words by the AICs and Pentecostal churches is in the realm of prophetic declarations. Adherents in these churches are encouraged to attend prophetic declaration conferences and seminars where the word of God which is active and potent is declared into their circumstances to dislodge negative and evil happenings in their lives as they embrace the healing virtues encapsulated in these words. Burgess, a British anthropologist with particular interest in African churches, cited the case of a Nigerian church where the word of God is equated with the power of God; ‘God’s word has intrinsic power—that is, it carries its power within itself…It therefore carries the power of God and fulfils the purpose of God.’

Many attend religious gatherings at the beginning of each month to receive blessings through the prophetic declarations of the men of God that will transform their lives and bring favour in their employment and businesses. They are encouraged to receive and confess these declarations received directly from God by His chosen servants. These declarations bring not only physical healing but financial and material prosperity too. These Christians attach much importance to the words of these prophets of God just as the adherent of the traditional religion attaches much importance to the potent words of the soothsayer or medicine man. The emphasis is usually on God’s blessings that bring about well being. It is now a common practice for these Christians to have ring tones on their cell phone of these prophetic declarations such as ‘You shall be blessed in your businesses, you shall be blessed in your families, you shall be blessed when you go out, you shall be blessed when you come in…’ Some Nigerian social scientists equate these prophetic declarations to the incantations of the medicine men or diviners of the traditional religion.

Adamo stated also that another way of protecting oneself traditionally from one’s perceived enemies is the use of charms and amulets. ‘The medicine men and women who are healers and diviners usually prepare amulets and charms for those who need them. They are

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used for diverse purposes, but mainly as protective devices to prevent enemies, witches, wizards and evil spirits…\(^{23}\) from harming the individual. Charms and amulets are made from various ingredients depending on the purpose they are prepared to serve. They are hung around the neck or placed on door posts or any vital part of the house. They are wrapped in animal skin, leaves, and feathers of birds, cloth, and paper and tied or sewn around with white or black threads. Potent words are used to activate the efficacy of the charm or amulet.

In some AICs and Pentecostal churches, pastors have found replacement for some of these items in the usage of anointing oil. Members carry anointing oil around like charms for protection from evil and apply them daily on their foreheads declaring the day to be safe and invoking the favour of God upon their lives. Anointing oil in these contexts is taught as containing the power of God, therefore potent for all desirable purposes. It is drunk and applied as healing balm. Its usage goes beyond the biblical recommendation for setting apart for the king or priest office as in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 16:13) or therapeutic purposes in the New Testament (James 5:14).

There are also specialists among traditional medics in African societies just as it is in modern medicine. There are those who function in the department of psychiatry, who take care of those who are either mentally or emotionally unstable. Much of their prognosis is done with the aid of spirit mediums through divinations. The other popular traditional practice that thrives and competes with orthodox medicine is traditional orthopaedics and physiotherapy. These are local bone setters who are deft in the art of local orthopaedics and physiotherapy. They are popular with the people especially in cases where there is delay in healing in government orthopaedic hospitals. Relations of patients discharge them in order to patronize local bone-setters. Some cases have come out successfully after the intervention of the local bone-setters, while others have resulted in dire consequences such as gangrene and amputation. As it is in other areas of African traditional medical practice, there are deities responsible for this department to whom traditional medics have to appeal in the course of their diagnosis and pay homage through regular sacrifices. As noted earlier, the African traditional health practice is rigidly attached to the traditional religion. This is so because of local deities that are responsible for health, fertility, and prosperity just as there are gods of iron whom the local smiths have to subscribe and worship for success in their trade or the god of the earth who farmers must make sacrifices at the beginning of each planting season for a

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bountiful harvest. As far as health is concerned therefore, the African mind-set is such that believes in the intervention of the gods for one to enjoy good health. There is preponderance of this belief even among Christians. This is why the ‘spirit theory’ holds sway over the ‘germ theory’ in many African countries relating to causes of diseases.

5.2 The Medicine-man

In many African societies the medicine man is important just as good health is desirable. Nigerians attach a lot of importance to their well being. Beside material wealth or possessions, the other major concern is good health. This assertion holds true in other parts of Africa too. Kolie cites the result of a survey in French speaking Guinea in West Africa where it was discovered that ‘the realm of disease and healing is the first concern of the African population.’ 24 The African considers his health and well being as a primary concern. Burgess corroborates this as he suggested that among the Yorubas of Nigeria, ‘…the ‘good life’ is summed up in the state of Alafia or ‘peace’ which …embraces protection, health, practical guidance, fertility, success and material prosperity, all fruits of power looked for in Christianity.’ 25 This African quest underlies the religions of Africans as they believe the gods do bestow these blessings on people that they are positively disposed towards. It is therefore understandable why AICs focus on healing as their chief goal as emphasis on the Alafia theme attracts more attention into these churches than the mission churches. Alafia can be likened to the Hebrew word shalom which bears similar connotation of right living and well being. 26 This is why many leaders of the AICs see a close affinity between the people of the Bible and Africans because of similarity in cultures and worldviews.

The primacy attached to health and well-being can be seen also in their disposition towards health related issues especially in their culture. In their social interaction with others in the community, the African enquires about the Alafia of his fellow men and their families. The African does not take things for granted as he is quick to seek available help in times of health crises. This is why the medicine –men who according to Mbiti are regarded as the greatest gift to African societies are indispensable for their role in the health institution in

24 C. Kolie, ‘Jesus as Healer?,’ 139. A poll which was conducted by Jeune Afrique, on March 12, 1980, revealed that the chief concern, ahead of family (48%) and job security (33%), is health (75%).
26 NIV Study Bible notes on Numbers 6:4.
Africa. These local health practitioners are variously called ‘herbalists’ (because of their deep knowledge of herbs and their applications), ‘traditional doctors’, (who have long been on the scene even before the arrival of the white man’s orthodox medicine), and in a more of derogatory term-‘the witch-doctor’, because of close association with soothsayers and mediums who they consult often to have knowledge of diagnosis and course of treatment. Their method involves the complex activity of manipulating elemental spirits through divination, invocation, incantations in favour of the infirmed, to the simple practice of the application of herbs, balms and concoctions to bring about healing. According to Mbiti, one finds these medicine-men in every village in Africa,\(^\text{27}\) and they are welcome into people’s homes as specialists who play an important role in the life of the communities. Their roles in these communities vary from preparing healing portions or herbal medications for the sick or infirmed to preparing talisman to ward off evil. In other instances, the medicine-men play a mediatory role between the living and their ancestors, especially in crises and are apt to prescribe remedies to avert disasters in respective families and communities. Michael Gefland describes the versatility and indispensability of the medicine man that he describes as the kingpin of African communities in this manner,

> European society has no one quite like nganga\(^\text{28}\), an individual to whom people can turn in every kind of difficulty. He is a doctor in sickness, a priest in religious matters, a lawyer in legal issues, a policeman in the detection and prevention of crime, a possessor of magical preparations which can increase crops and instil special skills and talents into his clients. He fills a great need in society; his presence gives assurance to the whole community.\(^\text{29}\)

Kolie acknowledged the waning influence of traditional chiefs, masters of initiation, juridico-political institutions and rites, and other traditional structures of African society in today’s Africa, ‘...but soothsayers, seers, healers, abide. Surely this shows that the objective of life, from time immemorial abides, as well: escape from the ravages of time.’\(^\text{30}\) This is to say that in spite of modern development, the local medicine-man still finds place of relevance in the health-care system of the African society because of the much importance that Africans attach to their health and wellbeing. Besides, in many African countries, hospitals and other modern health institutions exists only in the cities, far from the reach of the villages where the medicine-men hold sway. Added to this is the failing health-care system and decaying

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28 Nganga refers to the witchdoctor among the tribes of East Africa.
29 M. Schoffeleers, ‘Christ in African Folk Theology: The Nganga paradigm,’ 76.
infrastructures in many government health institutions in African countries as these could not be maintained or sustained because of lack of funds or simply because of corruption and ineptitude. The medicine-men are feared, loved and respected. Beside the local chief, the medicine-men exert some measure of influence in the village community. This is because his place is the first port of call in times of sickness, disease and misfortune. His role here is significant because according to Mbiti, the aforementioned are ‘...generally believed to be caused by the ill-will or ill-action of one person against another, normally through the agency of witchcraft and magic. The medicine-man has therefore to discover the cause of the sickness, find out who the criminal is, diagnose the nature of the disease, apply the right treatment and supply a means of preventing the misfortune from occurring again...Thus, the medicine-man applies both physical and ‘spiritual’ (or psychological) treatment, which assures the sufferer that all is and will be well. The medicine man is in effect both doctor and pastor to the sick person.‘  

His presence and services are indispensable to the life of the community. It is for this reason that theologians seek to give imagery of the medicine-man a Christological application in the African context because just as the medicine-man’s role as a doctor and pastor of the community is indispensable for her survival, so is Jesus Christ the ultimate Shepherd and healer for the world. This is why in a quest for Christological relevance; Jesus is called the medicine-man or Nganga by some theologians in the west and east of Africa. It resonates with similar role of Jesus as he walked on the parched surface of Judea and Galilee as an itinerant preacher and healer. Matthew’s account of Jesus ministry stated:

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among people.  

Luke corroborated this in his account,

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.  

Aylward Shorter said ‘Jesus was a medicine-man in his own culture and a worker of wonders.’

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32 Matt. 9:35 (NIV).
33 Acts 10:38 (NIV).
34 Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor*, 3.
The reason why the medicine-man still plays such a dominant role in African communities is not farfetched. African traditional societies are essentially paternalistic, where the younger ones are trained to look up to the elderly and those with distinguished role like the medicine-man for guidance and protection. Besides, the African is believed to very religious. Therefore, religious personages will for a long time to come continue to play dominant roles in the community. In cases where the African finds himself in the city, he seeks out institutions that play similar roles like his traditional religious base which he has left behind by reason of his migration to the city. The African indigenous churches are more appealing in this regard because they incorporate certain elements of the local culture into their liturgies such that the African feels at home in worship. It becomes easy to transpose the same love, respect and fear which he had hitherto had for the medicine-man in the village to the pastor in the city. This is why pastors of some of the AICs command large followership as they assume the role of charismatic leaders that adherents look up to in these settings for guidance and protection.

5.3 The Nigerian Economy and Health Sector

The quest for material acquisition and physical well being may be a universal phenomenon, in Nigeria it assumes an alarming proportion because of the extent to which people go to get wealth and health. It is acknowledged that the cost of living is high in Nigeria relative to other West African countries because Nigerians have a high taste especially for foreign goods. The oil boom of the seventies and eighties heightened this materialistic tendency. This has invariably affected their standard of living as the average Nigerian wants the good things of life and to live comfortably and healthy. Alongside foreign goods from the West is also the importation of Western culture. The acquisition of Western capitalism and lifestyle has impacted on the local culture negatively as almost everything is viewed from the perspective of the European. The church is not left out as happenings in the global scene, especially in the Pentecostal circles. This has affected the dominant theology in the Nigerian society.

The axiom that a people get the kind of leadership they deserve can also apply to the religion arena. The ecclesiological emphasis of the day may largely derive from what the people want to hear or want to have especially among the AICs, where the worldview and cultures permeate their theology. The content of a people’s worldview may not draw only
from their past history and tradition but also from their present day realities. In other words, the past can influence how the present is perceived, but actions or decisions may be taking in the face of current realities and players may merely look for its antecedent in the past to justify it. The implication is that, while it is true that Africans attach much importance to their worldview, the current fluidity of cultures of nations of the world helped by the information age and modern technology, indigenous cultures are not static. The American version of Pentecostalism with emphasis on health, wealth and prosperity finds a popular acceptance in Nigerian Christianity because of her past history and current realities. The AICs in Nigeria emphasize healing and exorcism drawing from experiences in their history and also borrowing from Pentecostal theology on the cardinal point of healing and deliverance in the Gospel. Thus a combination of the traditional view of the past and present realities informs some of these healing practices.

The economic policy failures of past leadership in government of Nigeria and the attendant widespread poverty in the country has made the quest for divine healing to be topical and relevant. Health is a critical issue in Nigeria because of the deteriorating infrastructures in the nation’s health care delivery institutions. This is because Nigeria, like many developing countries, apparently lacks good healthcare system, and adequate medical professionals to man the existing hospitals. Some of the reputable government hospitals are decaying due to years of neglect and poor maintenance culture. The doctor to citizen ratio in Nigeria is one of the poorest in Africa. Government hospitals have come to be regarded as mere consulting clinics. There are no medicines to cater for the sick. The deplorable conditions in these government hospitals have made many to look for different direction in times of health crises. The number of private hospitals is on the increase, but the cost of attending these clinics are well beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Life expectancy in Nigeria is said to be 47 years. The failing health care system has encouraged the growth of alternatives to orthodox medicine ranging from unorthodox practices such as the herbal practices, the involvement of soothsayers (witch-doctors in other cultures), and religious institutions such as the prayer houses for the infirmed, Sabbath healing centres, church based psychiatric homes etc.

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36 Sabbath homes are offshoots of AICs’ quest to have hospital like centres where patients are admitted and nurtured back to health. In their case, patients are prayed for at regular intervals and most often ‘holy or
The AICs and Pentecostal churches’ stress on healing makes it attractive to ordinary folks who desire good health but cannot afford the prohibitive cost. Jesus is peddled in these settings as the ultimate healer who can cure all diseases. In many African cities, it is a common sight to see newspaper adverts, radio jingles, and posters in public places inviting the general public to crusades and revival programmes where invitees will certainly experience salvation, healings and deliverance from evil forces responsible for ill-luck and poverty. Healings, salvation and deliverance are considered to be main attractions to these events and programmes of this nature are considered incomplete without a stress on this. Herein lays the appeal to the invitees. Failure to stress on healing power of the presiding minister of God at such crusades may invariably lead to the poor attendance at such programmes. The more experience the ‘man of God’ has had in healing the sick, raising the dead and delivering the oppressed from witchcrafts and demon spirits, the better the prospect of attendance by the public.

The popular message is ‘Come to Jesus and you will be delivered from all your life’s troubles; come meet with the Great Physician and he will cure all your diseases.’ This in turn affects their perception of Jesus Christ. How is Jesus perceived by the people when their sensitivity is barraged everyday on the street, through the mass media and in popular churches by the health and wealth messages? What kind of paradigm is used to define the Christian faith especially as it has to do with healing? What form of Christology is projected here? These are issues that will be raised later in this chapter.

Healing and deliverance practice is one factor among many others that distinguishes the AICs from the older mission churches. The quest for and claims of actual healings is inherent in the salvation message packaged in the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Christianity is known for, is taken for granted in many of these churches. Soteriology as preached and practiced in some Nigerian indigenous churches connotes not only individual’s salvation sanctified’ water are applied on the patients to alleviate sufferings and diseases. Sabbath homes are popular in the Eastern part of the country and persist till date. In the Western part of the country, these healing centres are known as Faith homes which also serve as maternity centres which are operated by Indigenous churches especially those whose doctrines forbid orthodox medicine. The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) is one of such churches.
from spiritual sin, but also from prevalent forces responsible for poverty and lack, sickness and disease, deprivation and want etc.

5.4 AICs and Healing Emphasis

Having examined the importance of health and well being to the African and the role of the medicine-man in African societies, focus in this section will be beamed on the concept of health and current healing practices in some AICs, their historical antecedents and factors responsible for this.

Many of the AICs as stated above make healing as a cardinal objective, and most often promote this above other aspects of the gospel. This, as will be seen later, was independent of experiences of Pentecostalism and faith healing that began in the early part of last century that had Azusa Street event as its watershed. Anderson argues that the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches dotting the African religious landscape are a continuation of the Holy Spirit movements and the so-called ‘prophet-healing’ and ‘spiritual churches’ of the AICs. According to him, the distinctiveness about these churches is that they have in most cases ‘…responded to the existential needs of African worldview. They have all offered personal encounters with God through the power of the Spirit, healing from sickness, and deliverance from evil in its entire manifestations, spiritual, social and structural.’ Three factors may account for these practices. These are African spirituality and world view, modern trend in global Pentecostalism and biblical antecedents particularly in the New Testament.

The thrust of the teachings and practices of AICs is often focused on well being of the individual as evident in radiant and healthy living; having abundance of financial and

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37 Salvation here deviates from the evangelical connotation of the word as deliverance from personal sin and its consequences, to include deliverance from all that hampers a good life. The stretching of this word to include elements of a good life may owe its root to the African traditional contraption of the word salvation which simply means good life devoid free from every form of adversity and one in harmony with the social and natural order. This interpretation can also be linked to the many years of Pentecostalism in Nigeria that emphasize on ‘…happy, healthy and prosperous lifestyle’ as the will of God for man. (see T.L.Osborn, How to have the Good life, Tulsa: Osborn Foundation Publishers,1977,10)


material possessions, success in life, interpreted as wealth and achievement in chosen
devourds, dominion of one’s environment, subduing perceived enemies and agents of evil
forces; and generally having a good life. These are a derivative of African culture and
traditional religion’s concept of well-being. There is an affinity between African concept of
health and well-being and that of the Semitic culture of the Bible. Richard Burgess affirms
that ‘Nigerian Pentecostals also have a fondness for narrative texts and find particular
affinities between the biblical world and their own. This leads to a preference for the Old
Testament and the narrative portions of the New Testament, especially the Gospels and the
Book of Acts. Old Testament characters, such as Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Hannah
and Ruth, are especially popular as illustrations of the fruits of God’s blessings and
miraculous intervention.’\textsuperscript{40} Emphasis mostly is on appropriating power to overcome
existential needs and negative forces in the environment. In this regard, many in the AICs
have assimilated the Pentecostal dominion theology, that of triumphant disposition over evil,
sickness, poverty and all that makes life unbearable.

Whatever deprives the individual from wholesome living is considered as a spiritual
sickness or ‘attack’ that has to be addressed in prayers and deliverance sessions. As Olusegun
Fakoya stated:

Many Nigerians, both rich and poor, run after pastors for spiritual protection
from known and imaginary enemies. This is typical African syndrome which
education has failed to influence. The bottom line is wholesale embrace and
exploitation of the people’s fear by modern-day Pentecostalism and hence the
multitudes of crusades and revivals to free adherents from the yoke of
witchcraft and sorceries.\textsuperscript{41}

In his critique of the Pentecostal movement and its impact on the AICs, Fakoya noted
that there are certain distinct features or elements that are characteristic of these churches,
which to a large extent derive ‘…heavily from its American influence and amply modified by
its sensitivity to African culture, temperament and inherent materialistic expectations from
whichever God is worshipped.’\textsuperscript{42} The European missionaries came with a brand of
Christianity that focused on individual sin and piety. Africans sought for a form of
Christianity that was both relevant in meeting their existential needs and resonated with their

\textsuperscript{40} Richard Burgess, ‘Nigerian Pentecostal Theology in a Global Perspective,’ 29-63.
\textsuperscript{41} O. Fakoya, ‘The Gospel of Materialism-Nigerian Pentecostalism and Hypocrisy’, (Part 3),
cultural world view. This, they found in their local form of home grown Christianity that is not only focused on eternal bliss in the life after as taught by the missionaries, but one that also seeks an appropriation of temporal blessings in the present life too. Fakoya speaks of common features of this brand of Christianity in Nigeria. According to him, one of the features is the preaching of prosperity messages and another is healing. He distinguishes two types of healing practices in these churches. There are those he describes as ‘General practitioners: those who can heal all diseases without exception.’ The second category of miracle healers includes those that Fakoya calls ‘Specialists’ referring to churches that emphasize exorcism. The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church grew over the years because of its emphasis on prayer, deliverance (exorcism) and healing, as noted in the previous chapter.

5.4.1 Early Missionary thrust and the quest for healing

The mission churches were established in the 19th century and subsequently concerned themselves with the spread of the Christian faith, establishment of schools, hospitals, vocational training centres etc. as noted previously. Schools and infirmaries were considered by the missionaries as the churches’ strong arms of evangelism. Hospitals and infirmaries created supposedly better alternatives to traditional healing practices. The missionaries sometimes vilified the local medicine-men labelling them as witch-doctors and diabolists because of their resort to divination and mediums for diagnosis of ailments. The missionaries were not different from the colonialists in their approach to the health of the indigenes because they desired a return for their free health scheme. The colonialists wanted an active workforce to execute their interests of procuring raw materials for their home industries. Health schemes in this era were self-serving as they were geared towards the preservation of colonial interests. ‘The creation of wealth in the colonies was dominated by the workforce. Infirmaries and hospitals, vaccination programmes and hygiene were all integrated into a comprehensive system of domination. The development of the colonies was nothing but the creation and maintenance of the work tools that were the peasants.’ The missionaries were sometimes seen as collaborators with the colonial authorities because some of them were accused of using their medical practice as a means of conversion to Christianity, as ‘…conversion wrought by an evangelization bound up with medical aid did

\[\text{\footnotesize 43 C. Kolie, ‘Jesus as Healer?’ 139.} \]
not fail to arouse diffidence in certain African milieus. In the colonial context, medicine and mission seemed to respond to one and the same purpose.\textsuperscript{44}

For the missionaries who came from cultures where science was a determinant of what is to be believed in a post-enlightenment era, faith healing and the miraculous were consigned to the era of the primitive past, and not the modern times of scientific breakthroughs. The churches of Europe and America at this time were slowly emerging from a period in which many of their teachings and dogmas were discredited as simplistic, unscientific and merely myths that do not have room in modern contemplations. Theologians were quick to reformulate the Christian faith to be more fitting to contemporary views then and to discard that which is considered offensive or simply incredulous. Therefore, existence of miracles, healings and exorcism were denied or were not accorded their proper place in catechism of the heathen converts in Nigeria. But the converts read the Bible, appropriated biblical texts for their context and sought for a living faith that will address issues in their environment. The quest for biblical Christianity was a factor that would give rise to the AICs in later years. According to Ogbu Kalu

A significant aspect of the nineteenth century was that as missionaries sowed the seed of the gospel, Africans appropriated it from a primal, charismatic world-view and read the translated scriptures in that light. Indigenous agencies recovered the spiritual resources of the gospel and challenged missionary Christianity to be fully biblical. This set the stage for the process that followed the World Wars. New forces such as the implosion of the state challenged the heritage of African Christianity; and the collapse of the dictatorial states and attendant probed the tensile strength of the church’s stewardship charismatic and Pentecostal spirituality resurfaced to provide the energy for growth and sustainability in the midst of hostile circumstances.\textsuperscript{45}

Beside this, the missionaries failed in certain regards because of their inability to connect with the natives on the religious plain. Failure to dialogue invariably led to failure to understand the people’s worldview and expectations from religion. Ilogu cited instances of failure in appreciating the people’s culture by the missionaries which led to lost opportunities in contextualization and firmly establishing Christianity in Ibo land in Nigeria. He recounted the smallpox epidemic episode that affected Onitsha between 1872 and 1873, which killed king Ediari and his prince-son. Many attempts of the Ibo native-medicine diviner priests

\textsuperscript{44} C. Kolie, ‘Jesus as Healer?’ 140.  
\textsuperscript{45} O. Kalu, ‘Christianity in Africa,’ in J. Bowden(ed) \textit{Encyclopedia of Christianity}, New York:
(dibia) to avert the epidemic failed and many lost faith in their local gods and religion. Many out of desperation turned to the church for help. A local soothsayer told the people that he had seen a vision that unless the people listened to the missionaries and went to their church, the whole of Onitsha would be wiped out by the small-pox epidemic. This caused virtually everyone in the town to troop to the Church for salvation from the epidemic. This, according to Ilogu, was an opportunity for the missionaries to demonstrate the healing power of the Gospel message, teaching them about the Christian doctrine of wholeness of man, and man’s healing through salvation in Jesus both in his body, soul and mind. Crowther (the missionary) felt otherwise, ‘…that the success of the evangelistic work in Onitsha should not depend on such smallpox and the soothsayer’s vision.’ The people left disappointed as their hopes of receiving succour from the ravaging epidemic threatening the entire community were dashed. African Church historians felt that that was a lost opportunity both to win converts among the Ibo indigenes and assure them of the salvific power of the Gospel. Ilogu would comment later of this incident that ‘If he (Crowther) and the missionaries after him knew the people’s emphasis on harmony between man, community and cosmos as the background to health and well being, they would have capitalized on it to show how Jesus Christ is God’s means of creating harmony between Himself, men and nature. Even now the orthodox Churches in Iboland do not capitalize on it; it is only the Pentecostals and the prayer-healing Aladura churches who do so.’

This account shows the failure of the missionaries to fully comprehend African traditional worldview and by implication presents one of the reasons behind the growth and successes of the Pentecostal and AICS, the fact that they understand the African’s nuances and what appeals to him or her especially in time of crises or deprivation. Adamo as stated in the previous chapter decried the type of Christianity introduced into Africa, which was devoid of power to meet existential needs in the African context. He reasoned that the missionaries taught African Christians to discard these indigenous ways of handling problems without offering any concrete substitute, except the Bible. He said that charms, medicine, incantations, divination, sacrifices, and other cultural ways of protecting, healing and liberating ourselves from the evil powers that fill the African environment were hurriedly

47 Aladura is a Yoruba word which means a praying people.
discarded in the name of Christianity. Yet Africans were not taught how to use that Bible as a means of protecting, healing and solving daily problems. It took the ingenuity of African converts in the mission churches that read and interpreted the bible through another eye or perspective to make the scripture fitting to the African context and its realities. The Bible was made to speak to concrete needs in the African cultural context. This was the thrust of the AICs theological emphasis as they discovered in the Old and New Testament experiences that are similar to their African cultural context, especially the manifestation of power and the triumph of good over evil through the intervention of the all powerful God. They saw the demonstration of power in the Old Testament narratives like the crossing of the red sea and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the power filled Samson and his triumph over the Philistines, David and Goliath, Elijah and the contest at Mt. Carmel, Jesus victory over Satan and healing of the infirmed in many New Testament narratives. This resonated with what Africans believe is inherent in religion, the intervention of the powerful gods in times of crises. The Old Testament was particular appealing to the AICs especially the prophet-healing churches. In Nigeria, many of the Aladura churches sought to pattern their religiosity and leadership after the manner of Old Testament prophets who were filled with the Spirit of God and had power to perform miracles and healings.

Religion as noted earlier plays a significant role in the African community. Critical to the African worldview is the belief in spirits and their influence in the world. Aylward Shorter for example, reports of illnesses and sufferings in traditional African societies that cannot be traced to any physical causality. ‘Missionaries and doctors working among the traditional societies of the third World frequently report cases of ‘witchcraft illness’, people dying with no apparent scientific medical cause…’49 This is the world of the Africans where the belief in juju50 or voodoo is widespread and where people take all precautionary measures to protect themselves from dangers and harm that seem palpable in the air. Beside this, an African is concerned about happenings in his or life especially in times of crises. He consults the medicine man to know why and what can be done to avert future occurrences. For example, the parents of the newly born child in an African village are inquisitive to know what the future holds for the child. At death, the local priest is consulted to find out if the deceased died naturally or caused by someone in the community. The European would ask

49 A.Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor,34.
50 A derivative of the French word for toy, jou-jou, used by early French missionaries to describe the idols of the natives. (see E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare- God in Yoruba Belief,.2.)
why as he seeks to understand certain phenomenon in nature. This prompts his research to find answers to his question. The African would ask who did it as he tries to find out who may be responsible for particularly bad events in the life of the individual or community. Religion comes to their aid in the quest. In all these, religion serves his existential needs. The AICs capitalize on this to provide ready answers to some of the questions Africans ask, and these answers resonate with their traditional religious views.

Aylward Shorter compares the practice of orthodox medicine in Europe with the traditional African practice. He acknowledges the human quest for healing in times of illness which compels him/her to seek for cure at all costs. According to him, Westerners go from treatment to treatment, even on occasion from doctor to doctor. They want to ascertain that every avenue has been exhausted in seeking a search for a cure. ‘Africans also ring the changes on all the possibilities, the possible sources of their sickness. In this, they are assisted by the diviner’s ‘switchboard’. With the diviner’s help they identify the cause of their suffering and remove it if they can particularly if it is due to some occult agency in a preternatural or religious sphere.’\textsuperscript{51} The diviner or herbalist plays a significant role in the traditional health care system.

Luke Mbefo who took a critical look at Christianity in the Eastern part of Nigeria at this time observed that there was a discontentment among the members of the missionary founded churches in meeting their expectations. He noted that

Their (members of mainline churches) expectations from the churches were not met. The missionaries of the older churches failed to address the type of questions the African situation raised for them: witchcraft, demon possession, haunting by evil spirits, the cult of ancestors; the use of protective charms, talisman; sorcery and the traditional dancing form of worship at the shrines. The tendency among the missionaries was to dismiss these questions as due to ignorance arising from a pre-scientific mentality.\textsuperscript{52}

Many of the mission churches today are still averse to adopting the African traditional worldview as a way of reaching the Africans for the fear of being labelled as syncretism. On the other hand Africans have come to view some of the mission churches as Eurocentric, full of form and observance of religious rituals but lacking in power to confront peculiar

\textsuperscript{51} E. B. Idowu, \textit{Olodumare- God in Yoruba Belief}, 35.
problems such as witchcraft, sickness and afflictions of evil forces, diseases, lack and poverty that are typically African. What has become a loss to the mission churches invariably has been the gain of Pentecostal and African Independent churches.

Ilogu cites another incidence of failed opportunity by the missionaries in this eastern part of Nigeria in 1886 arising from lack of understanding of the worldview of the people and poor mission strategy. He narrated how the chiefs and prominent personalities were in the habit of demanding from missionaries the assurance that their acceptance of Christianity would mean ‘long life, multiplicity of children and fruitful productions of their land’. To this persistent request, the missionaries would reply in the negative. The chiefs were disappointed to know that the Christianity the missionaries brought to them did not offer anything in this world in exchange for their belief as against what obtains in their traditional religion that assured them of physical and material benefits so long as they fulfil their religious obligations to the gods and ancestors. Ilogu queried the ineptitude of the missionaries ‘Why reply in the negative as if the gospel was irrelevant to the people’s daily existence and needs?’

The issue raised by the chiefs and prominent men above underscores the utilitarian value of religion in the African context. Africans worship because of what they hope to derive from religion in their present existence. Life exists for the African as a continuum, as the present life transits into the nether world of the spirits where the ancestors and the spirits of the departed live. Religion in this context is highly materialistic because it is believed that the gods bestows favor of abundance of material wealth, large families and long life to those they are predisposed to. Health and wealth is a dominant issue in the traditional religion both in the past and in the present. The emphasis by the missionaries on personal salvation which makes religion a personal affair rather than communal as it is in African traditional religion and its other-worldly tendencies fails to connect with the ordinary African. This warped strategy of the missionaries accounts for the failure in winning converts among the prominent people in this region, who in most cases refuse to listen to the missionaries, but allowed the missionaries access to their children, slaves and the rejected of the society who were not reckoned with in the social ladder.

53 E.C.O Ilogu, Christian Ethics in African Background, 89.
54 ‘Catholic missionaries had little success in the nineteenth century, partly because of limited personnel and high mortality rates, partly because of a mistaken mission strategy. Like their counterparts elsewhere, they concentrated on redeeming slaves and founding Christian villages, such as Topo, a coastal settlement near
Another major concern among the native converts was the apparent lack of visible symbol like charms and amulets that could be worn around the bodies to ward off danger or evil as they are accustomed to in their traditional religion. Often the Dibia (soothsayer/medicine man) give his weary client talisman to be hung on the neck or tied on the waist to drive away evil spirits that afflict people with ill-health and other sufferings that the unprotected fall victims to. Children adorn their necks with such charms to ward off diseases prevalent among children of their ages. In other instances cuts or incisions are made on the body to protect one from the ubiquitous evil in the African society, because the philosophy of the ordinary African is that the best form of attack is defence. The natives take precautionary measures by arming themselves with charms. But the missionaries would have none of this as they tried to convince the native converts that their fears were unfounded. Besides they taught the converts that the best form of protection was not to adorn oneself with charms but to have absolute trust in God. The natives were again disappointed because they come from contexts where visible symbol is a mark of the presence of a superior force in which the people believe can protect them.

Ilogu noted of a particular case where a young man accosted a missionary for a talisman to ward of evil. ‘But Perry and many missionaries after him, rigidly attached to extreme Evangelical dread of symbols and images in the Reformed Church, were not in the position to help the young man and the many like him. Roman Catholicism capitalized on this, but today, it is the Pentecostals and the Prayer-Healing Aladura Churches who really appeal to the depth of Ibo sentiments and beliefs in the visible symbols of well-being as part of religious faith and practice.’ Ilogu reasons that the reason why Roman Catholicism has wide acceptance in this part of Nigeria is its stand on images such as the crucifix, and pendants bearing the images of the saints of the church which resonates with the peoples’ belief in adorning protective charms. In some of the AICs, visible symbols such as holy water, the crucifix, fragrance, candles and other paraphernalia associated with worship particularly in the Old Testament are regularly used for healing purposes. Olusegun Fakoya comments on the successes of Pentecostalism in Nigeria this way,

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Belief in the efficacy of charms and amulets was substituted with holy oil and holy water. This is psychologically attuned with the prevalent cultural belief; something magical that can work in the supernatural. And since oracles and divination have to be substituted, prophecy filled the void perfectly. Thus in this way, Africans remain Africans with traditional beliefs substituted with pseudo-Christian formulas amply provided by the mostly educated and suave American-influenced Pentecostal pastors. This is perhaps the reason behind the monumental success of Pentecostalism as compared to missionary Christianity, which came into Africa with contempt for African traditional belief and customs.  

The losses of the mission churches because of their unwillingness to interpret the Gospel message from the cultural framework of the people particularly in regards to healing were the gains of other denominations whose beliefs were adaptable to African context. The ‘Unorthodox’ churches that emerged on the religious scene in Nigeria comprising of Prayer-healing, Prophetic and Pentecostal churches captivated the people because they sought to contextualize the Gospel. In these churches, the word was made flesh as they sought to bridge the gap between the traditional worldview and consciousness of the people and the Christian faith. It was this group of churches that sought to remove the foreignness of the Christian faith and adapting it in a way that is more suitable to the local context by including in its message and practice what appeals or connect with the people. Before the emergence of these churches, the mission churches were regarded as emissaries of a foreign religion. It is applause to these churches that they sought to bring into the Christian faith some dynamics of the local culture which made Christianity to be more acceptable to the people.

It was not all loss for the missionaries however as some of them impacted the local people and left an indelible footprint in the sand of time in education, modern health and religion by changing forever the belief system of the people that impinged negatively on their cultural practices. The name of the Scottish Presbyterian missionary, who laboured assiduously among the Qua-Ibo people, would forever be remembered for putting an end to the evil practice of killing twin babies by throwing them into an evil forest because they are perceived to be harbingers of evil in the community. She worked hard to convince the

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57 O. Fakoya, ‘The Gospel of Materialism-Nigerian Pentecostalism and hypocrisy,’ (Part 3)
58 It was a custom in this part of the country to destroy twins because it was considered unnatural for human beings to be born more than one at a time, only lower animals like hens, dogs, goats etc. that are reasoned to give birth more than one. A mother of twins is accused of desecrating the land and is required to do ritual cleansing and the twins killed or thrown into the forest.
people that the birth of twins is a natural phenomenon. They believed and changed this evil practice.

5.4.2 Ethiopianism and Healing Practices

In the previous chapter, much was said about Ethiopianism and the quest for African leadership in the mission churches. African converts who could not bear with the high handedness of some missionaries separated from these established churches to form parallel churches. These were churches that were wholly indigenous and had no foreign support. It was in reference to Psalm 68:31 which reads ‘Let Ethiopia hasten to stretch her hands to God’ that this quasi-nationalist initiative was labelled Ethiopianism. Oborji however viewed these churches more as protest movements and political in nature and were forerunners of the Independence struggles.\textsuperscript{59} The Africans were inspired by the victory and the resistance of the Ethiopian empire against the Italian colonial military occupation in 1896, the Africans, especially in South Africa, said that perhaps in the same way the black people could win their struggles over the whites in their country.

The Ethiopian sects’ initiative did not have any direct bearing on the healing practices that would unfold in the indigenous churches in the later years but gave impetus to the concerns of African Christians that Christianity would be better expressed through the lens of African culture and worldview. African Christianity in Nigeria owes gratitude to the Ethiopian sects that emerged as breakaway from the Mission churches in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century for daring to declare that Christianity can be believed in and practiced by ordinary Africans in their own perception and worldview. They were the forbears of later theologians who saw through the ethnocentrism of the missionaries and would seek Christianity that is both authentic and African as expressed by Bediako, ‘It is difficult not to link our missionary connection with the problem of identity which came to weigh so heavily on the Christian conscience of many an African; must we become other than African in order to be truly Christian? The story of many so-called African Independent Churches is often an answer to that kind of question, at least to the extent that these churches take seriously matters relating to the African religious worldview and the question it poses.’\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{60} K. Bediako ‘Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions’, 91.
Ethiopianism was what precipitated the indigenous quest for Christianity that could aptly call their own because they had the courage to challenge the status-quo and lay claim to the universality of the Gospel and the power therein which the missionaries hardly emphasized. The AICs will later seize this initiative to harp on areas which was hardly the concerns of the missionaries, in their quest to bring their faith to bear on their existential needs.

5.4.3 Prophet-Healing Movement

Another stream of Christianity that emerged within the first two decades of the 20th century is the prophet-healing movement. This brand of Christianity began in the delta region of the country in 1916 by an Anglican layman, Garrick Sokary Braide. Braide had been an influential member of the St. Andrew Anglican Church, Bakana, where he was the Pastor’s warden around 1914-1915 after a formal training. He later developed efficacy in the prayer-healing ministry, and a prophetic attitude to religion which he used to benefit the parishioners of the church. His prowess along this line of healing and prayer became recognized in his immediate environment and even from far off people came to be healed. Braide was reputed for spending long hours in solitary prayers because he claimed to have received a vision from the Lord calling him to be his messenger. Based on the positive response he received from his immediate environment, he began what become known as the first prophetic movement in the country, with prayer and faith healing being its chief emphasis. Because he gained widespread recognition being one of their own, an Ijaw native of the Delta area of Nigeria, (unlike white missionaries from Europe or black missionaries from Sierra Leone) and that his method of preaching and demonstrating miracles resonated with the expectations and beliefs of the natives, he was declared a heretic by the presiding Anglican bishop of the Niger Delta region. A large number of people who sympathized with Braide joined him in forming the first ‘prophet’ type indigenous church, which became prominent after his death. Subsequently the church became known as the Christ Army Church that exists till date.

It is acknowledged in the history of church movement in Nigeria that many churches within and outside the country came into existence from this Prophetic movement started by Garrick Braide. What distinguished Garrick Braide’s prophetic movement from the Christianity of his immediate church, the Anglican, was that while the missionaries placed

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emphasis on ‘teaching of doctrines: the Creed, Article of Faith, the Lord’s prayer and Catechism, Braide adopted a non-intellectual and practical approach…He emphasized absolute dependence on God for physical and spiritual healing. He encouraged his hearers not to take medicine nor seek medical doctors.’ Critical in this prophetic movement’s emphasis that made it appealing to the people is its simplicity and emphasis on prayer and healing. Garrick Braide’s prophetic movement was the first indigenous church with a widespread appeal that went beyond its immediate environment because of its emphasis on prayer and healing and its quest for power to undo afflictions such as sickness and diseases which ordinarily are thought to be products of evil spirits. Garrick Braide took into cognizance the culture and beliefs of the people and their quest for health in all ramifications. Braide’s prophet –healing church was the first reviver movement in Nigeria and set the tone for later reviver movements of the subsequent decades. From this time onwards, churches began to emphasize on prayer, healing, the usage of dreams and visions to interpret maladies, the quest for African spirituality etc. Subsequently, healing and the quest for the supernatural via endowment of Spiritual gifts became an issue and remain dominant in Christianity in Nigeria till date.

5.4.4 The 1918 Worldwide Influenza and its effects on African Indigenous Churches with emphasis on faith healing and Spirit empowerment

Historical factors played significant roles in the emergence of AICs and their emphasis on healing and deliverance practices. Ayegboyin contends that ‘…religious movements did not emerge in a historical or social vacuum. They were conditioned by a number of factors ranging from spiritual, cultural, political, social and circumstantial factors.’

One of the circumstantial factors that promoted the growth of the AICs in Nigeria was the worldwide influenza plague that ravaged nations of the world decimating whole populations in its wake. This disease afflicted nations at a time when they were barely recovering from the devastating effect of World War One. Flu is a respiratory disease mostly transmitted when people are in close contact and concentrated together in houses,


compounds, factories etc. The flu pandemic of 1918-19 was identified as the HINI strain. It came suddenly and had a devastating impact on African communities with poor sanitary conditions, low level of nutrition intake, endemic malaria affliction and in some cases, widespread famine. The flu pandemic was the single largest demographic disaster of the twentieth century, and according to Patterson, the flu was ‘...almost certainly the greatest short-term demographic catastrophe in Africa’s history.’ In Nigeria, the epidemic took its toll on the populace who had just begun to adjust their lives to the reality of colonialism and Christianity which were contending with their old values, socio-political way of life and their traditional religion. According to Killingray, because of its speed and devastating presence in Ekiti in South West Nigeria, flu was known as lukuluku meaning killing at a stroke and later as Ajakale-Arun ‘a disease that spreads everywhere’. In southern Nigeria, as many as 450,000 people succumbed to the dreaded disease.

In response to this epidemic that the people could not explain its cause nor diagnose for appropriate treatment, many turned to religion either as a source of comfort or explanation. The dual devastation of world war and influenza pandemic was viewed in many religious quarters as a divine punishment for sin and lack of faithfulness. In Sierra Leone, another West African country where Christianity had taken deep roots, ‘...people turned to prayer, held evangelistic services, preached in the streets, and more strictly observed the Sabbath. Churches held regular times of public confession and repentance for sins committed.’ In the southern part of Nigeria, many of the adherents of the Christian faith were rather disappointed that the missionary leadership of the mission churches could not proffer solution to the pandemic.

According to Ayegboyin, in the western part of the country, many Yoruba Christians who had previously renounced their traditional religion to embrace the new Christian religion were disappointed at the leadership of the Mission churches who were rather helpless as the disease plagued communities. Considering their traditional religious background where the

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priests upon consulting the deities through the means of oracles, would always have appropriate response to disasters threatening whole communities and prescribe appropriate sacrifices which will not only placate the gods, but also cleanse the land and ward off the calamity, the African adherents of the new found Christian faith were appalled that the missionaries were unable to proffer answer to this endemic disaster. In response, the Yoruba lay Christians took up the challenge to try their new found faith and believe in the God of the Bible as they were taught by the missionaries. They had also read in the Bible how the people of God dared to trust Him to avert calamities threatening their nation. ‘Consequently, Yoruba Christians started prayer and healing fellowships to check the outbreak.’69

One of the earliest established fellowships with an indigenous flare was the Aladura. ‘The church of the Lord Aladura came from the indelible memory of over a quarter of a million dead in a space of two to three months in southern Nigeria. Through prayer and ritual, adherents were offered spiritual healing. There were other similar movements in Nigeria such as the Christ Apostolic church founded by Sophie Odulami.’70

The Yoruba’s traditional religion attaches much importance to the efficacy of prayer. It is one viable instrument through which humans can influence the gods and make them to be favourably disposed to them. Burgess elucidate further on this when he said that there are two key elements in the Yoruba traditional spirituality; ‘…the first is the continuing belief in an invisible world (orun) of benevolent and malevolent powers constantly interacting with the visible material world (aye).’71 Because of the activities of these powers and their struggles with one another, the world is an evil place to dwell in, and one must seek the protection of the benevolent spirits over the malevolent ones. This of necessity creates room for the second dominant belief, the efficacy of prayer (adura). According to him, ‘Yoruba religious rituals such as prayer, divination, and sacrifice, are intended to attract benevolent powers and repel malevolent ones.

The Yoruba religion is highly pragmatic and worship is expected to bring tangible benefits in terms of the ‘good things’ of this life: children, prosperity.’72 Another

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71 R. Burgess, ‘Nigerian Pentecostal Theology in a Global Perspective,’ 45.
72 R. Burgess, ‘Nigerian Pentecostal Theology in a Global Perspective,’ 47.
anthropologist, J. Peel, regards Yoruba indigenous prayer as a purely technical instrument for securing practical benefits, rather than a ‘vehicle for moral reflection or a “colloquy with the divine.’\(^{73}\) It is therefore easy to understand the spiritual undertone the Yoruba Christians gave to the influenza epidemic that ravaged the land and the instrumentality of prayer employed to attack and wade of the disease. This method can be understood from the perspective of their worldview and religion.

At the onset, there was a prayer band of ‘…Anglican laymen at Ijebu-Ode in Nigeria. The group emphasized divine healing, prayer protection and puritanical mode in an apparent dissatisfaction with western religious forms, European control of the churches or lack of spiritual power.’\(^{74}\) As said earlier, the dominant feature in the African traditional religion is the quest for power. ‘For the Yoruba, the quest for power (agbara) to enhance life is the hermeneutical key to understanding their attraction to religion, including Pentecostalism.’\(^{75}\) What holds true for the Yorubas, applies to other tribes in Nigeria. Religion plays a significant role in the enhancement of life’s vital force without which life is meaningless. Africans worship therefore for empowerment as noted above and enhance life’s vital force. A religion that comes into an African context without emphasis on ‘power’ may not win followers among the people.

The native Christians in one of the places hard hit by the influenza sought solution in prayer imploring the intervention of God. They formed prayer bands and ‘…these prayer bands culminated in the establishment of congregations like the Diamond Society, the Faith Tabernacle, the Cherubim and Seraphim society and a number of other religious bodies which subsequently seceded from them.’\(^{76}\) Killingray corroborated this as he said,

There has been a good deal of research and writing on the African religious movement that had their origins in the influenza pandemic. Many of these movements rested on Christian foundations and involved prophets, spiritual healing, and an acute awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Leaders were often from mission churches.\(^{77}\)

\(^{73}\) J.D.Y Peel, *Aladura*, 62.
\(^{75}\) Richard Burgess, ‘Nigerian Pentecostal Theology in a Global Perspective,’ 53.
\(^{77}\) David Killingray, ‘The wind of death: Mortality in Africa during the influenza pandemic 1918-1919.’
Elsewhere in Africa, Phillip Jenkins gave account of one Simon Kimbangu, who lived in what was then the Belgian Congo. At the time of the worldwide influenza in 1918, some Christians here believed that the world was undergoing an apocalyptic transformation. Simon Kimbangu was one of such; he received a vision to be a prophet and healer. ‘Although he tried to resist his call, he ultimately began his preaching and healing ministry in 1921.’

The emergence of these churches at the throe of the influenza became a watershed for indigenous initiative and contribution to African Christianity. ‘African spiritual churches arose out of the context of the experience of large-scale deaths in late 1918. In a situation of deep distress and lack of comprehension as to where this sudden visitation of death came, it is not surprising that prophets and preachers placed great emphasis on spiritual healing.’ These religious movements, at the time of their inception, were merely responding to the exigency of the times. Preaching and healing was their focus, and where these churches still exist today or have offshoots, the emphasis continues to be on preaching and healing.

Today, there are other indigenous churches like the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), Cherubim and Seraphim church (C&S), the Brotherhood of Cross and Star that practice rituals that are linked with the African traditional religion such as bathing in local streams (to wash away ill-luck and misfortunes dogging one’s progress in life), putting sacrificial portions at cross-roads and road junctions of the community. These are practices common to African traditional religion which are now adapted into the Christianity in a bid to ‘Africanize’ the faith and make it speak to their context. The nocturnal bath in rivers or ‘spiritual bath’ is a common ritual among these churches distinguished for their ‘Africanized Christianity’. It is a way of bringing healing to diseased souls. According to Rev. Richard Soyebi of the Celestial Church of Christ, Lagos, ‘The Holy Spirit can direct that one should go and bathe in a flowing stream for cleansing.’

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78 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom the Coming of Global Christianity*, 59.
80 See F. Macaulay, ‘Why white –garment churches prescribe baths in flowing streams.’ *The Nation on Sunday*, February 28, 2010, 45. Africanized Christianity is a phrase used by this writer to describe churches that have adapted into their form of Christianity practices that are common with African traditional religion.
81 F. Macaulay, ‘Why White-garment churches prescribe bath in flowing streams.’, 45.
will be made whole...”\(^{82}\) He claims that everything in existence originated from primordial water and that is why water is efficacious in the treatment of diseases such as Asthma, tuberculosis, AIDS, cerebra-spinal meningitis, hypertension etc. According to him, ‘There are many deadly diseases which are being treated in Celestial Church of Christ through the use of water that include rain water, spring water, rock water, water from flowing stream, coconut water, sea water, dew, orange juice, pineapple juice etc.’\(^{83}\)

In other instances, they prescribe the burning of incense to drive away evil spirits, burning of coloured candles at road junctions or cross-roads to return to sender\(^{84}\) whatever source of evil meant for the troubled soul. Healing is a primary concern in many of these churches, and what has popularized the Christian faith among the poor and lowly in Nigeria over the years is the ability to provide succour and healing to the infirmed and their families. In some of the indigenous churches mentioned above, healing is practiced not solely on the basis of invoking the name of Jesus but adding other elements borrowed from African traditional religious sphere. In some Aladura churches, names of angels and saints that are not found in the Bible are implored for dislodging the enemies. Other practices from African culture which were strictly forbidden by the missionaries which were incorporated into the Aladura mode, according to Hood, included polygamy, trance and visions, removing one’s shoes before entering the church, and veneration of ancestors.\(^{85}\) Some of these practices are described as syncretistic by the newer AICs and Pentecostal churches.

5.4.5 Pentecostalism and Quest for Divine Healing in Nigeria

One reason why churches whose emphasis is on faith healing are thriving today in Nigeria is the dominance of Pentecostalism on the religious landscape popularized by African Pentecostal churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Embassy, Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel); and new generation AICs like the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church, etc. The Pentecostal movement in America had its ‘humble beginnings in the ‘outpouring of the Spirit’ among students at the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas (1901) and a few years later(1906), among African-American people in the Azusa Street

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\(^{82}\) F. Macaulay, ‘Why White-garment churches prescribe bath in flowing streams.’, 45.

\(^{83}\) F. Macaulay, ‘Why White-garment churches prescribe bath in flowing streams.’, 45.

\(^{84}\) ‘Back to the Sender’ resonates in popular prayer of some Nigerian churches like the MFM. This is a form of imprecatory prayer seeking evil wishes of enemies be returned upon their own head.

\(^{85}\) R. Hood, Must God Remain Greek? Afro-Cultures and God-Talk, 21.
Mission, Los Angeles in the United States of America. Pentecostals believe that the coming of the Spirit brings the ability to perform ‘signs and wonders’ in the name of Jesus Christ to accompany and authenticate their evangelism; and see the role of healing as good news for the poor and afflicted. Early 20th century Pentecostal newsletter and periodicals abounded with ‘thousand of testimonies of healings, exorcisms and deliverances.’ McLung says that divine healing is ‘an evangelistic door opener’ for Pentecostals, and that ‘signs and wonders are the evangelistic means by which the message of the kingdom is actualized in “person centred” deliverance.’

Allan Anderson noted that from the onset, the Pentecostals have always been passionate about evangelism and missions. ‘In many parts of the world, Pentecostals are notorious for rather aggressive forms of evangelism and proselytism, and Africa is no exception.’ In their quest to win converts, Pentecostals embark on missions and all manners of evangelism including the distribution of tracts and literature which are given out freely. It was one of such literature of the Faith Tabernacle Church in the United States of America, according to Ayegboyn, that the leaders of one of the praying groups (the Diamond Society) in Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria read and were convinced that this was the form of Christianity they desired; one that assures them of power through the Holy Spirit to affect their circumstances. Ever since this circumstantial beginning, Pentecostalism has grown over the years with newer churches every year affirming the faith. On reasons of this widespread growth, Ukpong noted that,

One of the essential characteristics of the nascent African Christianity was the emphasis placed on prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit. The peculiar situation in the Nigerian society of the early 20th century contributed immensely to this spiritual consciousness. There was abundant poverty and terrifying diseases. There was an acute present of the demonic in the society and the epitome of the demonic was seen in the witchcraft. Prayer was seen as the immediate way of combating these evils.

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87 A. Anderson, ‘Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa’, Centre for Missiology and World Christianity, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.
88 A. Anderson, ‘Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa’;
89 Anderson noted that some of these literatures, apart from teachings of the Bible, gave missionary accounts that were sometimes embellished with optimistic accounts of how many people were converted, healed and had received Spirit Baptism.
It is instructive to note that there had been indigenous movements prior to the contact made with the American church that had sought for, and emphasized holiness and Spirit’s power for daily living. Mention was made above of Garrick Sokary Braide and the Christ Army church founded after him who sought for Holy Spirit power and practiced faith healing and prophetism. There are churches that began as indigenous churches but metamorphosed over time into Pentecostalism with emphasis on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church is one of the newer churches that reached back to history and brought into focus again that which agitated the minds of a band of Yoruba Christians who had left the Anglican Church because of perceived powerlessness in the church in the face of a raging epidemic and banded together to form prayer groups that brought about a religious revival.

Another chronicler of Christian history in Africa, Elizabeth Isichei, suggests that healing is one reason that makes Pentecostalism appealing to Africans. She said:

Despite the sacrificial generosity of their richer members, the African churches could never compete. The issues that concerned them scarcely impinged on the lives of villagers or the new urban poor. These craved, as they had always done, physical and spiritual ‘healing, and protection from the multitude of evils against which the poor are powerless. When African prophets arose who spoke to these needs from the depths of their own religious consciousness, they counted their converts in hundreds of thousands.91

Africans live in a world dominated by spirits and the fear of their agents. There are diabolical forces that are out to destroy the lives of people or make them to fail in life. Demons, witches, wizards, ogbanje, emere,92 mammy water spirits are some of the notorious agents of the devil that are on the prowl seeking to ruin the lives of people. During his recent African nations visit to Cameroon and Angola, (March 2009) the Roman Catholic pontiff, Pope Benedict decried witchcraft practice in these countries that has largely been responsible for the slow growth of Catholicism and has hampered economic development in these nations.93 The Pope’s assertion lends credence to the general belief that evil or diabolical forces are responsible for the setback in many African societies. Many incurable diseases and

92 These are local terms used for tormenting spirits that bring sorrows and sadness into the lives of people,
sickness are attributed to the activities of the devil and its agents. In the traditional African society, there are places that Africans resort to in times sickness, bareness, and misfortunes or are attributed to in other to combat these forces, Africans resort to patronizing spiritual sources to avert disasters and failures in life.

John Thomas suggests that there are three approaches to divine healing within the Pentecostal tradition\textsuperscript{94}. The first category is those who see in every illness or disease the activity of demons. Typical of the times of Jesus where Beelzebub (the Satan) was responsible for all ailments and had to be rebuked or exorcised to deliver the victim from suffering and trauma associated with the disease. There is a differentiation between the activities of devil and its cohorts, who in the words of Jesus Christ, “…has come to steal, kill and destroy…” and the life giving activity of the benevolent God who “…gives life in abundance.” (John 10:10). The abundance of life here includes good health, both physical, spiritual and all that it implies. Just as Jesus Christ cast out demons to set captives free from ailments, believers are to use their God given authority to rebuke demons that are behind ill-health and liberate all who are under the affliction of the devil.

Health, according to this school of thought, is a heritage of the believer in Christ. Christ suffered to liberate man from sin and its consequences which include disease, sufferings and death. The often-quoted text in this regard is Isaiah 53:5, ‘But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.’ Every believer by virtue of Christ’s suffering has access to good health. Those who yet suffer in spite of the provisions through the vicarious sufferings and death of Jesus Christ may be lacking in faith or have sin present in their lives. ‘A lack of faith or presence of sin might prevent healing, but it is never God’s will for a believer to continue in such suffering. God’s will is for all to be healed.’\textsuperscript{95}

The second school of thought in the Pentecostal tradition as regards healing, according to Thomas, are those who hold on to the view that not all sickness or disease can be attributed to afflictions of the Satan. There are diseases that owe their origin to natural causes. Man is in a fallen state and lives in a sin ravaged world and sin consequences taking

\textsuperscript{95} J. C. Thomas, ‘The Devil, Disease and Deliverance,’ 1-25.
its toll on the whole creation. Creation is subject to change, aging process, destruction, decadence and eventual demise. Sickness and disease are the effects of sin in a fallen world. Man, irrespective of his belief, will continue to suffer because of sin’s presence in the world, until the parousia, when Christ establishes his kingdom on earth; when all sufferings, pains and tears will be non-existent. Pains and sufferings are a reminder of man’s fallen state and individual Christians are likely to suffer illness or other physical ailments as much as the unbeliever. Not all illness therefore can be attributed to the devil. God may sometime permit sufferings to bring about his glory. Views expressed here are similar to those held by some theologians who see physical suffering and disability as part of the fallen human nature. Aylward Shorter, a Catholic theologian for example believes sickness and suffering have some salvific value for the sufferer. ‘Sickness and disability are life-diminishing only in so far as they are deprived of meaning. Suffering belongs to transcendence and it is this ‘beyondness’ which gives it meaning and makes it bearable. There is no adequate answer to the question: Why does suffering occur? It is there. But paradoxically it reveals the goodness of God.’

Oborji, another Catholic theologian from Nigeria affirms this view as noted in the previous chapter, as he criticized the new generation churches in Nigeria for trivializing faith healing and denying the faithful the opportunity of understanding God’s ways through suffering.

The third category of Pentecostals according to Thomas, are the ‘functional deists’. These are individuals who acknowledge the power of God to heal; and the malevolence of the devil in inflicting sickness, disease and sufferings on mankind, but have failed to acknowledge the will of God to heal. Their apathy towards God’s willingness to heal is drawn from particular cases they have experienced in which there was the belief or faith to appropriate healing, but healing was not effected on the sufferer. What then is the will of God on healing? Is it His will that the sick and diseased continues in pain and suffering or to have relief through healing? Since there is no empirical evidence that it is always the will of God for healing to take place in every situation, these Pentecostals will rather choose to be non-committal to issues of divine healing in the church.

From the foregoing, it is easy to align the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in Nigeria with the first Pentecostal school of thought in their faith and practice. In the previous

96 A. Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor, A.
97 J. C. Thomas, ‘The Devil, Disease and Deliverance, 1-25.
chapter, the origin of the this church was traced to one of the foremost AICs, the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) that emphasized and practiced divine healing as a cardinal belief. In this setting, they discouraged the use of orthodox medicine as this is believed to negate the practice of healing as seen in the New Testament particularly in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is on account of healing, deliverance through the power of exorcism and effectual prayer that many have come to the MFM church. The growth of the past decade and a half is linked to this factor.

5.5 Summary

The experiences of the AICs that would later form the basis of beliefs and practices of the MFM church, relating to healing have proven to be an interesting development over the years. From the onset, Nigerians in the mission churches longed for a church that would truly reflect their worldviews and culture, one in which they can appropriate as truly their own, as against one that was imposed from a foreign culture which they have to subscribe unwillingly to. The churches evolved over time with their own distinct liturgies and theological emphasis. Many of the practices in these churches were neither contrived nor foisted on the people by some foreign entity, but were shaped by historical and environmental factors alongside the desire to be faithful to the bible and Christian tradition. The people read and interpreted the Bible from their cultural framework and applied same to contextual issues of their environment. This way of interpreting the Bible was labelled as vernacular or cultural hermeneutics by some theologians. The primary focus was that it met the existential needs of the people.

The writer in this chapter gave a panoramic view of the historical development of the Nigerian churches with particular emphasis on the practice of healing. Each phase of this development had its distinct emphasis. The era of ‘Ethiopianism’ was particular about leadership structure in existing mission churches, and there was little or no healing emphasis at this stage. But it gave the indigenes the boldness to seek after that which they consider as suitable for their people and environment. The second phase was the era of prophet –healer churches, a period characterized by the rise of charismatic indigenous church leaders akin to prophets of the Old Testament with particular gifting or endowment of the Spirit. Just as God raised the prophets at turning points in the history of Israel, so were the claims of these prophet-healers as being chosen and called by God to meet the need of that particular era.
These were African laymen in historic mission churches who through the medium of visions, dreams or audible messages received call from God to bring deliverance to the people. Garrick Braide, an Ijaw layman of the Anglican Church, was a worthy example of a prophet-healer in the early part of the last century. He had an outstanding ministry with profound effect on the people of Niger delta in Nigeria. This gave an impetus to others who claimed to have similar callings to follow suit. The third phase of burgeoning indigenous church movement was the Aladura churches. These are indigenous Christians who believed in the efficacy of prayer and healing power as of old times in the Bible as previously stated. What started as a prayer-band of few laymen to combat the raging effects of the flu-epidemic in the south-west of Nigeria, in the second decade of the last century became a large scale religious movement that spread across the nation of Nigeria. The Aladura churches epitomized the true African indigenous or initiated church with its peculiar form of liturgy, and indigenous leadership. They had no linkage with the historic mission churches that were largely sustained and supported by their foreign based home churches in Europe and America. In other words, they were to a large extent, self-governed, self-sustained and self-financing. Many denominations in Nigeria today owe their origin to this religious movement. This movement dovetailed into the larger Pentecostalism that became a global phenomenon. The emphasis on healing and Spirit power made the teachings of the Pentecostal churches to be acceptable to the AICs.

From the foregoing analysis, there are three major issues that can be deduced in this chapter on healing practices of the African indigenous churches. Healing and quest for power to overcome life’s adversities is a major concern here. They draw largely from the African traditional religious background where the dominant emphasis is on good health, well being and peace with oneself and environment. The reason for the fast pace of growth in some of the AICs like the MFM church, is the fact that some of the beliefs and practices of the traditional religions resonate in their context.

The second issue or observation is that the indigenous religious movement that swept across Nigeria in the early and middle twentieth century was a lay people or ‘grass-root’ movement. Ordinary Nigerian folks read, interpreted and practiced the Bible the way they literally understood it, void of the complexities of the theologians and reminiscent of the early church after Pentecost where ordinary people were at the vanguard of the burgeoning church and practiced the faith as inspired by the Holy Spirit; ‘…and perceived that they were
unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled…’ (Acts 4:13) It can be stated therefore that the lay people or the grassroots have always been critical to religious revival or renewal of the church from antiquity. It is imperative therefore that Africa Theologians should consider lay peoples’ participation in the religious revival as an object of study rather than formulating what African theology should be from above and foisting it on the people as African Christian theology. It is also important to consider issues that are of great concern to people of this social stratum. Their immediate concerns borders on well being and the improvement in their lives. Churches that make issues of upliftment in life and improvement in one’s social standing a focus of their teachings, and those that dwell on deliverance from forces that hinders progress and success in life receive large patronage in their church programs. This is why the dominant theme in the AICs and newer Pentecostal churches circle in Nigeria today is prosperity and deliverance. The Mountain of Fire and Miracle church falls into the latter category of churches.

Another critical issue is the spirit’s influence in healing and deliverance in the traditional health system in Nigeria. Belief in spirits existence is rife in Nigerian cultures. Benevolent spirits bestow the good things of life, while malevolent spirits are evil, malicious and do damage to the human community. In African traditional religion, evil spirits are warded off through making appropriate sacrifices to the deities in order to prevent ugly events such as plagues, natural disasters, famines, diseases or some form of mishap or the other; and that the lives of members of the communities may be preserved. To deny the existence and operations of the spirits influence in the world of humans is a failure to understand a critical element in African worldview. Missionaries who came with scientific mindset or world view of the Western world failed to take into cognizance African worldview and cultures much to their detriment and in some cases, affected their mission activities adversely. As noted, the AICs who took into account the worldviews and cultures of Africans in their theology and liturgy had a greater appeal amongst Nigerians. The praying groups of the Aladura thrived among the Yoruba tribe of Western Nigeria because they recognized the culture and needs of the people.