

Report of group discussion

After having listened carefully to the different reports that were presented by my colleagues and discussed in our group I came to understand that there are different perceptions that people have about popular religion versus official religion. These different perceptions are influenced by different factors mainline religion and education. The dominant views that were presented in our group are only three and those are the ones I am going to discuss. The first group is the one that does not recognise popular religion at all, those who practice it but separately from christianity and the last ones are those who have intergrated it to their christianity. After having discussed these points I will then evaluate my essay then conclude it.

Group 1

In this group I have put a group of people who do not think that popular religion makes sense and some of them do not even think that it is worth being included in academic debates. Most of the people who were interviewed by Roydon fell under this category. I think that there are many factors that influence this negative attitude towards popular religion but the most prevalent ones are biblical fundamentalism, context and education. I would like to look at these in detail showing how they proved themselves to be part of the problem of popular religion in our interview.

Biblical Fundamentalism.

Among those interviewed in our group were members of some pentecostal churches who felt strongly that popular religion should not be practiced because it is sinful. Now and again they quoted some scriptural passages that they claimed to be proving the evilness of popular religion. They associated popular religion with the worship of evil spirits which the Bible is talking against. They thought that as christians they are not to practice it. They also blame those who practice it of worshipping ancestors not God. The problem with these people when you ask them what is really popular religion most of them do not know. They only know

how to judge it. It is not true that those who practice popular religion worship ancestors. All our interviewees were in agreement that they do not worship ancestors but God. So the problem with these critics of popular religion is that they rush to judge people for things they themselves do not know.

Context

Another point that influence peoples' perception about popular religion is the context that they live in. Most of the people who stay in well established townships or suburbs do not follow popular religion. In our discussions we came to see that those who were anti popular religion came from towns and people from rural places were more likely to to adhere to it. The problem is that in townships traditional values get broken easily as people adopt new values the so-called civilised ones. People in townships are socialised differently from those in rural places who still holds on their traditional values.

Education.

Education also plays a very important role in influencing the perception of people on popular religion. This is because it is based on western rationalisation thus undermining the traditional world view that people holds. As a result we found that most of the educated people that had been interviewed judged popular religion on western standards. They built their perception of it from there.

This group of people saw popular religion as having no future and most of them thought that it was being swallowed by westernisation and christianity.

Group 2 religion by night and religion by day.

There are two groups under this category. One group of people are those who do not think that it is sinful. They accept it and most of these people practice it openly. Others practice it secretly because they do not know think it is right to do it.

There is a group of people who think that it forms a vital part

of their lives so they practice it. These are members of the Apostolic churches. In this church it is allowed but it can not be practiced in church because it does not mix with christianity at the same time that does not mean that it is sinfull no. God in it is the same as in christianity. They do not do it in church because there people with different cultures there that can not be brought together. So they do it at their homes. Members of the church can or cannot be invited and even if they come they do not come as christians but as members of the community. These people percieve it not to be sinfull but also not as christian.

Another group which is slightly different from this one are those who understand it to be unchristian but practice it because they have to. Their culture and identity forces them to practice it. Their church does not allow them to practice it. These are people who belong to our mainline churches who have been taught to forsake their evil cultures. Unfortunately for these christians they do not get satisfaction from our churches thus they decide to practice popular religion at night they do not want to be seen. Most of those people are those who needs healing that they did not get from their churches but when they turned to popular religion they were helped.

These people are ashamed of talking about popular religion because they think their faith would be undermined. A number of people that are now in the AIC churches were members of our mainline churches who left them and went to the Zionist to get healing there that is done through the use of popular religion.

This group of people when asked about popular religion they are not sure whether it is sinfull or not. Some think it is not sinfull but they have been confused by their church dogmas that simply dismiss everyrthing that is traditional as sinfull. Some think it is not sinfull. Through our discussion we could see that most of these people think that popular religions' future is very bright. They thought their churches needed to look at this issue seriously because it was a matter of concern.

Group 3

This is the last group that I am going to look at. These are mostly members of the Zionists church. They say that popular religion is not sinfull. They have intergrated it to their christian faith. They see God in both of them as the same. They have removed elements that are contrary to the Bible from African traditional religion. These are elements like talking to ancestors or placing the ancestors above God. They believe that popular religion for them is now christian because they have contextualised it. It is no longer different from their faith. Their liturgy is mixed with elements of African traditional religion. These people think that God is one in popular religion or christianity.

They also believe that the future of popular religion is bright because their religion meets the needs of African people. They think that if christianity wants to survive in Africa it must stop being a foreign riligion that is trapped in an african land with its cultures but it must be contextualised to meet the needs of the people.

Evaluation

I think it is now clear that there are many different perceptions that people have about popular religion. The discussion made me understand that the perception is influenced by who they are and their context. I think the group discussion for me was very helpfull. As we were sharing one anothers' interviews I came to understand that the opponents of popular religion do that because of different reason that influence them. The Bible is not an opponent of popular religion as such unless it is misinterpreted as not people do.

I felt very sorry for those christians who are caught in the middle of christianity and popular religion. These are people who who like it but their doctrine does not allow them because this is said to be sinfull. One old women who is a Methodist was not happy about the discussion itself because she thought it was her secret to practice popular religion for her as a christian. This

confusion is good enough to challenge our church theologians to look seriously at this problem because people are in a dilemma. There are two things that are happening here, some members of our churches are practicing popular religion secretly and that is crippling their faith. Secondly they are leaving mainline churches and joining African Independent churches. This shows the discrepancy that is in our church.

There is also the problem of the Pentecostals and charismatic churches who condemn people for practicing Popular religion. It is unfortunate that most of them do those things at night. Some of the interviews made it clear that these people consult diviners at night. One healer we interviewed said that he challenge them but they will always insist that they want to be healed., but as soon as they go out of his consulting room they preach against popular religion.

This shows the confusion that is in these people. They also need to be helped. I think it is now clear that popular religion is an issue in our community that needs to be addressed properly.

Conclusion

In this essay I have shown how differently people perceive popular religion differently. I think it is now clear that popular religion is not an issue that should be treated with ignorance. People have different perceptions about it and they are causing conflict among themselves. Most of the conflict is caused by Biblical fundamentalist because they condemn those who practice popular religion which then interfere with other people's faith. There are also those Christians who are caught in the middle of the controversy between popular religion and Official religion. The third group are those who have made some mutual agreement but is that enough, is there no problem of syncretism. I think this is a challenge for us theologians to work on this topic even better. So as to come up with a clear answer for our people.

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