

Charms, Talisman, and Amulets in Contemporary African Christianity

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Abstract

One practice, which in recent times has gain much popularity, patronage and great entrance in modern African Christianity, is the use of charms, talisman and amulets which for many years were considered the reserve of African indigenous religions. This practice though the Bible is critical about it has eventually struggled its way in. The question however is, what biblical, theological or religious teachings forms the basis for these practices and how consistent are these practices with the general teaching of the Bible. This article seeks to explore the phenomenon by analysing the facts and trends to decipher influences and implications for the present and future of Christianity in Africa and beyond.

Keywords: charm, talisman, religion, beliefs, doctrine,

Introduction

Africa for many years has introduced lot of important practices that have ensured the reception of the religion as one of the three major religions of Africa including Traditional Religions of Africa and Islam. Amidst lot of struggle to emerge as a religion that identifies with the social, cultural, political and religious challenges and needs of the African peoples, the church has undergone many changes. It has defined and redefined itself severally but always found new and fresh issues confronting it every time.

This is the reason why recent developments of the use of charms, talisman and amulets in contemporary African Christianity which seem syncretic present yet another challenge to the whole enterprise of consolidation and growth of the church in Africa and its acceptance in other parts of the world. It might seem unimportant and probably not capture the scholarly eye of elite researchers, but the fragmentation of incidences is quite enlightening and demanding such that when they eventually explode it might present a catastrophic shock to the gains made over the years by Christianity to make the church in Africa relevant and accepted.

The concept of RELIGION in Africa

Religion is perhaps the most significant, powerful thing in the life of many Africans. Mbiti⁴⁰² and Parrinder⁴⁰³ have variously described the African as notoriously and incurably religious. Religion is so significant in so that s/he it is difficult to understand anything about him in isolation to his religion and culture. It is what forms his cosmology and worldview. His susceptibility to accepting practices similar in his culture and tradition as imported to Christianity is irresistible no matter how inconsistent and contradictory they might be. He comes into Christianity with depth of beliefs and predispositions, expressions, typologies, rites and rituals that is familiar to him in his traditional, cultural and religious cosmologies. Therefore, when practices such as charms, talisman, and amulets are introduced in his present environment as a Christian it induces in him a propensity to accept, justify and practice without being too much critical, the danger therefore is greater syncretism

Unlike other cultures that find a complete dichotomy between religion, personal life and community life. In Africa, there is nothing like a personal life or differences between religion, culture and traditions. African culture and traditions find their full expression in

⁴⁰² John S Mbiti (1990). African religions & philosophy. Heinemann

⁴⁰³ Geoffrey E Parrinder (1976) Africa's Three Religions, Sheldon Press

religions and African religions find its full sense of expression and meaning in the traditions and cultures of the African peoples. As a field of both academic research and phenomenon of practice and devotion, according to Sundermeier,⁴⁰⁴ religion is the foundation of all life. For Opoku⁴⁰⁵ it is 'the source of life and meaning.' Not only for the African but also for many other cultures and traditions. For Mbiti⁴⁰⁶ it is an epistemological activity, not just an intellectual, cognitive experience. As a phenomenon or construct religion influences every area of human life i.e. health, politics, science, law and economics. Religion forms in majority a mental disposition and emotional behaviours.

Submitted by Morreall and Tamara,⁴⁰⁷ there is no scholarly consensus on what precisely constitutes "a religion". Peter⁴⁰⁸, submits that the etymology of the word is from middle English "*religioun*" from the old French "*religion*" which may have been originally derived from the Latin "*religo*" meaning "good faith," "ritual," and other similar meanings or from the Latin "*religãre*" meaning, "to tie fast." Peter⁴⁰⁹ submits that the modern concept of religion, as an abstraction that entails distinct sets of beliefs or doctrines is a recent invention.

⁴⁰⁴ Sundermeier, T., (1999), Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft in theologischen Kontext [What is religion? Religious studies in a theological context], Chr Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh

⁴⁰⁵ Opoku, K.A., (1993), 'African Traditional Religion: An enduring heritage', in J.K. Olupona & S.S. Nyang (eds.), Religious plurality in Africa: Essays in honour of John S. Mbiti, n.p., Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.

⁴⁰⁶ Mbiti, J.S., (1990), African Religions and Philosophy, 2nd edn. Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford.

⁴⁰⁷ Morreall, John; Sonn, Tamara (2013). "Myth 1: All Societies Have Religions". 50 Great Myths of Religion. Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 12–17; Nongbri, Brent (2013). Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept. Yale University Press

⁴⁰⁸ Harrison, Peter (1990). 'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁰⁹ Harrison, Peter (2015). The Territories of Science and Religion. University of Chicago Press; Roberts, Jon (2011). "Science and Religion". In Shank, Michael; Numbers, Ronald; Harrison, Peter (Eds.). Wrestling with Nature: From Omens to Science

Brent⁴¹⁰ concurs that the concept was formed in the 16th and 17th centuries. Despite these rhetorics, scholars have attempted a categorisation and definition of religion. Geertz⁴¹¹ defines religion as “a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.

To Durkheim⁴¹² religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set aside and forbidden – thus, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community”. For Karl Marx⁴¹³, religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. To Whitehead⁴¹⁴ religion is, “the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension...”

In summary, it can be supposed that religion is a system of thoughts, feelings, and actions that is shared by a people and that gives them an object of devotion. A code of behaviour by which persons may examine the personal and social consequences of their actions; and a frame of reference by which individuals may relate to themselves and the universe. In all these submissions, one thing is clear, and that is, religion is so much important to human existence and survival such that it cannot simply be ignored. Particularly, as submitted by Mbiti

⁴¹⁰ Nongbri, Brent (2013). *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. p. 152.
Harrison, Peter (1990). *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 1.

⁴¹¹ (1973)

⁴¹² Durkheim, Émile, (1915), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (translated by J. W. Swain), London: Allen & Unwin.

⁴¹³ (1844)

⁴¹⁴ Schmidt, p. 15

and Parrinder the African is notoriously and incurably religious; religion pervades every fibre of his life and worldviews such that there is a thin line between his culture and religions. As a result, the Africans attitude to towards religions is full of deep veneration, devotion, dedication as well as rites and rituals.

Religious BELIEFS and EXPRESSION in Africa

Religious beliefs and expressions in Africa is something with deep awe, reverence and devotion. It emanate from a depth of successive traditions and culture (written and oral) over many years from one generations to another, kept, revised and protected by the very custodians of the traditions and cultures of Africa who are the kings and priests. Unlike other parts of the world, religion in Africa is what defines Africa's history and ancestry; it is what binds his traditions and culture and make them meaningful and relevant. Acknowledging the difficulty in understanding evolution of religion, Eliade⁴¹⁵ submit that indeed it is imprecise owing to the lack of clearly distinguished stages, but suggest a typology by anthropological and historical studies of isolated cultures in various periods of development.

Nevertheless, observation of religious beliefs and expression is grouped in respect to origin, doctrines and tenets of beliefs and practices. Generally, all religions are grouped as monotheistic, polytheistic and pantheistic. Beyond the elementary forms are what is commonly called the higher (*revealed*) religions. They embody a principle of transcendence, i.e., sometimes a *godhead*, that involves humans in an experience beyond their immediate personal and social needs, known as the sacred or the holy. Another classification is based on the origins of the body of knowledge: some religions are *revealed*, as in Judaism (where God revealed the Commandments to Moses), Christianity (where Christ, the Son of God, revealed the Word of the

⁴¹⁵ Eliade, Mircea. (1978) History of Religious Ideas: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian mysteries. Volume I, University of Chicago Press, Eliade, Mircea. The Encyclopaedia of Religion. MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987.

Father), and Islam (where the angel Gabriel revealed God's will to Muhammad).

Some religions are *non-revealed*, or *natural*, (African Indigenous/Traditional Religion). Included among these and sometimes called philosophies of eternity are Buddhist sects (where Buddha is recognized not as a god but as an enlightened leader), Brahmanism, and Taoism and other Chinese metaphysical doctrines. Each of these categorizations have what they contribute to the discourse and debate on religion. The many modifications and manifestations of these categories of religion and religious expressions bring with it sets of knowledge, beliefs and practices that have evolved in the context of culture, traditions and encounters with indigenous ways of life, culture and traditions.

Concept of the CHURCH

The concept of church over the years has assumed various expressions and modification to incorporate other socio-religio-political theories. According to Kittel⁴¹⁶ in the OT the usual Hebrew words to designate a gathering of God's people were *'edah* and *qāhāl*. "*Edah*" which referred to the people even when they were not assembled (as in Num 31: 16), but "*qāhāl*" usually designated an assembly (as in Deuteronomy 5:22). Expressions like "the congregation of the Lord" or "the assembly of Israel," as Jay⁴¹⁷ succinctly summarizes is "a people called into being by God, who from time to time are gathered together for such solemn religious occasions as the receiving of the law (Deut 5 :22), and the reading of the book of the Law by Ezra (Nehemiah 8:2). Ecclesia (or *ekklēsia*) in Christian theology means both: a particular body of faithful people, and the whole body of the faithful.

⁴¹⁶ Gerhard Kittel. ed, TDNT. trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1979), a. v. "ekklēsia," by K. L Schmidt;

⁴¹⁷ Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries* (Atlanta, 1978), 5-9;

According to Robertson⁴¹⁸ the Latin “*ecclesia*”, from Greek “*ekklesia*” is a compound of two segments: “*ek*”, a preposition meaning “out of”, and a verb, “*kaleo*”, signifying “to call” - together, literally, “to call out”. The “*ecclesia*” or “*ekklesia*” (Greek: *ἐκκλησία*) according to Osborne⁴¹⁹ was the principal assembly of the democracy of ancient Athens. According to Mogens,⁴²⁰ the assembly was responsible for declaring war, military strategy and electing the “*strategoï*” and other officials. It was responsible for nominating and electing magistrates (*árchontes*), thus indirectly electing the members of the Areopagus.⁴²¹ In ancient Greece an “*ekklesiasterion*” was a building specifically built for the purpose of holding the supreme meetings of the ecclesia.

According to Brown⁴²² the term “*ecclesia*” or “*ekklesia*” (Greek: *ἐκκλησία*) is adopted to describe the Christian church which is a body of believers who have been called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ. An appellation which according to Bickerman⁴²³ is derived from “*Christus*,” that is, “the Anointed,” and is composed of the Church Militant (Christians on Earth) and the Church Triumphant (Christians in Heaven). The church is also local and universal. Local churches are gatherings of

⁴¹⁸ Robertson, A. T. (1919). *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

⁴¹⁹ Osborne, Robin, ed. (2008), *The World of Athens: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Culture*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press also see Moore, J. M., ed. (1975), *Aristotle and Xenophon on Democracy and Oligarchy*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press,

⁴²⁰ Hansen, Mogens Herman; Fischer-Hansen, Tobias (1994), “Political Architecture in Archaic and Classical Greek Poleis”, in Whitehead, David (ed.), *From Political Architecture to Stephanus Byzantius: Sources for the Ancient Greek Polis*, *Historia: Einzelschriften*, vol. 87, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, pp. 23–90,

⁴²¹ Sinclair, R. K. (1991), *Democracy and participation in Athens*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press,

⁴²² Colin Brown, ed., the new international *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1979), a.v. “Church, Synagogue,” by L Coenen.

⁴²³ Bickerman, Elias J. (April 1949). “The Name of Christians”. *The Harvard Theological Review*. 42 (2): 109–124. doi:10.1017/s0017816000019635. JSTOR 1507955. also available in Bickerman, Elias J. (1986). *Studies in Jewish and Christian history*. ISBN 90-04-04395-0. (from which page numbers are cited)

members of the universal church. The local church is where the members of the universal church can fully apply the “body” principles of 1 Corinthians 12, encouraging, teaching, and building one another up in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the church is two-fold. The church comes together for the purpose of bringing each member to spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:13). The church reaches out (scatters) to spread the love of Christ and the gospel message to the world (Matthew 28:18-20). The church also come to worship God (Luke 4:8; John 4:23; Rev. 4:10), study His Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor. 4:6), pray (Acts 2:42), love one another (John 13:35; Phil. 1:1-4), help each other (Gal. 6:2). In summary, the church is not a building or a denomination. According to the Bible, the church is the body of Christ - all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Basic DOCTRINES of the Church

Doctrine (Latin: *doctrina*) meaning "teaching" or "instruction" is a codification of beliefs or a body of teachings or instructions, taught principles or positions.⁴²⁴ According to Barackman⁴²⁵ in the Greek New Testament, there are two words for doctrine: “*didache*” and “*didaskalia*” both means teaching, instruction, education, and explanation. According to Davidson⁴²⁶ in Scripture, doctrine refers to the entire body of essential theological truths that define and describe that message. These doctrines and teaching of the church according to Grillmeier⁴²⁷ as essence of Christianity revolves around the life, death

⁴²⁴ James Madison Pendleton, (1878) *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology*. American Baptist publication society, pp 1878 - 426

⁴²⁵ Barackman, Floyd H. *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith*. Kregel Academic, 2001.

⁴²⁶ Kelly, John Norman Davidson. *Early Christian Doctrines*. A&C Black, 2000. See also Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Vol. 1. University of Chicago Press, 2018.

⁴²⁷ Grillmeier, Aloys. *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the apostolic age to Chalcedon (451)*. Vol. 1. Westminster John Knox Press, 1975.

and resurrection of Jesus. Pelikan⁴²⁸ rightly states that for Christians the “*didache*” and “*didaskalia*” is that Jesus died for humanity, that God raised him from the dead, and that Jesus will come again at the end of time.

Among the essential doctrines is the Gospel. “*Euangellion*” meaning “good news” or “good message”. The main title that the Bible has for itself is “The Word of God.”⁴²⁹ Although God used many people to do the actual writing, it is primarily God’s Word. God was pleased to commit His Word to writing. Hence, it is called “the Holy Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15). It was inscripturated, or written down in human script.⁴³⁰ God used the human authors of Scripture as His fingers to write the Bible.⁴³¹ 2 Tim. 3:16 says that all Scripture is “inspired by God”.

EVOLUTION of the church (historical development)

The history of the evolution of the church links the past factual data of the gospel with the future proclamation and application of that gospel in a present synthesis that creates understanding of its heritage and inspiration for further proclamation and application. The Romans, as no other people up to their time, developed a sense of unity of humankind under a universal law. Whereas Rome set the political climate, Athens set the philosophical climate for the early church while Judaism set the relational climate. Christianity developed in Judea in the mid-first century CE, based first on the teachings of Jesus and later on the writings and missionary work of the disciple.

⁴²⁸ Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian tradition: a history of the development of doctrine*. Vol. 5. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

⁴²⁹ Beekman, John, and John Callow. *Translating the Word of God, with scripture and topical indexes*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974.

⁴³⁰ Carroll, Benajah Harvey. *Inspiration of the Bible*. T. Nelson, 1980. See also Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Inspiration of the Bible*. Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1894.

⁴³¹ Canale, Fernando. *The cognitive principle of Christian theology: An hermeneutical study of the revelation and inspiration of the Bible*. CreateSpace, 2013.

Originally, Christianity was a small, unorganized sect that preached salvation through belief in Jesus as the son of God after death.

Judaism had a status of a legal religion in the Roman Empire with formal protections. Although Christianity developed out of Jewish traditions, it had no such legal protections. Christians were occasionally persecuted - formally punished - for their beliefs during the first two centuries CE. In 313 CE, the emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan⁴³², which granted Christianity legal status. In 325, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea to determine the formal - or orthodox - beliefs of Christianity. The result was the Nicene Creed, which laid out the agreed upon beliefs of the council. In 380 CE, the emperor Theodosius issued the Edict of Thessalonica⁴³³, which made Christianity, specifically Nicene Christianity, the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Division in the Church is not a new phenomenon. 5th Century following the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) the Assyrian (or Persian) church, the Copts, the Syrians, the Ethiopians and the Armenians developed autonomy. From the 11th Century East and West are no longer in communion. From the 16th Century, Division extends to the Church of the West, at first in the Germanic world with the Protestant Reform (1517) and later in the Anglo-Saxon world with the Act of Supremacy of the Church of England.⁴³⁴ There have been seven major councils of the church including the First Council of Nicaea (325), the First Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431), the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the Third Council of

⁴³² Frend, W. H. C. *The Early Church* SPCK 1965, p. 137 see also Cross and Livingstone. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 1974 art. "Milan, Edict of."

⁴³³ Ehler, Sidney Zdeneck; Morrall, John B. *Church and State Through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries.* (1967). p. 6-7. See also Williams, Stephen; Friell, Gerard. *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay.* B.T. Batsford Ltd (1994). pp 46-60

⁴³⁴ Fahlbusch, Erwin, and Bromiley, Geoffrey William, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Volume 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003. p. 362.

Constantinople (680–681) and finally, the Second Council of Nicaea (787).

During the period, the church dealt with many heresies including, Docetism, Montanism, Arianism, Pelagianism, Gnosticism and the Monophysite. At this time, the majority of the formal doctrines of the church had been settled and creeds developed. There has been protestation to Roman Catholicism originating in the 16th century Reformation, a movement against what it perceived to be errors in the Catholic Church⁴³⁵ it emphasized the priesthood of all believers, justification by faith alone (*sola fide*)⁴³⁶ rather than good works, and the highest authority of the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) rather than church tradition.⁴³⁷ Many figures of influence featured within the period including Martin Luther and John Calvin, Jan Hus, and John Wycliffe, Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin and John Knox etc.

In other parts of the world, including Africa major figures included Irenaeus and Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine. The years that followed experienced events that further changed the face of the church. Historians identify three events (waves) of increased religious enthusiasm between the early 18th century and the late 20th century. These later became known as the great awakenings around the years 1727, 1792, 1830, 1857 and 1882. The First Great Awakening was a wave of religious enthusiasm among Protestants in the American colonies c. 1730–1740, emphasising the traditional Reformed virtues of Godly preaching, rudimentary liturgy, and a deep sense of personal guilt and redemption by Christ Jesus.

⁴³⁵ Protestant – Definition of Protestant in English by Oxford Dictionaries". Oxford Dictionaries – English.

⁴³⁶ Four Hundred Years: Commemorative Essays on the Reformation of Dr. Martin Luther and Its Blessed". Archive.org. Retrieved 2015-08-13.

⁴³⁷ Barber, John (2008). *The Road from Eden: Studies in Christianity and Culture*. Academica Press. p. 233. Also, the five fides' of include: *Sola scriptura*: the Bible alone as the source of authority for Christians (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). *Sola fide*: salvation as a free gift. *Sola gratia*: grace as the reason for our salvation (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:9). *Solo Christo*: the role of Jesus in salvation (Hebrews 4:15) and *Soli Deo Gloria*: the glory of God as the goal of life (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Historian Ahlstrom⁴³⁸ saw it as part of a "great international Protestant upheaval" that also created pietism in Germany, the Evangelical Revival, and Methodism in England. It centred on reviving the spirituality of established congregations and mostly affected Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, German Reformed, Baptist, and Methodist churches, while also spreading within the slave population. The Second Great Awakening (1800–1830s), unlike the first, focused on the unchurched and sought to instil in them a deep sense of personal salvation as experienced in revival meetings. It also sparked the beginnings of groups such as the Mormons, the Restoration Movement and the Holiness movement.

The Third Great Awakening began from 1857 and was most notable for taking the movement throughout the world, especially in English speaking countries.⁴³⁹ The revival movement permanently affected Protestantism as adherents strove to renew individual piety and religious devotion. The Great Awakening marked the emergence of Anglo-American evangelicalism as a trans-denominational movement within the Protestant churches. More recent awakenings (revivals) in the 20th century include the 1904–1905 Welsh Revival, 1906 (Azusa Street Revival), 1930s (Balokole), 1970s (Jesus people), 1971 Barrio Revival and 1909 Chile Revival which spread in the Americas, Africa, and Asia among Protestants and Catholics. The most recent Great Awakening (1904) had its roots in the holiness movement, which had developed in the late 19th century.

Significant names include Dwight L. Moody, Ira D. Sankey, William Booth and Catherine Booth (founders of the Salvation Army), Charles Spurgeon and James Caughey. Hudson Taylor began the China Inland Mission and Thomas John Barnardo founded his famous orphanages. In Africa, the case was not different. Christianity in Africa goes back to the earliest days of the church, when it spread along the

⁴³⁸ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972) p. 263

⁴³⁹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972) p. 263

Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlands of north and northeast Africa and their hinterlands.⁴⁴⁰ Further south, Christianity was introduced later by European Christian missions, initially on the heels of Portuguese expansion. While conversion to Christianity increased with the extension of formal European colonial rule, Africans strived to interpret the new faith in the light of their own religious concerns and concepts and made it their own.⁴⁴¹

Missionary ENCOUNTERS

A Christian mission is an organized effort to spread Christianity to new converts.⁴⁴² Missions involve sending individuals and groups, called missionaries, across boundaries, most commonly geographical boundaries, to carry on evangelism or other activities, such as educational or hospital work.⁴⁴³ Responding to the commission of its master, (Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–18) the church has invested a lot in reaching the world with the gospel. By the time, Constantine reigned (306–337 CE), Christianity had spread to all parts of the Roman Empire, both East and West.⁴⁴⁴ Although paganism and local religions persisted, by 500 CE the population of the Roman Empire was predominantly Christian. During this period, missionary endeavours moved to the empire's borders and beyond.⁴⁴⁵

The advance of Christianity slowed after 500 as the Roman Empire, with which it had become identified disintegrated. In the 7th and 8th

⁴⁴⁰ Isichei, Elizabeth. *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. London: SPCK, 1995.

⁴⁴¹ Hastings, Adrian. *A History of African Christianity, 1950–1975*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511563171

⁴⁴² "Mission". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 8 January 2013.

⁴⁴³ Anderson, Gerald H. "Biographical dictionary of Christian missions." *Missiology* 27, no. 1 (1999): 41-45. See also LaTourette, Kenneth Scott. *A history of Christian missions in China*. Gorgias Press, 2009. And Bosch, David J. *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. No. 16. Orbis books, 2011.

⁴⁴⁴ <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/christianity/v/roman-empire-and-christianity>

⁴⁴⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Society-for-the-Propagation-of-the-Faith>

centuries, Arab invasions established Islam as the dominant religion in about half the area in which Christianity had been dominant.⁴⁴⁶ During this time, however, Celtic and British missionaries spread the faith in western and northern Europe, while missionaries of the Greek Church in Constantinople worked in Eastern Europe and Russia. From 1350 to 1500, Christianity suffered a serious recession. The new Empire of the Ottoman Turks replaced the Arab state and destroyed the Byzantine Empire. The old Eastern Christian churches declined, and in addition, the Black Death killed hundreds of missionaries, who were not replaced.

The Roman Catholic Church, reformed and revitalized after the Council of Trent (1545–63), sent missionaries into the newly discovered and conquered territories of three Catholic empires: Spain, Portugal, and France. As a result, Christianity was established in Central and South America, in the Caribbean, and in the Philippines. Jesuits established missions in Japan, China, and India. Central direction to the completely vast enterprise was provided by the establishment at Rome in 1622 of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a great upsurge of Protestant mission activity, and many more agencies and boards were formed. Many were voluntary and unofficial, but most denominations also established official organizations for missions.

As Christianity moved from continents to continents and encountered various peoples, traditions and cultures. Its message although the same, the method of delivery and theology changed, via mediums of communication, education, translation, understanding and familiarity. No longer was Christianity understood and communicated as they were originally received. For example, in Africa, two types of Christianity emerged i.e. Christianity in Africa and African

⁴⁴⁶ Brian Stanley ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company/Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press Ltd., 2001. 180 pp.

Christianity, Christianity in Africa is historically how Christianity arrived in Africa, its original doctrines and theology.⁴⁴⁷ African Christianity means, how African has come to accept, understood and expressed Christianity with experiences of her tradition, culture, cosmology and worldview.

These missionary encounters with new continents, cultures and people resulted in the redefinition and importation of theological concepts and expressions considered traditionally not mainstream to Christian theologies. This notwithstanding, the people who have succeeded in interpreting Christian concepts and theologies of the gospel of Jesus Christian through their cosmological worldviews and cultural milieu have contributed no little feat to the spread, sustenance and growth of the church. The extremities of this however, is the danger of the importation or inclusion of practices and teachings that stirringly syncretic, standing in clear contrast with authentic Christian beliefs and practices.

Religious SYNCRETISM

Syncretism is the combining of different beliefs, while blending practices of various schools of thoughts. Syncretism involves the merging or assimilation of several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, thus asserting an underlying unity and allowing for an inclusive approach to other faiths.⁴⁴⁸ Religious syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions.⁴⁴⁹ This can occur where multiple religious traditions exist in proximity and function actively in the culture, or when a culture is conquered, and

⁴⁴⁷ Sundkler, Bengt, and Christopher Steed. *A History of the Church in Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁴⁴⁸ Cotter, John (1990). *The New Age and Syncretism, in the World and in the Church*. Long Prairie, Minn.: Neumann Press. 38 p.

⁴⁴⁹ Ferdinando, Keith Billington, Antony (ed.). *Mission and Meaning* (PDF). Paternoster Press. (1995). p. 265.

the conquerors bring their religious beliefs with them, but do not succeed in entirely eradicating the old beliefs or, especially, practices.

The consequence, according to Keith Ferdinando⁴⁵⁰, is a fatal compromise of the dominant religion's integrity. Syncretism is not new to the church; it has been an issue since the first century, concerned with both practices and teachings. Syncretic teachings have been referred to as heretic (heresy – religious heresy). In his work, 'Encyclopaedia of Heresies and Heretics', Clifton⁴⁵¹ indicates that the word "heresy" comes from "*haeresis*", a Latin transliteration of the Greek word originally meaning, 'choosing', 'choice', 'course of action', or in an extended sense a sect or school of thought, which by the first century came to denote warring factions and the party spirit. Heresy eventually became regarded as a departure from orthodoxy, a sense in which heterodoxy was already in Christian use soon after the year 100.⁴⁵²

Heresy is used today to denote the formal denial of a core doctrine of the Christian faith⁴⁵³. It is distinguished from both apostasy⁴⁵⁴ and schism⁴⁵⁵. Early attacks upon alleged heresies formed the matter of

⁴⁵⁰ Ferdinando, Keith. "Sickness and Syncretism in the African Context". In Billington, Antony; Turner, Max (eds.). *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* (PDF). Paternoster Press. (1995). p. 272.

⁴⁵¹ Clifton, Chas S. (1992). *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books.

⁴⁵² Jostein Ådna (editor), *The Formation of the Early Church* (Mohr Siebeck 2005), p. 342

⁴⁵³ J.D Douglas (ed). *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* Paternoster Press/ Zondervan, Exeter/Grand Rapids 1974, art Heresy

⁴⁵⁴ Apostasy (Greek: ἀποστασία *ápostasia*, "a defection or revolt") is the formal disaffiliation from, abandonment of, or renunciation of a religion by a person. It can also be defined within the broader context of embracing an opinion that is contrary to one's previous religious beliefs. One who undertakes apostasy is known as an apostate. Undertaking apostasy is called apostatizing (or apostasizing – also spelled apostacizing). The term apostasy is used by sociologists to mean the renunciation and criticism of, or opposition to, a person's former religion, in a technical sense, with no pejorative connotation.

⁴⁵⁵ A schism is a division between people, usually belonging to an organization, movement, or religious denomination. The word is most frequently applied to a split in what had previously been a single religious body, such as the East–West Schism

Tertullian's Prescription against Heretics⁴⁵⁶ (in 44 chapters, written from Rome), and of Irenaeus' Against Heresies⁴⁵⁷ (ca 180, in five volumes). The letters of Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna warned about mixing Judaism with Christianity, as did other writers, leading to decisions reached in the first ecumenical council, by the Emperor Constantine at Nicaea in 325.⁴⁵⁸

The early Church was birthed through perseverance against intense persecution: (i) physical persecution by the governments of the time, which lauded the oppression, imprisonment, torture and death of Christians for their new religious doctrines; and (ii) intellectual persecution by opposing religious sects who sort to denounce the doctrines of Christianity. The earliest controversies in Late Antiquity were generally Christological in nature, concerning the interpretation of Jesus' (eternal) divinity and humanity. In recent times, some modern Christian Pastors and Prophets failing to find adequate answers in Christianity that solves the existential and experiential regional needs of their people in the context as presented by European Christianity have sort for those answers in other regional and familiar, cultural and religious expressions and brought same into Christianity.

This attempt has seen certain expressions and presentation of Christianity, its theology and doctrines, beliefs and practices in

or the Great Western Schism. It is also used of a split within a non-religious organization or movement or, more broadly, of a separation between two or more people, be it brothers, friends, lovers, etc.

⁴⁵⁶ Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, eds. "The Prescription against Heretics." *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3 (1982): 243-67. See also Holmes, Peter. "The Prescription against Heretics." *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson 10 (2010); Jackson, Maury. "The Heresy Tertullian Overlooked: On Prescription against the Apologist's Use of Rhetoric." *Spes Christiana* 22, no. 23vol (2011): 15.

⁴⁵⁷ Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The scandal of the incarnation: Irenaeus against the heresies*. Ignatius Press, 2017. See also Irenaeus, Saint. *The Writings of Irenaeus: Irenaeus against heresies*. Vol. 5. T. & T. Clark, 1868; Kalvesmaki, Joel. "The Original Sequence of Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1: Another Suggestion." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15, no. 3 (2007): 407-417.

⁴⁵⁸ Frances M. Young. *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 1: Origins to Constantine*, Series: Cambridge History of Christianity(2006),

contexts that seems syncretic as well as heretic. That notwithstanding, the gradual general acceptance and normalization of these expressions, beliefs and practices in these regional christianities seems to reinterpret certain basic Christian beliefs and practices in contexts that are syncretic and on the whole heretical by combining Christian ideas with regional, cultural and traditional religious beliefs and practices. The problem however, is the extent to which some of these expressions can be accepted or tolerated in the church as practices or beliefs.

CHARMS, TALISMAN and AMULETS

One practice, which in recent times has gain much popularity, patronage and great entrance in modern African Christianity, is the use of charms, talisman and amulets. This practice though the Bible is critical about it has eventually struggled its way in. According to Christiane,⁴⁵⁹ a talisman is an occult object stemming from religious or astrological practices. It connects the possessor with the spiritual world to provide functions such as healing and protection. Together the use of charms, talisman and amulets seem to have become very popular in modern Christian churches and they are either prepared by Pastors, Prophets and Bishops for members or they are purchased from juju men/women (*okomfo*) for use by themselves. Usually they are crystals, Celtic crosses, or other mystical jewellery worn as a pendant on a necklace or bracelet or hung on a chain dangling from the rear-view mirror of automobiles or images placed in the church rooms etc.⁴⁶⁰

These so-called “sacred stones” or “metals” and other “elements” are believed to have mystical powers, which supposedly bring personal

⁴⁵⁹ Gruber, Christiane (2016). Power and Protection: Islamic Art and the Supernatural. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum. p. 33.

⁴⁶⁰ Vyse, Stuart A. (2000). Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. pp. 19–22. ISBN 978-0-1951-3634-0.

protection, success, and prosperity.⁴⁶¹ They are often regarded as transmitters of healing energies and positive vibrations that are thought to promote feelings of peace and tranquillity.⁴⁶² What does God say about people who use amulets, according to Isaiah 2:6, NIV “They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans”. The Bible further warns that, “In that day, the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes [and] amulets” (Isaiah 3:18-20, NAS).⁴⁶³ In the Deuteronomic narrative, one of the practices that God categorically warn is charm and spells. In Deuteronomy 18:9-12 ESV the bible says, “When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.”

Again, in the Prophetic literature of the Biblical narrative the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 13:20 ESV) declared, “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds.” These notwithstanding, a development in modern Christianity that attracts attention is the subtle but strong emergence of the use of charms and talismanic elements by some Pastors, Prophets and Bishops. The

⁴⁶¹ Risen, Jane L. (2016). "Believing what we do not believe: Acquiescence to superstitious beliefs and other powerful intuitions". *Psychological Review*. 123 (2): 182–207. doi:10.1037/rev0000017. PMID 26479707.

⁴⁶² Staddon, J. E. & Simmelhag, V. L. (1971). "The 'supersitition' experiment: A reexamination of its implications for the principles of adaptive behaviour". *Psychological Review*. 78 (1): 3–43. doi:10.1037/h0030305.

⁴⁶³ A. A. Barb, St. Zacharias the Prophet and Martyr: A Study in Charms and Incantations. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 11 (1948), pp. 35-67 (34 pages)

craze for so-called mega church with huge membership and quest to keep each one of them has pushed some pastors to enter into contract with some juju men and women for charms and talismans. Some of these charms and talismans have been in the forms of holy water, anointed oil, handkerchiefs, hand-bangles perfumes, stickers etc. Unsuspectingly, these are sold to members in the name of prophetic guidance (akwankyere).

Again, antagonism, unhealthy competition for popularity and extreme emphasis on materialistic gain as proof of one's success in ministry has brought about accusations of some pastors casting spells to maim, kill or destroy the ministry of colleague pastors who are seen to be succeeding than others. In addition, some pastors and prophets not finding enough concepts in Christianity as presented by Europeans resort to concepts and practices that found in the (African) indigenous religious or traditional cultures that evoke fear and extreme reverence. Such concepts, though contradictory, find wide acceptance because of their natural and relative familiarity with the indigenous peoples. The word charm according to when used commonly refers to a quality that makes someone or something likable or attractive. The word, charm comes ultimately from the Latin word "*canere*", which means, "to sing or chant."

Today's common meaning of charm, however, is an extension of the word "*incantation*" from middle English "*incantacioun*", from middle French "*incantation*", from late Latin "*incantare*."⁴⁶⁴ To "*enchant*" is the use of spells or verbal charms spoken or sung as a part of a ritual of magic also a written or recited formula of words designed to produce a particular effect. Charm therefore came to refer to anything believed to have the magical properties of a spell. A charm therefore is a spell that adds certain properties to an object or individual.⁴⁶⁵ A

⁴⁶⁴ Olsan, L. T. "Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice". *Social History of Medicine*. 16 (3): 343–366. doi:10.1093/shm/16.3.343 (1 December 2003).

⁴⁶⁵ Conley, Craig (2008). *Magic Words, A Dictionary*. San Francisco: Weiser Books. p. 40

talisman is also an object that someone believes holds magical properties that provide particular power, energy, and specific benefits to the possessor.⁴⁶⁶ The word talisman comes from French talisman, via Arabic “*tilism*”, which comes from the ancient Greek “*telesma*” (τέλεσμα), ultimately from the verb *teleō* (τελέω)⁴⁶⁷ the most common. According to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn,⁴⁶⁸ a talisman is "a magical figure charged with the force which it is intended to represent."⁴⁶⁹

MAGIC (enchanted) Paraphernalia

The most common of talisman used by pastors in modern Christianity are hand-bangles, handkerchiefs, oil (all types) and magic rings. A magical (enchantment) works to give pastors powers and a wide range of explicit forces that they would then be able to use for themselves and additionally for their assembly. Magical (enchanted) paraphernalia like rings can be endowed with any number of special abilities that are requested by people that need special magical aid in their lives. A magic (enchanted) paraphernalia may contains the spiritual energy of the spell that has been cast on it. For example, a

⁴⁶⁶ Campo, Juan E. (2009). Encyclopedia of Islam. New York: Facts On File. p. 40 see also Thomas, William; Pavitt, Kate (1995). The Book of Talismans, Amulets and Zodiacal Gems. Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company.

⁴⁶⁷ "talisman - Definition of talisman in English by Oxford Dictionaries". Oxford Dictionaries - English. Retrieved 17 March 2018. See also "Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, τέλεσμα". Perseus.tufts.edu. Retrieved 18 March 2018.

⁴⁶⁸ The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Latin: Ordo Hermeticus Aurorae Aureae; or, more commonly, the Golden Dawn (Aurora Aurea) was a secret society devoted to the study and practice of the occult, metaphysics, and paranormal activities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was founded by William Robert Woodman, William Wynn Westcott and Samuel Liddell Mathers, known as a magical order, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was active in Great Britain and focused its practices on theurgy and spiritual development (Jenkins, Phillip (2000) Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History, pg. 74. See also Smoley, Richard (1999) Hidden Wisdom: A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions, p 102-103.

⁴⁶⁹ Gonzalez-Wippler, Migene (2001). Complete Book Of Amulets & Talismans. Lewellyn Publications.

magic (enchanted) ring for power is a power spell that is attached to a ring, a magical ring for a money is a money spell attached to a ring.

Magical rings for healing used for healing spiritual and physical ailments to eliminate the root cause of sickness and disturbance in one's life. Each magic paraphernalia is made magical by mystical powers that are drawn into the ring. Among the many reasons for Pastors going for these rings include, the desire to be able to heal the sick from all kinds of diseases, exorcize people from demonic manipulation, teach and touch people's hearts with the word of God, and to predict/foresee things that are about to happen. For many of these paraphernalia, church members never become suspicious because they look normal and ordinary.

SANDAWAMA Oil (enchanted oil)

Sandawama Oil originally used by numerous customary healers and pastors is a substance said to be able to achieve positive change in one's life in an assortment of ways. Diverse sandawama have various purposes; for instance, some sandawama oils can bring you riches and flourishing, while others can bring you adore or satisfaction. While not all spells require props or fixings, sandawama oils stand the trial of time as one of the most seasoned and best mystical substances. Sandawama Oil in France Africa can make you rich beyond anything you could ever imagine. What you do is to apply the oil regularly on your body or face or mix the oil with pomade or other substances that is used on the body.

The spell of attraction, power, favour and riches just attracts the people one needs to get what one is seeking. Normally, the sandawama oil goes with a skin, which is often laid down in front of where the pastor sits or behind the pulpit where he stands to preach. Among the many said things that the sandawama oil and skin can achieve include, bringing people good life. In addition, when someone has worked hard but nothing seems to come out of it and

when one is seeking an employment jobs, manage business, and family, provided the individual can properly follow the instructions.

EFFIGIES and IMAGES in church rooms

Another practice that has emerged and become quite popular in some churches include the placing of the images of certain creatures and figures that are unknown to Christian images and figures. Recently there was a case where a traditional priestess Patricia Asieduaa, popularly known as Nana Agradaa, in a public television accused a founder and leader of Anointed Palace Chapel, Francis Antwi, popularly known as Reverend Obofour of bringing the figure (effigy) and totem of his occult master into his church and challenged him to a contest to prove she was aware of what that effigy came from and what it does since she had herself prepared similar for her customers. Unfortunately, the said Pastor could not challenge the Priestess. In a form of an effigy or picture, they are placed on the chalice or hanged in the church room to keep close contact with those masters and increase their influence and efficacy.

In another incidence, Collins Agyei Yeboah, a pastor who sought the help of a renowned fetish priest at Akomadan-Afrancho in the Ashanti Region to establish a church known as Vision Charismatic Chapel at Kato near Berekum in the Brong Ahafo region, has lost his powers. This followed the recovery of the juju from the pastor by the fetish priest, Nana Kwaku Bonsam and his allies on Wednesday April 2 this year. Two years ago, Mr. Agyei Yeboah, founder and leader of Vision Charismatic Chapel allegedly consulted Nana Kwaku Bonsam at his shrine in Akomadan-Afrancho for a special juju to establish a church at Kato, his hometown. The prominent fetish priest, who had hit the news recently, obliged and prepared a special juju at the cost of GH¢550, out of which the pastor instantly paid GH¢100, promising to pay the remainder in a few days.

Pastor Agyei Yeboah, after taking delivery of the juju, came back a few weeks later and paid an additional amount of GH¢100 to Nana

Kwaku Bonsam. According to the celebrated fetish priest, the pastor, believed to be in his early thirties, failed to settle the balance of GH¢350 two long years after utilizing the juju powers to establish his church. “In spite of numerous reminders to him to pay the remaining GH¢350, Pastor Agyei Yeboah refused to honour the payment with the flimsy excuse that the juju he collected did not work,” the fetish priest stated. Nana Kwaku Bonsam disclosed that this stubborn stance of the so-called man of God incensed his gods who quickly ordered the retrieval of the juju from Pastor Agyei Yeboah. He explained that the gods spelt out two conditions for him, which were either that the juju be retrieved from the pastor or he, Nana Kwaku Bonsam would lose his life in a matter of hours.

The fetish priest said not wanting to lose his life, he organized his guys and headed for Kato on Wednesday with the mission to dispossess the pastor of the juju. Anticipating a possible resistance from Pastor Agyei Yeboah, Nana Kwaku Bonsam noted that he first sought permission from the Divisional Police Commander of Berekum before proceeding to the church premises. He said when he and his people got to the church hall around 12 mid-day, the first service was just over and church members were in a queue to attend counselling session. “When he saw me, he was shocked and could not utter a word, so I just asked him to give me the powers in a matter of seconds if only he was desirous to live again,” he pointed out.

According to the famous fetish priest, Pastor Agyei Yeboah who was visibly shaken, could not put up any resistance but wilfully went to the back of the church where he had placed the juju, retrieved it, and delivered it to the owner. Nana Kwaku Bonsam indicated that after accomplishing his mission, he and his entourage went back to thank the Berekum Divisional Police Command before returning to base. He disclosed that the whole township of Kato went agog when news went round that the fetish priest who gave juju to Pastor Agyei Yeboah to establish his church had come to collect back the juju. Nana Kwaku Bonsam noted that but for the intervention of the police officers who accompanied him to the church premises, the leader and founder of

Vision Charismatic Church would have been lynched by the angry church members in whose presence the exercise took place.

“The police had to whisk him away, to prevent him from being lynched by the angry church members in whose presence the retrieval of the juju took place,” he said. The popular fetish priest gave stern warning to pastors who had sought his help but were not performing the necessary rites, to contact him immediately before he descends heavily on them. He shockingly revealed that more than 460 pastors including renowned and influential ones had come to him for one form of power or the other in establishing and sustaining their churches in the country. Later in an interview, Pastor Agyei Yeboah admitted taking juju from Nana Kwaku Bonsam but asked his church members and the townsfolk to pardon him, stressing that never will he commit such a sacrilegious act again. He said he was ready to continue with the church if only members would forgive him.

Conclusion

Bush⁴⁷⁰ noted that ‘ecclesia reformata, sempe reformanda’ (the church reformed, always being reformed) as one of the enduring slogan that vocalized struggle for Protestant Reformation. Although its origin is uncertain, the kernel of the idea is true enough: Until we are fully, finally and perfectly conformed to the exact likeness of Christ, we as saints individually, and the whole church collectively, must always be reforming. Unquestionably, the significance of the idea did not suggest that Christians stay abreast of every wind of transformation in the name of being relevant in the face of the rapid social, cultural, economic and political changes confronting its members. Neither, did the principle of ‘ecclesia reformata, sempe reformanda’ required the church to rewrite its doctrinal statements in every generation in order to keep in step with it.

⁴⁷⁰ Michael Bush, (2008) "Calvin and the Reformanda Sayings," in Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Calvinus sacrarum literarum interpres: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,) p. 286.

This meant that any act of reform must necessarily be in accordance with the teaching and the spirit of the teaching of Jesus Christ and not just an introduction of practices that are theologically baseless and inconsistent with general biblical teaching. The challenge to remain true to authentic Christian traditions and teachings is more urgent and critical now than ever, the church cannot accept to allow too much of practices and teachings that are sterningly contradictory into its teachings and practices.

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