

Religious Symbols in Healing and the Christian Values Attached in the Contemporary Nigeria Society

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Abstract

Man by nature is a “homo symbolicus”- symbolizing conceptualizing and meaning seeking. Man has proved capable of using one thing to stand for or simply represent another. In educational psychology for instance, there is a famous saying that nothing gets into the mind or brain without first passing through the senses. Therefore, for a person to perceive abstract ideas, it must be quantified and symbolized with signs, marks and objects. Thus, the philosophical saying which makes it explicit that, we move from the known to unknown come true here. Observing the Nigerian society, and utilizing survey and analytical methods, this work argues that there are Christian values attached to religious symbols in healing. With help of historical method the work comes to the conclusion that in the Nigerian society, people believe in what they can see, hear, feel or touch than mere abstract ideologies in faith.

Keywords: Religious Symbols, Healing, Christian Values.

Introduction

Symbols in man's innate processes denote many things, take many forms and have many functions. The symbol is a rather curious phenomenon. It literally abolishes clarity and it confounds one's common sense of understanding of self and world. Neither the positive nor the negative meaning of a flag can be curtailed in the material that allows for us to have a visual perception of it, nor the meaning of a cross be explicated in terms of the prices of wood that make it up.

By nature facts are bare, crude but often shielded and protected like an egg by shell. Whenever we mention symbols, we note that it is covering something. The core meaning of life is not so obvious and so are the virtues and values which make life a rare gem. The human mind is a complex processing machinery. The raw material of speech act fades into the mind and through a complex network and procedure, the raw materials is processed and the meaning reached however vaguely through symbolization. This procedure then is interpreted which in turn informs actions and behaviour of the individual and the society. It was this vision which informed Emil Durkheim when he stated that, “the creation of consciousness and society is impossible without the symbolic, no society is possible without symbols.”

As distinct from sign, symbols stand ambiguously for multiplicity of meanings. It is itself ambiguous making interpretation a precondition for understanding and appropriating it. It evokes emotions and impels men to action. They usually occur in stylized patterns. In this article, religious symbols in healing and the Christian values attached in the contemporary society shall be viewed with the prospect of seeing how various denominations within Christianity differ in their approach to its usage.

Religious Symbols in Healing in the Old Testament

In the book of Prophet Ezekiel 37 we have the following:

O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.... Behold, I will cause breath to enter in you, and ye shall live..... so I prophesied as I was commanded...there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone of his

bone.....and the breath came into them,and they lived, and stoodup upon their feet, and exceedinggreat army.

Breath in the vision is the symbol of life, God commanded and dry bones were healed and they came to life. So through the word of God, action as symbolized in breath, healing took place. A more explicit use of religious symbols in healing in the Old Testament of found in II Kings 5. "Naaman the leper healed." In this story, the man of God, Elisha said, let him come now to me that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel," (II Kings 5:10). On arrival Elisha Sent his messenger to hell Naaman, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored and you shall be clean (II Kings 5:10). When at least Naaman dipped himself seven times in the Jordan according to the man of God, his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and was clean (II Kings 5:14). Here, **Water** is the symbol that washed off all his impurities and sicknesses, restored Naaman and made him clean. Water is used to wash away things that are dirty, plates, clothes, etc. And thus water is a good symbol.

Religious Symbols of Healing in the New Testament

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ while on earth added more credence and credibility to the value of religious symbols in healing as Christ practicalized himself. Christ started by submitting himself to John the Baptist to be Baptized (Matt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:9-11 and Lk. 3:21-22) in River Jordan. There, God proclaimed, "This is my beloved son with thee I am well pleased," (Mk. 1:11) to confirm the symbol of water in cleaning the original sin and purifying the body and soul. It shows the outward sign of inward manifestation which is still invoked till today in Baptism and sprinkling of Holy Water before Religious services in some Christian churches, mostly during the Easter triduum (Holy Week). So water is a religious symbol used in faith healing.

This is further exemplified in John 5: 1-18 where a paralytic complained to Christ, "I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled and while I am going another steps down before me (Jn. 5:6-7). With a strong faith, Christ healed him-"Rise, take your pallet and work." Thus, with the words of command, prayers though with strong faith, Jesus Christ healed people.

Jesus Christ, healed by mere symbolic sign of touching. This is exemplified in healing a leper (Matt. 8:1-4; Mk.1:40-45; and Lk. 5:12-16) saying, "I will, be clean." Another instance is when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother in-law sick with fever, He touched her and the fever left her and she rose and served them (Matt.5:14-15). Christ also healed people who touched Him and His clothes as evident in the woman with the issue of blood, power went out from Christ to heal people with faith.

Finally, Christ healed with religious symbolic objects as shown in Jn. 9:1-7. In healing a blind man, Christ spat on the ground and made clay of spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool, of Siloam." He came back seeing and confirmed that he was blind but could see.

Religious Symbols in Healing in the Apostolic Era

During the time of the Apostles, the value of symbols continued to exist. After the Pentecost, Peter and John filled with the Holy Spirit were going to the temple to the when they met a blind man on a beautiful gate of the temple soliciting for alms (Acts 3:1-10). Peter fixed attention on him and said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk". And he took him by the right hand and raised him up and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong and he walked.

Secondly, during the conversion of Saul, (Acts 9:10-19), Ananias, was sent by the Lord to a man of Tarsus. And laying his hand on Saul he said, "Brother Saul, the lord Jesus who

appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit,” and immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight and was baptized (Acts 9:18). So, Ananias laid hands on Saul.

The Value of Religious Symbols in Healing in Contemporary Christian Churches

Since Christ the Head and leader with signs, words and objects and right from Old Testament to New Testament, through the Apostolic era to modern times, healing through religious symbols is valued accompanied with faith. But with the advent of denominational escalations within Christianity, value orientations differ from one denomination to another. For instance, the Sabbath churches believe in immersion baptism as in River Jordan and burn sacrifices as reflected in the Old Testament, sprinkling of blood of the lamb and use of candles in healing.

Within the Catholic Church the symbols include Holy oil for anointing the sick. Salt for preservation as in the blessing of Holy water and Baptism. Holy water for purification. The signs of Cross of the ordained Holy Ministers received with faith, their touch as in the sacrament of confirmation and extreme unction can heal spiritually and bodily with faith. Water from Lourdes and Jerusalem, Scapular, medals, relics of saints and other sacramentals are valued as symbols in healing with prayers and faith since all show external sign of inward grace.

The Anglican denomination as orthodox Christian believed in the value of some symbols in healing. Prayers, faith, word of God, water, touching, etc. Are valued symbols in healing. The Pentecostals; while some do not believe in the use of candles, incense, and sacramentals, insist on the use of water, and the spirit of God which moves to where it wills. Just believe in Christ and accept him as your personal Lord and Saviour, become a born again, surrender totally to Christ with faith, miracles and healing can be experienced. This type of value concept is preached in all the Pentecostal churches. Here, the healing comes mostly through touching and falling to the ground.

Summary and Conclusion

Value is attached to religious symbols in healing. The value extended from Old Testament time to New Testament and through Apostolic time to our present day Christianity. However, the value concepts differ from one denomination to another. It is good to note that Muslim Religion and even Traditional Religion have their own value in religious symbols for healing. This is because healing comes through faith and faith comes through experience, hearing and seeing which can be received through religious symbols. Therefore, there is value in Religious symbols in healing which differs from person to person depending on denomination, education and class of the individual within a particular society and religion.

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