AN ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES CONCERNING EPILEPSY AMONG CHRISTIANS IN ILE-IFE

BY

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research was carried out by Miss Adekunle, Adeseeke Ruthwith Registration Number ARP10/11/H/0865 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents-in-the-Lord, Pastor Jacob OluwumiOladejo and Engr. Oluyemisi-Joy Oladejo, and my maternal uncle, Ven. James OlatinwoFatoki, who believed in me when I no longer believe in myself.

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Abstract

The study identified the knowledge and beliefs about the aetiology of epilepsy held by different categories of Christians in Ile-Ife. It analysed how these beliefs and practices of Christians influenced their attitude to, and their social perception of people with epilepsy. It also investigated the religious and social factors that influenced the choice of treatment by people with epilepsy. The study further examined the extent to which Christian clerics were able to be mobilized to provide better care and social tolerance for people with epilepsy. This was with a view to determining how the stigma and discrimination against people with epilepsy could be reduced.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary source included administration of questionnaire administered on 150 Christians drawn in equal number from some selected mainline Protestant and Pentecostal churches. The mainline Protestant churches purposively selected included Anglican, Baptist and Methodist, while the Pentecostal churches included Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), The Apostolic Church (TAC), and Gospel Faith Mission International (GOFAMINT). The selection of these churches was based on their geographical spread and numerical strength in Ile-Ife. These were supplemented with structured interviews held with two clerics each from the selected churches. Also, participant observation was carried out among the epileptic patients at the Neuro-clinic of the ObafemiAwolowo University Teaching Hospital Complex for a period of three months, June-August 2012. The secondary source included books, journal articles, newspapers and the Internet. The data collected were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

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The results showed that most Christians in Ile-Ife attributed the cause of epilepsy to brain disease, spiritual attack, heredity and demonic possession. The study found out that they also held the belief that it was contagious, thus accounting for their low tolerant level. The study also found out that the religious beliefs of relative and friends, the nature and frequency of seizure, and residential location were the social and religious factors responsible for the preferred choice of treatment by persons with epilepsy. Furthermore, the study found out that despite the adherence of these Christians to their various religious denominations, some of them still recommended traditionally-based healing alongside church healing and deliverance sessions.

The study concluded that clerics and neurologists could work effectively for better care and social tolerance for people with epilepsy in order to reduce the stigma and discrimination against them in the society.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The interaction between religion and healing is complex and in many respects ambivalent. Religious beliefs are products of people's culture, likewise cultures interprete what constitute sickness and the meanings associated with specific illnesses. It is also within specific cultures that healing is sought and appropriated. Throughout history, healing power has been recognized and has played a significant role in every religion and culture.[1]

In many religions, the founder or key figure is often associated with healing. For example, in Christianity, Jesus was a renowned healer and also commissioned his followers to "heal the sick". Indeed, the first generation of Christians was primarily a healing community. Likewise in Judaism, the name "Jehovah Rapha" means the "Lord our healer" and it was believed by Israelites that Yahweh prescribed the healing remedy for those bitten by serpent during the journey to Canaan, under the leadership of Moses.[2] In Islam, healing is a key part of the revelation given to Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an.[3] Islamic tradition, in both the Sunni and Shi'a branches, attributes several dramatic healings to Prophet Muhammad. The hadith, (sayings and doings) of the Prophet collected and compiled after Muhammad's death, offer extensive commentary on disease and medicine. In a much quoted hadith, Muhammad stated, "God has

[1]Matthews A. Ojo," Religion and Healing," in Stephen Glazier (ed), *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religion* (New York: Routledge,2001), p.144.
[2]Religion and Touch Healing.Online. 12 April 2012. (http://www.newuniversalchurch.org/newsletter.mhtml)
[3]Religion and Touch Healing.Online. 12 April 2012. (http://www.newuniversalchurch.org/newsletter.mhtml)

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not sent down a disease without sending down a remedy". Thus, one vital healing method shared by both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims is healing through prayer.[4]

Throughout history, Judaism has had a rich tradition of healing folklore. For example, Isaiah treated King Hezekiah for intestinal illness with an application of figs (Is.38:21). Equally, the Talmud devotes pages to material *medica* that came from ancient Babylonia concerning the warding off of demons, the evil eye, and other causes of illness with charms, amulets, potions, and incantations. They derive healing power from Hebrew, the language of the Bible and so of God. Hebrew letters are placed in the amulets to be worn around the neck, carried in one's pocket and placed at sick beds. Even herbs from Sabbath services or unleavened bread from a Passover Seder can be medicinal. It has been discovered that the basis of Jewish concern for healing is the belief that healthiness is a spiritual virtue.[5]

Almost every culture of the world has realized the relationship of good health to successful living. Each culture explored and utilized healing power from within the framework of its own knowledge and traditions.Hence, in Africa, traditional religions have been the basis of medicine and healing. Africans conceive diseases and healing as religious experiences requiring religious approaches.

Healing in traditional Africa begins from the premise of finding the source of ill-health, hence answers are always sought to two basic questions: How did the illness or traumatic accident happen to the victim, and why did it happen to the victim?[6] Consequently, there are three general

[4]Nancy Gallagher "Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Islamic Texts and Traditions" in Lindsay Jones (ed), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd edition, Vol. 6, 2005), p. 3831.
[5]David L. Freeman "Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Judaism" in Lindsay Jones (ed), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd edition, Vol.6, 2005), pp.3828-3830.
[6]Brian M. Du Toit "Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Africa" in Lindsay Jones (ed), (2nd edition, vol.6, 2005), p. 3817.

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dimensions of the aetiology of diseases in Africa. First, Africans believe that diseases are biological or natural phenomenon that could be due to visible natural causes such as ageing, accident, or overwork. Second, diseases could be caused by evil agencies, the devil, evil spirits, jinns, witches or enemies. Third, illnesses could come from God or his ministers or ancestors as punishment for sins such as breaking of taboo. Such illnesses can only be removed by the moral repentance of the sufferer. In correspondence with these beliefs, two medical systems can be distinguished. These are biomedicineand indigenous native healing. In whatever healing system, the method of healing is definitely linked to the aetiologies already identified. Quite often, Africans make use of plurality of therapeutic systems whenever they are ill, because they believe that every system has its own benefit.[7]

Some diseases and illnesses are regarded as mysterious largely because there is no scientific knowledge to explain them. Among these diseases is epilepsy. This study therefore centres on how Nigerian Christians as a religious group, conceive epilepsy from their religious experience, and how this belief influences their social perception of people with epilepsy.

Epilepsy is a chronic, non-communicable disorder of the brain and not less than three (3) of every one thousand (1000) people in several places are affected. It represents one of the most common chronic neurological disorders that carry a high burden of social morbidity and the patients are highly stigmatized and discriminated against. The World Health Organization (WHO), International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), and the

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[7]Matthews A.Ojo, "Religion and Healing" in Stephen Glazier (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 139.

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