

The Sociological Implications of the Worldview of the Annang People: An Advocacy for Paradigm Shift

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Abstract

The focal point of this paper is that the worldview of the Annang people of Nigeria, which is based on supernaturalism, is shaped by many factors viz: geographical location, historical background, economic situation, religious experiences and consciousness, political structure and social conditions. Spiritual beings and their agents are believed to be solely responsible for quandary in life. The sociological implications of this worldview are enormous: all manners of frustrations and problems are blamed on spiritual agents. This worldview is responsible for people often seeking faith-healing even when it is clearly inappropriate. The consequences of these are often fatal. This paper advocates a paradigm shift particularly in the area of undue spiritualization of issues. This work observes that spiritualization of issues often diverts attention from the actual causes of the people's problems and make innocent people scapegoats for stigmatization. It is hoped that some of the advocacies proposed in this work namely the education of people and sensitization of religious leaders on the authentic causes of peoples' health issues and other problems in life will lead to paradigm shift in the Annang worldview.

Keywords: *annang people, supernaturalism, stigmatization, religious leader*

INTRODUCTION

The Annang people of southeast Nigeria referred to in this paper are the traditional Annang people who are not as Umoh observed 'Americanized' or 'Europeanized' (Umoh 2009) or those that are culturally alienated. This category of the Annang people like most African people are notoriously religious and the religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully it is not easy or possible always to isolate it (Mbiti 1976). They are predominantly Christians. Their worldview is based on supernaturalism, a deeply spiritual worldview. In this worldview God and other spiritual beings are relevant. Spiritual beings and their agents (mostly witches) are believed to be solely responsible for difficult economic conditions, illness, socio-political crises, failures, misfortunes, car crashes, air crashes and other quandary in life. To a large extent, individual's responsibility in these odds of life are relegated to the background or completely ignored. Christianity as practiced in Annangland has helped to deepen the belief that spiritual agents are responsible for all problems in life. Consequently, many of the Christian churches engage in subtle 'witch-hunting' and 'deliverance' programmes. The end result is often stigmatization and killings of suspected witches and others who are believed to harm people spiritually. The sociological implications of this worldview are enormous and cannot be ignored. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to elucidate the worldview of the Annang people for the purpose of advocating for a paradigm shift in this worldview that has gargantuan social implications.

Worldview: What is it?

Worldview as Jerry Solomon (2002) rightly explains is a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world. Also, Phillips and Brown state that: A worldview is, first of all, *an* explanation and interpretation of the world and second, an application of this view to life (Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton: 1984). In simpler terms, worldview is a view of the world and a view for the world. According to Clyde it is from the worldview that an individual derives an understanding, interpretation and response to the world in which she or he lives (Clyde 2005). To each individual, a worldview should provide a coherent, but not necessarily authoritative manner in thinking about the world. An individual's worldview will be shaped by far more than the surrounding physical world. Religion, philosophy, ethics, morality, science, politics and all other belief systems play a role in shaping a worldview.

A person's worldview, whether it be Christian, humanist or whatever is a personal insight about meaning and reality. It is how a person interprets, through his or her own eyes, a personal belief about the world. A person's worldview tries to give reasons for how the facts of reality relate and tie together. The summation of these facts provides the big picture into which the daily events of a person's life should fit.

Further, James Sire in his book, *The Universe Next Door*, catalogues the most influential worldviews of the past and present era viz: Deism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Christian Theism, Naturalism, and the New Age Pantheism (James 1988) He notes that

Deism, a prominent worldview during the eighteenth century, has almost entirely left the scene.

The Deists believe in God, but that God created and then abandoned the universe. Nihilism, a more recent worldview, is alive among many young people and some intellectuals. The Nihilists see no value in reality; for them, life is absurd. Existentialism is prominent worldview in our era. The Existentialist, like the Nihilist, sees life as absurd, but sees man as totally free to *make himself* in the face of this absurdity. Christian Theism, Naturalism, and New Age Pantheism are the most influential world views. For the purpose of this work, Christian Theism is important to us due to its semblance with the Annang worldview. The Christian Theism is summarized by Jerry Solomon as follows:

There is an infinite-personal God who has created the universe out of nothing. Man was originally created good in God's image, but chose to sin and thus infected all of humanity with what is called a "sin nature." So man has been endowed with value by his creator, but his negative behavior is in league with his nature. Death is either the gate to life with God or to eternal separation from Him. The destination is dependent upon the response we give to God's provision for our sinfulness. The guidelines for conduct are revealed by God. Reason and experience can be legitimate teachers, but a transcendent source is necessary. We know some things only because we are told by God through the Bible (Jerry 2002)

Jerry Solomon further explains that Naturalism is the exact opposite of Christian theism. In this worldview, God is irrelevant; the progress and evolutionary change are inevitable; man is autonomous, self-centered; and will save himself; education is the guide to life; intelligence and freedom guarantee full human potential. Science is the ultimate provider both for knowledge and morals.

The summary of the New Age Pantheism is that all is one. There are no ultimate distinctions between humans, animals, or the rest of creation. Second, since all is one, all is god. All of life has a spark of divinity. Third, if all is one and all is god, then each of us is god. Fourth, humans must discover their own divinity by experiencing a change in consciousness. We suffer from a collective form of metaphysical amnesia. Fifth, humans travel through indefinite cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation in order to work off what is called "bad karma"... Sixth, New Age disciples think in terms of gray, not black and white. Thus they believe that two conflicting statements can both be true (Jerry, 2002).

The Annang People and Their Worldview

The worldview of the Annang people has been shaped by many factors viz: geographical location, history, economic situation, religious experiences and consciousness, political structure and social conditions.

Geographically, The Annang territory lies between latitude 4.25 and 7 north and longitude 7.15 and 9.30 east (Enang 1979). The landscape is generally flat and low-lying with no point rising to 300 feet above sea level. There are two main seasons: the wet and rainy season which starts from April to October and the dry season from November to March. The typical rainfall pattern is bi-modal with a two week spell or break in August commonly referred to as "August Break". The harsh harmattan wind occurs between December and January. The area is generally humid. Vegetationally, the area lies within the rich forest zone which aids the growth of palm-wines trees, palm trees and huge lofty tropical vegetation (Ekong 1983). The huge lofty tropical trees are believed to be a soothing and natural habitat for witches. Curiously bent trees and rivers are often seen as coven for witches and other spiritual beings.

Historically, the task of tracing the origin of the Annang people has been onerous, given the fact that only very faint legends and memories and disjointed oral traditions remain among the people about their original homes and waves of migrations to their present homeland. Jeffreys in his 1935 notes on the Ibibio language is of the opinion that the Annang people have always been where they are today, implying that they migrated from nowhere (Jeffreys 1935). But using the linguistic approach, some scholars have been able to show that the Annang migrated to their present homeland from somewhere. Johnson in his *Comparative Survey of Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages* grouped the Annang among the Semi-Bantu speakers, stating that the general area of Bantu evolution was in the region of the Congo-Nile water parting (Johnson 1922). From there, the Bantu speaking people moved out southwards and eastwards. The Ibibio and Annang and a few ethnic groups in Ogoja formed the western frontiers of the Bantu in Nigeria. Udo (1983) further described the different stages of the Bantu migrations: the first state carried them from their cradle-land to the Cameroon area south-eastwards through the equatorial rain forest to the Savannah grassland, after breaking through the forest barrier, the Bantu underwent a second stage of consolidation and dispersion from the Savannah country south of the Congo rain forest. The first batch of the Bantu reached modern Ibibio land from Benue and Plateau States. It is suggested that this must have taken place between 600-800 A.D. Others using the Cross River tributaries reached Ibom in Arochukwu and later moved to Itu in Northern Ibibioland. From Itu they fanned out to form the modern northern Ibibio or Enyong (Itu Mbon uso) and Nkari, and southwards to

an area in Ikono clan. Later this group expanded to form modern Iman, Ibesikpo, offot, Oku, western and eastern Nsit, Oron, Eket, Ubium, Asutan Ekpe and Uran clans and the clans in Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Abasi (Udo 1983). This hypothetical suggestion is how the Annang migrated to their present homeland.

The Annang people are the second largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State of Southeast Nigeria, occupying eight out of the thirty one Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria viz: Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Essien Udim, Abak, Etim Ekpo, Oruk Anam, Ika and Ukanafun. They have a common boundary with the Sudanic Igbo. They had to fight many wars against the Ngwa Igbo in order to preserve their territorial integrity and their farmlands (Udo 1983). Being always confronted with intertribal wars, the Annang people then not having access to sophisticated weapons always resorted to the reliance on spiritual powers to conquer their enemies. Reliance on spiritual beings for aid has become a way of life among the people. In their worldview, humans must always resorts to 'higher' spiritual beings for assistance. Their history has played a part in their worldview.

Economically, Anannang territory is not industrialized; the people are basically subsistence farmers, traders, craft men or civil servants. The economy is not strong enough to sustain the people. Sometimes young people are often given out to more comfortable people for menial works in the cities. Problems associated with poverty are enormous but most of these are blamed on the operation of witches and other spiritual agents that are believed to abound in the area.

The religious consciousness and the experiences of the Annang people are unique. To understand the very complex worldview of the Annang people, it is important to describe their religious scenario. Two major religious traditions are in Annangland and are responsible for the present complex worldview of the people, viz: the Annang traditional religion and Christianity. The traditional religion of the people is based on the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being called *Abasi Ibom* and myriads of divinities and spiritual beings that assist *Abasi Ibom* to deal with human problems of moral, social, economic, political and psychological nature (Udo E.A. 1983). The exact number of these divinities is unknown. Messenger gives an estimated number of these divinities as being over thirty (Messenger 1959). Enang (1979) leaves the number at twenty three noting that their exact number cannot be know as individuals and villages or clans can and do easily welcome and accept any 'new god' from anywhere if the community believes the 'god' is powerful. This is to be expected in a polytheistic religion of this nature. Of all the divinities, one most dreaded among the people- *Ekpo Nka Owo*- whose duty is to check and punish infidelity in the marriage institution.

There is a strong belief in ancestors (the living-dead) in life after death and in reincarnation. The dead are believed to continue in some kind of existence in the underworld invisible to the humans. The Ancestors acts as the spiritual custodians of the family and must be placated periodically to ensure their protection. The belief in witchcraft is very prominent in the traditional religion of the Annang people. Witches and sorcerers have powers that come from their aberrant personalities; they perform antisocial magic. In their work, witches employ the assistance of animals or humanoids as servants or messengers. Although in most Annang communities, some witches are believed to be males, most are believed to be females. They meet around fires to promote their interests and eat the revived body of someone they have destroyed by supernatural powers. This phenomenon, which is of course by far not only found only in Annangland, can in the African context be related to the African life and worldview according to which the totality of reality consists of the interaction of forces and powers. In terms of this worldview, Van Beek notes that witchcraft can be described as the activities of witches and sorcerers who are people with the mystical ability to manipulate the forces of life to do harm to human beings or their property (Van, Beek 1994). This belief has a lot of sociological implications on the people. The myriads of spiritual beings in the universe with their powers to heal or to harm are greatly feared among the people. The religious experts are very popular among the people. The emerging situation being that when there are crises in life or misfortune befall an Annang person, for instance, if a member of the family takes ill suddenly, or dies, if a woman suffers miscarriage, if an accident occurred, theft, the person immediately begins to wonder what might be responsible for the mishap. At once the person begins to think of the gods, the spirits, witches, enemies, dead ancestors who might have been responsible for the particular misfortune. The religious 'expert': priests, diviners, soothsayers, rainmakers, witch-doctors, mediums, sorcerers and medicine men and women are very important figures in the lives of the people because they are expected to give explanations in all areas of human life: spiritual, social, economic, political etc. The spirits are to be placated to ensure peace. Witches are believed to be everywhere and the religious leaders must be engaged to eradicate them. The spiritualists and religious experts are believed to have the antidote to ensure a hitch-free human existence. Into this traditional religious scenario, the Annang people were first introduced into Christianity by the English Methodist Missionaries in 1919 (Enang 1979). Gradually many other Christian missions followed. Today there are very many varieties of Christian denominations in the area that taking a census of them will not only be difficulty but almost impossible as new forms of churches keep coming up everywhere. The area is often referred to as having the Churches as the main industry.

Although the different Christian denominations in Annangland have their unique theological stance, one thing is common among them: they emphasize on St. Paul's warning about spiritual warfare:

For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heaven (Ephesians 6:12).

Essien explains how the emphasis on the above scriptural passage summarizes the Annang worldview:

Such apostolic statement as the above go to show that human beings are confronted with the forces of evil and darkness typified by Satan and his angels and perpetrated through demonic practices like witchcraft. The belief in the existence and power of such devilish forces has not been denied by the Church and is widely held both in Christianity and traditional religious circles to account for human suffering or misfortune in susceptible persons. This is why the greatest single indication for people to seek spiritual healing is their belief that a person's problem (chronic or serious illness, misfortune or tragedy like "untimely death is caused by witches or such other agency of the devil, invoked on a person by a real or imaginary enemy...the belief has become very rampant and very strong in our country that the lives of the people are affected by it... a good number of Christians and non-Christians cannot see any tragedy like death, road traffic accident or any misfortune occurring without the influence of witchcraft...(Essien 1999).

The religious experiences of the Annang people play a vital role in their worldview.

Politically, the villages in Annangland are structured around a patrilineal system of descent with significant matrifocal element. The household consists of a man as the head of the family, his wife (wives) and children all owing allegiance to the household head. All household that acknowledge a common unbroken agnate line of descent constitute a lineage known as *Ekpuk*. Groups of *Ekpuk* which can trace their origin to some extent to common ancestors form a village. Villages are governed by village heads and council. Groups of villages form a clan. The several clans in Annangland are ruled by Clan heads and the council of Chiefs. The system of crime control in the villages and clans of Annangland are still primitive with emphases on spiritual agents to aid investigations. Sometimes the Nigerian law enforcement agents are not always as effective as they are expected to be. So the people often resort to trial by ordeal to find out offenders in the

community. It is believed that spirits can be implored during trial by ordeal sessions to help find out who the culprits are. Most times, these methods are very subjective and unfounded leading to more complicated social problems.

Socially, among the Annang people, the family, communal spirit and social ties are very strong. This communal attitude established among the Annang a typical sort of friendliness and trust to which this proverb refers: 'The Annang even exchange drinking gourds in a dark room'. This trust is strengthened by the fear of the gods and the ancestral spirits who would not hesitate to punish those who seek the downfall of any of his or her fellow tribal woman or man. The family is the first natural society. Some families are polygamous and some are monogamous. In Annang society ranks are not hereditary. This means that a person's position is not determined by ascription. Upward and downward mobility exist due to the flexible social stratification that exists among the people. Social groups are not arranged in a fixed order of superiority and inferiority. Marriage is a very important institution for the people. In the traditional society, everyone is expected to marry and have children. But social services are not put in place to help the families cope with the social issues that arise daily. There are no homes for the aged, children of broken marriages are no special package of arrangement and care, the disadvantaged, the poor, the physically and mentally challenged people in the society are often at the mercy of Registered Charity who can only according to their meager resources. It is not surprising that religious and spiritual explanations are given to social issues. A common example is branding older women and men with senile dementia as witches. Often too, children who due to poverty are given out for menial works are often stigmatized as witches.

The *sitz-en-leben* of the Annang people has given rise to their basic tenet of a worldview that is deeply spiritual with great fear of the unseen spiritual force at war with human beings. It is a worldview based on supernaturalism. Human beings are not autonomous and self-centered and cannot save themselves. For the people, science is not the ultimate provider both for knowledge and morals. God is the beginning and the end of all. Spiritual beings and witches abound everywhere and cause untold problems to people. In the Annang worldview man is in constant battle with the evil forces. People must protect themselves from evil forces especially witches by constantly seeking the help of religious experts. People's endeavour can be thwarted by the powers of evil. There is psychological and deep fear in the hearts of people about the powers of these evil forces. Spiritual interpretations are given to everything that happens to people. Science and technology do not have answers to all problems of human beings especially in health matters. The Annang people's religious experience has given rise to a new concept and categorization of worldview which I term: phobic-theistic worldview.

The Sociological Implications of the Worldview of the Annang People.

The market-place witchcraft problem: In Anangland, witchcraft talk and witchcraft accusations are house-hold talks. Suspected witches are often put to death. Women and children are the most vulnerable groups that are often stigmatized on baseless allegation of being witches. The centers of diagnoses of these witches are the numerous independent Christian churches that abound in the area of study. Over 150 children have been thrown into the street by pastors who claim the children are into witchcraft. They even attempted to burn the children alive. Some of these children have been rescued. The Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Chief Godswill Obot Akpabio has issued a stern warning to churches in Akwa Ibom State and the message is simple: “Stop your pernicious influences which are tearing down the fabric and cohesion of families in the State” (Sun Newspaper September 20, 2008).

Spiritualization of social issues. Another impact of this worldview is the spiritualization of issues. All manners of frustrations: inability to find job, attained desire goals are often blamed on witches, enemies and allied causes. I set out to interview 164 Annang people on what they believe spiritual and witches do cause in the society. Of 164 respondents interviewed, 97 were males and 67 females as shown below:

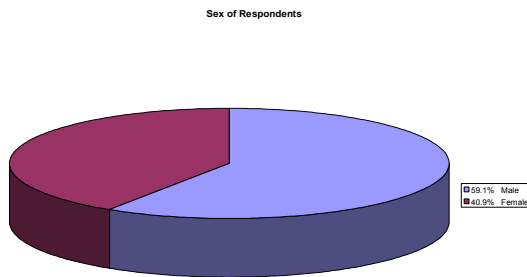


Figure 1: shows sex of respondents.

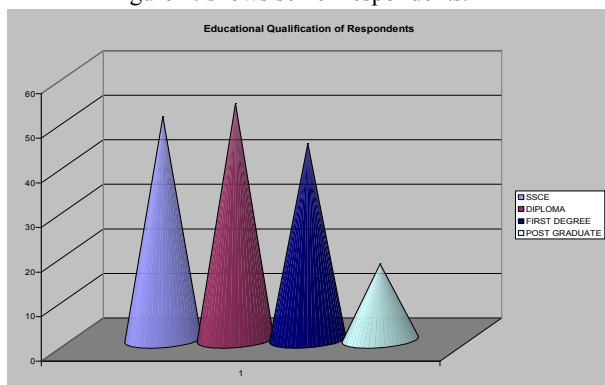


Figure 2: shows the educational background of the respondents:

The educational background of the respondent is shown above. Most of our respondents are educated above the secondary school level. The respondents with diploma and University degree form the greatest percentage. Education has little influence on the mindset of the people.

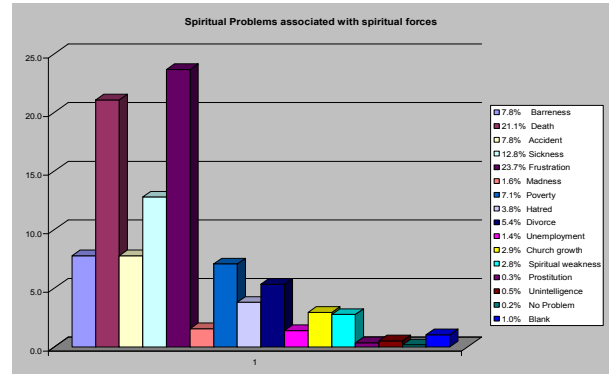


Fig 3: percentage of respondents’ perception of social issues as spiritual problems

The respondents identified that most of the social problems in Annangland that are linked up with witches and spiritual powers. As can be seen graphically, the social problems often associated with spiritual agents are: death, road traffic accidents, barrenness, sickness, poverty, divorce, madness, unemployment, hatred etc. The percentages of their responses are shown above. But some of these problems are consequences of more basic causes like corruption and mismanagement of public funds, improper health care delivery and so on. There is no need to put some of these problems at the door step of Satan. For instance if, the roads are not properly maintained and speed limits not observed, accidents are bound to occur. This worldview of spiritualization of issues actually diverts attention from the actual causes of these social problems.

Health: The worldview that spiritual forces particularly witches are largely responsible for ill health makes some Annang women and sometimes men to frequently visit prayer houses and healing homes to seek healing even against medical advice. The consequences of these are often fatal (Essien 1999). In the history of Christianity, miraculous healings have been sought and received as recorded both in the Scriptures and from those who have experienced it. Essien is of the opinion that although spiritual healing is sought for by both men and women, the number of those who do so is larger among the Annang women. The reasons are because of women greater vulnerability to stress, their easy spirituality and hence ready hope in the possibility of divine cure for and protection from all ills caused by the Devil or his agencies like witchcraft (Essien 1999). Enang in his book *The African Experience of Salvation: Based on*

the Annang Independent Churches of Nigeria observed that these Independent Churches have turned their Churches into quasi hospitals, diagnosing and treating complicated medical cases they know little or nothing about (Enang 1979). Some women have either lost their lives or have been seriously injured in a quest to seek healing in the prayer houses (Essien 2005). The claim to spiritual authorization provides threatening sanction against many fearful ignorant folk who experience horrifying ordeals in the hands of this class of 'religious experts'. Omoregbe was obviously right when he noted, in his book *Comparative Religion Christianity and other World Religion in Dialogue*, that religion is such a prominent feature in human society that it cannot be simply ignored (Omoregbe 1999). Worldview and religion has a tremendous power of religion to heal and to hurt (Xavier 1999).

Advocacy for paradigm shift

The advocacy for paradigm shift in the worldview of Annang people in the area of undue spiritualization of issues is important. The reasons for our advocacy being that the attitude of spiritualization of issues often diverts attention from the actual causes of the people's problems and make people scapegoats for stigmatization. Our advocacy initiative has focused on education on reproductive health and optimistic attitude to life. The rationale of our advocacy was based on the fact that although the numerous churches by their prophetic functions are supposed to be committed to promoting the welfare of the whole human person: body, soul and spirit; but thus far, the issues of reproductive health have often been relegated to the background and spiritualized. We organized workshops and seminars to educate women in particular about the issues of reproductive health. We have also focused on HIV programmes for the same purpose. We also advocate a positive attitude to optimism in life, which is a key of successful living. We acknowledge that the prospect of totally erasing the mindset focused on witches is a gradual process. It is our hope that the workshops we organize with and for religious leaders and the intervention of the government coupled with improving social services, this problem will gradually be eradicated and the worldview will eventually change.

CONCLUSION

The worldview of the Annang people has been presented and the sociological implications noted. Although on the positive side, this worldview is theistic, but the over emphasis on supernatural interventions and undue spiritualization of issues diverts attention from the true causes of people's predicaments in life. For instance, there is no need to find witches behind road traffic accidents when traffic rules and speed limits are not respected and roads not properly maintained. Again the many causes of illness and complicated health conditions: poor sanitary

conditions, lack of exercise, no medical check ups, poor dieting etc. Attributing, every health conditions to spiritual agents is also irrelevant. Witchcraft accusations, stigmatization and abandonment of suspected culprits is another area that need the intervention of the Governments. No doubt, innocent people have been killed as witches, properties destroyed and complicated sociological problems have been noted. The Annang worldview is to be seriously challenged in the face of unsolved social issues in the present era. This worldview should be rational and should provide a satisfactory basis for living in a developing economy. This worldview should accommodate authentic scientific discoveries that can help humanity to live meaningfully well in a world that is fast becoming a global village.

In summation, it is to be noted that the positive aspect of the Annang worldview that God is relevant is healthy because science and technology alone cannot lead humanity to the ultimate end of man which is God. A challenge of this worldview is to appreciate the positive scientific and technological developments that are helping humanity. Undue spiritualize issues should be carefully avoided.

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