

Medical Treatment and Nudity of the Opposite Sex: The Urhobo Christian Dilemma from a Biblical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Nudity before the opposite sex is abhorred by the Church in Nigeria. There appears a paradox between the Christian doctrine of purity of man and the medical science of physical wellbeing of man. Therefore, using the comparative analysis model as a method, this paper compared the Christian doctrine of purity with the medical science that defiles such Christian purity in the area of nudity before the opposite sex in medical treatment. The paper was a Christian critique on the church's silence over the nudity of the opposite sex before a medical doctor of an opposite sex in medical treatment. The paper also showed that both the silence of the church and defilement of the Urhobo understanding of *ofarie* (imorality) posed a serious dilemma to the Urhobo Christian. This paper argued that the gap between Christian morality and scientific justification is very narrow. The study was concluded on the presupposition that if the Church regarded nudity before the opposite sex as a sin, it is therefore a dilemma for the Christian when the church does not regard it as sin in medical practice. This raises the question of whether the church is just and fair on this matter.

Keywords: Medical Treatment, Nudity, Opposite Sex, Urhobo Christian Delima, Biblical Perspective

INTRODUCTION

Christianity is a religion of faith in God through Jesus Christ, holiness and righteousness as expressed in the Holy Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments abhor the act of watching the nudity of the opposite sex. There was no prescribed situation that should warrant such

act unless in marriage. The Christian faith sees the issue of nudity before the opposite sex done outside marriage as sexual immorality and inordinate affection. On the other hand, the African culture also abhors the watching or observing of the private parts of the opposite sex as a violation of the sanctity of

such privacy. It is a violation because it is believed that the nudity of a woman most especially is exclusively the right of the husband. All of these are thrown into wind by medical practice all over the world including Nigeria. It is even more alarming in Nigeria, in the sense that most of the specialists in gynecology and obstetrics are male doctors and as such, it is very difficult to avoid the nudity of females especially the married ones from them. Some of these male gynecologists and obstetricians are even Christians and some of the females that open their vagina to them for medical treatments, are also Christians. Of course, to them it is normal. This is the dilemma this type of practice poses to the African Christian. This paper therefore argues from two sides of the coin, that is from the medical science perspective and the Christian and cultural moralist point of view. The methodology adopted for this study, is the comparative analysis model. The comparative is also part of the inculturation hermeneutics paradigm. The comparative model compare African contemporary cultural milieus with biblical settings. According to Ukpong (2006,102), the inculturation hermeneutics model adopts a holistic approach to culture and as such, treats the religious and the secular aspects of culture as being interconnected. It is within this model that this topic shall be

dissected from the dichotomy of medical treatment and Christian-cultural moralist point of view. Within the complexity of illness and Christian faith as juxtaposed within the context of morality indeed poses the question of the extent of the persistence of the Christian and cultural moralist. This is indeed a dilemma to the African Urhobo Christian.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Medicine and treatment refers to medical treatment given to patients either for curing of illness or prevention of illness in people. Edwards and Landon (2014) states that many efforts to reform U.S. health care delivery focus on creating a high-performing primary care system that improves value through increased emphasis on access, prevention, and care coordination. Also, the Advance Cambridge Learners Dictionary sees medical treatment or care as the use of drugs, exercises, etc. to cure a person of an illness or injury. The Environmental Health and Safety, University of Washington (2014) see medical treatment as the management and care of a patient to combat disease or disorder. In the context of this work, medical treatment shall also refer to Medicare care. Moreover, nudity according to the Encarta Dictionary (2009) is the state of having no clothes on or bareness or plainness,

with no covering or decoration. Also according to the Collins Dictionary (2014) the word opposite sex means opposite sex if you are talking about men and refer to the opposite sex, you mean women and if you are talking about women and refer to the opposite sex, you mean men. The Macmillan Dictionary (2014) say that opposite for men, women are the opposite sex, and for women, men are the opposite sex. The contextual milieu of this study is the Urhobo Christian. The Urhobo are Africans and they are located in Nigeria in West Africa. Just like any other Africans they have their cultural heritage. The Urhobo according to Ottuh quoting Otite form an ethnic group in Delta State of Nigeria who speak Urhobo language (Ottuh, 2012). Ottuh, also quoting Henigie says that the Urhobo are a major ethnic group in Delta State and are located in over eighty villages and towns including a few cities like Warri, Effurun, Sapele, Ugheli, etc (Ottuh, 2012). The Urhobo nation is made up of different subgroups-tribes such as Ugheli, Isoko, Agbon, Uvwie, Okpe, Abraka, Udu, Idjere, Oghara, Orogun, Agbasa to mention but a few. Their major occupation includes farming and fishing. The land is blessed with mineral resources like crude oil. They are found in the Niger Delta Area. The Urhobo are people of southern Nigeria, near the northwestern Niger River delta. Delta State is one

of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Apart from Urhobo language, the Urhobo people communicate in Pidgin English. The Isoko and Urhobo are related in language and culture (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urhobo_people). The Urhobo now live in a territory bounded by latitudes 6° and 5°, 15° North and Longitudes 5°, 40° and 6°, 25° East in the Bendel State of Nigeria. Their neighbours are the Isoko to the South East, the Itsekiri to the West, the Bini to the North, Ijaw to the South and Ukwani (kwale-Aboh) to the North East (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urhobo_people). The territory is covered by a network of streams whose volumes of water and flow are directly concerned with the climatic season; wet season (April-October) and dry season (November-March).

Examination of the Genitals by the Opposite Sex: A Medico-Biblical Argument

In a study carried out by Bukar, Takai, Audu and Isa (2012:30-36) it is revealed that there is an increase in women's desires to be attended to by female obstetricians and gynecologists during consultations. This study which was carried out in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital Maiduguri, Borno State, North-East Nigeria was conducted to find out if women have

a gender preference in selecting their obstetricians and gynecologists and the factors associated with their preferences. Out of the 325 females who were sampled two hundred and one women (67%) showed gender bias for the attending doctor with 36.7% (110) in favour of female obstetricians and gynecologists and 30.3% (91) in favour of males, while 99 (33.0%) were indifferent to the gender issue. Moreover, most the females who preferred to be attended to by female obstetricians and gynecologists in their Medicare chose such preference on religious, traditional and cultural grounds. From a biblical and Christian point of view, Anderson (2006) raises some questions as to whether if nudity before the opposite gender is a sin. Anderson also raises the question as to whether if male obstetricians or gynecologists are condoned in the Bible and if male gynecologists are professionals or perverts. Anderson arguing from the point of view of seeing God as the God of moral absolutes says that nudity before the opposite gender is a sin. Whether such nudity before the opposite sex is done within the confines of a medical theater, a swimming pool, or in a doctor's office it is regarded as sin and pervasion. He opined further that in the Bible, the only nakedness allowable between a man and a woman is between husband and wife (Genesis

2:25) and that in Leviticus 18, God goes into great detail condemning nakedness between brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and son, aunt and nephew, uncle and niece, grandfather and granddaughter, etc. He explained that God also admonishes us repeatedly throughout the Bible to be fully clothed because nakedness in the Bible is associated with the word "shame." One of the many examples of this association is found in Isaiah 47:3a, "*Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen;*" Exodus 28:42 reads, "*And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach.*" In an attempt to answer the question, whether male obstetricians or gynecologists are condoned in the Bible, it was noted that male doctors are human beings and as such, they cannot be immune from the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and if God is so against nudity between members of the opposite gender, why would he allow a man called a doctor to examine a woman's naked body throughout her pregnancy and up to the birth as if he were somehow immune from sin or God's laws? Anderson also argued that throughout the Bible, women who are pregnant or giving birth are attended by female "nurses" or "midwives" and that there was not one time in God's word is there mention of a woman being examined

nude by a man who is a medical professional. God intended women to assist other women with these types of medical issues. He also observed that women have been giving birth to children for the last 6,000 years without the aid of male doctors, and yet Christians today seemed to think that a woman must expose herself to a male doctor in the name of medicine in contradiction of God's word. To those who argue that male obstetricians and gynecologists are immune to lust because they have seen the female vagina so many times; it no longer affects them, Anderson dismisses such argument on the ground that men who look at nudity and pornography for extended periods become more perverted, not less perverted and that if the appetite for nudity is fed, the appetite increases not diminishes. Anderson concludes by challenging preachers in this generation to make the Bible their authority, and condemn the medical practice of a male doctor that looks upon and touches a woman's private parts in his office as sin.

The Urhobo Cosmological View on Nudity before the Opposite Sex: A Cultural Perspective

In the Urhobo cultural milieu, the private part of a male is (*osho-pennis*) and that of a female (*ohorho-vagina*) are considered sacred especially that of a married woman. It is a taboo for another man

to see the nakedness of another man's wife. It is also a taboo for married women to dress in such a way that looks like nudity in the public. Among the Urhobo, a woman who allows another man to look at her nudity is regarded as an adulteress (*aye rho gbofarhie*) and prostitute (*igbeladja*) not to talk of allowing a man to examine and touch the vagina of a married woman. In the above light, a married woman who allows another man to tap her buttocks or hold her hand, or fondle with her breast or genitals commits adultery of the indirect sexual act (Ubrurhe and Eghwubare, 2000:50-53; Ottuh, 2012:1-21). Also, a married woman who allows another man to have sex with her commits adultery against her husband and when this happens the ancestors, *erivwi* (the spirit world) will arrest her and even extend sickness and death to her children and husband. Erivwo (1991:66) calls this act *umuemu* (sin) and the frequent indulgent in it as *orunkuruku* (iniquity). A married woman who allows another man to hug her or dances to the seductive song of another man who praises her with sexual tones is seen as a derailing woman who has appetite for adultery. For example, if a man sings a song, with such phrases like: "*evie we yoma* (your breast is so beautiful), or *owe ya ye ro me yoma vwe vu ra kpond*"(you are the most beautiful woman on earth), for a

married woman who appreciates them, she is supposed to have consented to adultery. In Urhobo traditional milieu, the traditional medical practitioners are allowed to specialize according to gender. A man was allowed to specialize on the area of males health issues and the female on the female health issues (Ottuh and Ottuh, 2012). The traditional midwives and female physiologists were women who were well trained in the act. It is so because no man will be allowed to carry out such functions on his wife in the name of medical treatments. In Urhobo culture, a male is not allowed to enter the labour room nor where a female is undressing. While the male visit the male traditional doctor, the female go to the traditional female doctor for medical care. Moreover, in Urhobo Traditional medical practice, the business of traditional midwives, obstetrics and gynecologists were basically handled by trained female doctors and that of men where handled by men. In the Urhobo traditional setting, it is unethical for a married woman to be massaged by a male who is not her husband. In the light of the above understanding, one dilemma being faced by the modern traditional Urhobo man is the medical practice in which orthodox medicine allows the opposite sex to examine, touch and treat the genitalia of the opposite sex. This is totally an

opposite of Urhobo traditional medical practice. Also, the dilemma is even worse when the Urhobo Christian does not see the church taking a stand on the issue in accordance to her teaching about purity.

A Christian View on Nudity before the Opposite Sex: A Biblical Perspective

Christians condemn viewing the nudity of the opposite sex but they are yet to condemn the medical practice in which male doctors are allowed free access to examine the vagina of a female and even that of a married woman. Also female doctors are allowed to view, touch and treat male genitals even the married once. This appears to be a mockery of the sacredness of the genitalia of the human being as being thought and practiced by Christians in Urhoboland. This raises a lot of questions in a critical mind. The excuse this holy Christians give is that, medical treatment can be exceptional because it is about health and moreover, the medical doctor has been trained to do so. If it is for health, it means the issue of health can defile a Christian doctrine. One of the strongest sinful act Both in the Old and New Testaments, one finds it difficult to see direct quotations restraining one from being nude before the opposite sex who is not one's marriage partner. However, there are

scriptural inferences that suggest that such act is sinful before God. Some of such scriptural passages shall be explored here. Some of these scriptures addressed the issue of nudity indirectly.

Some Old Testament References

There are so many other passages in the Old Testament that spoke on nudity but a very few passages shall be explored here for brevity.

- i. Genesis 3:7-Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths (ESV).
- ii. Genesis 22:9 and Exodus 28:42-You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs (ESV).
- iii. 2 Samuel 11:2-It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful (ESV).

All the above Old Testament passages address the issue of nudity. It was addressed to prevent sexual perversion and seductive manipulations on the opposite sex. In Genesis 3:7 the Hebrew word for nakedness is עירום (*eyrom*) or ערם

(*erom*) and means the exposure of the sex organs and its region in the public or to the opposite sex. Symbolically it means shame, hence the covering by both Adam and Eve (Youngblood, 1995:10). In Genesis 9:22 and Exodus 28:42, the Hebrew word that was used for nudity is עֲרֻה (*ervah*) and means not only nakedness or nudity but also means shame, pudenda (implying shameful exposure), nakedness of a thing, indecency, improper behaviour, exposed, undefended, unclean and uncleanness (Strong, 2001). The context of Exodus 28:42 is that of the description of the priestly garment. Although, it describes priestly regalia, the idea of covering the body including the genital regions from being seen by the public or other persons especially the opposite sex cannot be ruled out. In Jewish religion and culture, exposure of nakedness before the opposite sex imply sexual relationship (Strong, p.1438). In the case of Genesis 22:9, drunkenness was responsible for the nudity of Noah. The son paid dearly for looking at his father's nakedness. He was cursed by his father Noah for looking at his nakedness. This showed that nakedness was seen as something sacred among ancient Israel. Nudity was associated with shame or dishonour in the Mediterranean culture. Sex was given a kind of political significance that it lacks in primitive societies.

The woman was expected to tole the line of honour as she is expected to guard her nakedness against the gaze of men and as such, there is a sexual shame in the behaviour of the Hebrew woman (Hagedorn, 2005:498). In 2 Samuel 11:2 we were that David saw the neckedness of a bathing women and lusted after her. This lust eventually caused a collateral damage to him, his family and spiritual life. This is one biblical example that exposes the weakness of the human nature no mater how the professional or spiritual such person might be. The woman is very beautiful to be looked at.

Some New Testament References

In the New Testament the concept of nudity is indirect. Here Matthew 5:28 shall be used as a case study. Matthew 5:28 reads: But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart (ESV). This passage does not directly talk on nudity but the issue of lusting after a woman. The cause of lust is the lust of the eyes. It starts from the eyes. The emphasis here is on looking at a woman. The Greek word used here for lust is ἐπιθυμέω (*epithumeo*) and it means concupiscence or desire (Bromiley, 2004; Guthrie, 2004). The question of desire was much discussed in Greek ethics, but did not command a dominant interest in the New Testament. The noun

epithumia is occasionally translated for desire, but more often by lust. In the RSV, desire replaces lust in eight passages. Numerous words are used to express the same general idea. They poss no necessary moral connotation (e.g Luke 20:46; 15:16; 10:24), but because of the sinful nature of man they came generally to describe wrong desire. In Matthew 5:28 *epithumeo* is used specifically of sexual desire, understood as contravention of the law. In the New Testament Epistles the noun has become fixed as a description of lust (Guthrie, 2004). Nudity in ancient Greco-Roman society permitted male nudity on specific occasions and was generally tolerated but females who want to retain good family name and societal respect are only expected to be naked in private places (Cleland, Davies and Llewellyn-Jones, 2007:132). Also female nudity in ancient Greek society was associated with fertility and it was demonstrated during Aphrodite festivity (Jenkins and Turner, 2009:13). Ephesians 5:12 reads: "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly" (NRSV). Here nudity was not directly used. The word shame is figuratively used for nakedness like that of the Old Testament. The Greek word αἰσχύνη (*aischune*) was used for shame and it means the

confusion of one who is ashamed of anything, sense of shame, ignominy, disgrace, dishonour and something to be ashamed of (Vine, 1996:567). Here whatever that constitutes shame is being associated with *σκότος* (*skotos*-darkness). Darkness implies sin or wickedness. It also implies lust of the flesh and immorality in general. Revelation 3:18 reads: "Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (NRSV). In addition to the understanding of shame is the Greek word *γυμνότης* (*gumnotes*) and it means nakedness of the body. Here body as used in the above passage is not defined. Being that it complemented shame in the passage, body can mean the entire human body especially the genitalias and its regions.

Nudity before the Opposite Sex in Medical Treatment: A Christian Critique

The veneer of this critique lies in the Christian concept and practice of purity, vis-à-vis holiness and righteousness. It is believed by Christians that it is a sin for one to look at the nakedness of the opposite sex. The bible on the other hand did not tell us of any circumstance that will make one to do so. But in the medical practice of

which both Christians and non-Christian are involved, it is seen as something normal for a female even the married ones to open their vagina for the male doctor to see, touch and deep their hands into it. The same happens between the female doctor and male patient. Even the church that claims to be very holy establishes hospitals and allow this practice which they preach against to go on. How come the church succumb to this? Where is the holiness and faith they preach? Moreover, the Church in Nigeria also believe that prospective couple must not see the nakedness of one another before their wedding but it is amazing to see that the church sees nothing wrong in a male doctor examining the vagina of the would be wife of the man. Even after the wedding, the woman visits the male gynecologist and obstetrics for medical treatments than ever before due to one medical problem or the other. Surprisingly many of these male gynecologist and obstetrics are Christians and even pastors. Do we discourage them? Doing that will be detrimental to their profession and livelihood. The same church that condons this practice condemns the pastor who cast out demons from the breast and vagina of a woman by touching it. How do we reconcile the duo practice which falls into physical and spiritual treatments of the woman for her physical well being with

Christianity? Although, this situation can also be applicable to men, the reality on ground shows that it is more on women. The question is: why does the church allow this type of medical treatment among Christians? It is allowed because it is a life saving practice. But can a woman not do such life saving practice on a fellow woman. Even though the medical field does not know male or female, can Christians not take their stand on the matter and plan to train and give scholarships to female Christian doctors to specialize in this area and bring them to the church hospital and spread them all over the nation. Christians run missionary schools, press, bookshops and other business in a Christian way and that makes it different from that of non-Christians but that of hospital is compromised with the standard of the world. The Nigerian church can succeed if they are united. They can put huge resources together to bred more female doctors who are capable. They can do this by catching them young and scouting for those who are willing and ready from different parts of the world. This may take years to achieve but the most important thing is having a vision on it. In amazement, none of the churches has seen anything wrong with the practice hence they see no need to bred female gynecologist and obstetrics for the church and society. This practice poses a

serious problem to the Urhobo Christian in the sense that the Urhobo married woman is not allowed to be held by another man by the hand not to talk of opening her vagina to another man called doctor who is not her husband. Coupled with this world view, is the Christian teaching on adultery and fornication. All these pose a serious dilemma to the church in Nigeria.

The Christian View on Nudity of the Opposite Sex from a Biblical Perspective: Implication for the Urhobo Christian

One of the implications of nudity before the opposite sex as seen in the passages read above is "Immorality." Although, morality and immorality are being seen as relative among philosophers, it can be defined according to a people or society in accordance with their milieus and world views. In the case of a Christian world view, all the passages explored in both Old and New Testaments portray that gazing the nakedness of the opposite sex who is not one's marriage partner is a sin. Those who argue that it not immoral, argue on the basis of science and human justification. Some argue that the intention is what matters not the act. And of course the intention is to save life. In as much as this looks correct, the Bible is silent about it and the verses that address it directly and indirectly condemns it. This is the

Urhobo Christian dilemma. Another implication of nudity before the opposite sex as seen in the passages read above is "disrespect." The bible passages above also give the understanding that gazing or looking at the nudity of the opposite sex who is not one's marriage partner amount to disrespect. For those that are married it amount to invading the privacy of another man's sacred privacy. What can this teach an Urhobo Christian medical doctor or Christian? In the medical field, is there anything like Christianity? It is purely science and technology and their definition of morality is different from that of Christianity and Urhobo cultural believe on morality. Being that their understanding of morality differ it has no respect for human culture nor faith. Morality is around saving life within a formulated and regulated ethical standards as defined by the medical field. This indeed is a dilemma for those Christians in Urhoboland who are male obstetrics and gynecologists and those who are female urologists. To those who are Christians in Urhoboland who believe in the Urhobo culture and Christianity cannot control what happen in the doctors office and the hospital. How do they disrespect a fellow human being and at the same time practice Christianity as seen in Christian's tenets and faith.

CONCLUSION

In a changing world, the word of God does not change. Medical care is a very good development in the sense that it is meant to save life. Medical science does not know gender because it is about the human body, physical, psychological and social well being. In as much as this is correct, the practice of nudity of the opposite sex before an opposite sex is prohibited by Christian teaching but how come the church does not condemn it in medical practice? This paper has shown that the silence of the church over it in medical practice is a serious dilemma to the Urhobo Christian who is coming from the Urhobo traditional medical background. Another issue raised in this paper is the issue of male dominance in the specialty of gynecology and obstetrics and the inevitability of women patronage to them due to lack of female alternatives. Another issue is that the medical field does not operate on gender sentiments but at least there should be room for criticism and flexibility especially as it concerns Christians. This paper on the other hand did not intend to play down on the believe and practice of orthodox medicine but at least the church should help to create alternative by emphasizing and training of more capable women, both those already in the field and those intending to go in; by giving them full scholarship to go to the

best schools of medical training in the world and set them up to practice in the church community health facilities and also be allowed to be used by the society at large. This will bring a change in line with the Church preaching of no nudity before the opposite sex. If the church is not willing to do this, she should continue to be silent about it. One question which this paper did not address is: "can surgery be done on the lower abdomen of man or woman without nudity of the patient?" If yes or no what has the church to say about that as it concerns nudity of the opposite sex? This is a question for further study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the recommendations above:

- The Church should form and foot an organization that can bear any name provided it is aimed at sponsoring capable females for gynecological and obstetrics specialty in the medical field.
- Just as the Church took a stand against abortion and gay marriage, she should also take a stand on this matter with a balance biblical view, because the church has been silent about it in Nigeria for too long.
- The Church in Nigeria should not only preach about purity, she should also be ready to

develop human and material resources to promote biblical ideas and even be willing to suffer and die for what they believe.

- The Church should do awareness campaigns and set a long-term goal of sixty to one hundred years plan on how to develop more female gynecologists and obstetrics for church and the society at large. The church has to do this because a change of this nature will take a longer time to achieve. This change can never take place unless the church sees the needs and puts machineries in place to do this.

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