

Prophetism in African Christianity and Its Implications for Christian Education Curriculum

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Abstract

Prophetism is a recurrent religious phenomenon that characterizes the Christian faith. This paper examined prophetism in African Christianity and its implications for Christian Education Curriculum. The article argued that the prophetic gift in African Christianity had been a subject of immense controversy. In recent times, the development of prophetism has sometimes created uncertainties and misunderstandings in the minds of some contemporary African Christians, leading to unbiblical practices and questionable characters in the name of prophecy. This paper employed books, online materials, experiences, and descriptive methods in data collection and analysis. The article argued that biblical prophetism is to be distinguished from all other prophetism because of its unique characteristics. The findings showed that prophetism is very prominent in African Christianity because of the immediate solution it offers to its seekers. However, prophetism poses a challenge and yet offers hope to African Christianity due to its ability to respond to the soteriological and pastoral needs of the people in the midst of its unique nature and unconventional operation or practices. Thus, the Church needs to rearticulate the biblical truths that will enhance a biblical understanding and practice of prophetism among African Christians through the Christian education curriculum. Christian education curriculum should emphasize biblical truths and principles for developing a biblical worldview that will help prevent unbiblical prophetic practices. In addition, Christian education curriculum must

integrate and promote critical thinking, emphasize and teach Christian values and virtues. The paper concluded that Christian education curriculum is essential in responding to the challenges imposed by the excesses of prophetic practices in contemporary African Christianity.

Introduction

Prophetism is a recurrent religious phenomenon that characterizes the Christian faith, particularly common in African Christianity since the turn of the twentieth century. Prophets and prophecy play a vital role in the religious life of an African Christian (Quayesi-Amakye 2015, p. 43). Consequently, prophetic ministries have become more or less a normal religious phenomenon in African Christianity. However, many African Christians and denominations have suffered divisions due to the rise of the prophetic ministry, and at the same time, some have benefited from this phenomenon. Thus, there is a need to re-articulate through the Christian education curriculum the biblical truths that will enhance a biblical understanding of prophetism among African Christians (Twongyeirwe, 2021, p. 95).

This paper examines prophetism in African Christianity and its implications for a Christian education curriculum. The paper argues that the prophetic gift in African Christianity has been a subject of immense controversy (Thiselton, 2015, p. 281). The plying of prophetism in recent times has sometimes created uncertainties and misunderstandings in the minds of some contemporary African Christians, leading to unbiblical or ritual practices in the name of prophecy (Nwaomah, 2017, p. 213). Thus, the paper discusses the overview of prophetism, prophetism, particularly in African Christianity, Christian Education Curriculum, and the implications of prophetism in African Christianity for Christian Education Curriculum.

Overview of Prophetism

Prophetism is usually spoken of as an exclusive Hebrew phenomenon because of its unique features. The term prophetism can be defined in a way that limits it to the Old Testament. In other words, prophetism suggests prophetic character, function, or authority related explicitly to the system or doctrines of the Hebrews prophet (Folarin, 2004).

Although, prophetism as a religious phenomenon is not limited to Israel alone. Fabunmi (2019, p. 201) asserts that the rise of prophetism among the people of Israel has helped shape the Israelites' religious, social, and political life.

Through different prophetic ministries, the nation of Israel had witnessed God's intervention, and at the same time, they have been rebuked when necessary. Though, biblical prophetism has a similar outward appearance to non-biblical prophetism. Biblical prophetism must be distinguished from all other prophetism because of its unique characteristics (Obbink, 1939, p. 23). However, a detailed analysis of the differences between biblical and non-biblical prophetism is outside the scope of this paper.

Prophetism holds an important place in Christianity, especially when looking at the faith from the Old Testament background. The two words often used to describe prophetism are prophets and prophecy. According to Aune (1983, p. 3), "prophets and prophecy are a historical phenomenon in the history of early Christianity". Moreover, in the Old Testament, the different Hebrew terms that were used to designate a prophet are diviner (*ro'eh*), seer (*hozeh*), man of God (*'ish 'Elohim*), and prophet (*nabi*). Thus, a prophet is a person (man or woman) who speaks for God or gods (Opara, 2021, p. 64).

Furthermore, a prophet is someone who, under divine guidance, communicates divine revelation to the covenant people at various times. In other words, a prophet is the mouthpiece of God, called to utter forth the mind of God. The biblical gift of prophecy enhances divine-human communication. Thus, the significance of the prophetic gift is to maintain the integrity of the covenant relationship with God in the hearts of the Israelites (Opara, 2021, p. 6).

Augustine Deke opines that "prophets were not mere interpreters of God's will; they utter the actual words God gave them" (Deke, 2015, p. 12). God's Spirit empowered the Old Testament prophets for their specific tasks. Throughout the Old Testament, the prophet was regarded as the holy man, the seer, the spokesman, diviner, among others. However, all prophets have one thing in common: they do not invent the revelation preached out of their minds but must be

convinced that they have received the revelation from God (Obbink, 1939, p. 24).

Thus, prophets are messengers who communicate God's word to an audience that needs God's love, wisdom, power, and grace. In comparison, prophecy is an inspired word from God through a prepared and consecrated vessel, the prophet. According to Smith (1994, p. 308), the goal of prophetic ministry is to give God's new meaning to life and the world, to communicate it in a persuasive manner that would be meaningful to the listener, and to transform the worldview and behaviour of God's people.

Prophets were meant to be God's mouthpiece, drawing people closer to God. However, prophetism poses a challenge and yet offers hope to African Christianity due to its ability to respond to the soteriological and pastoral needs of the people in the midst of its unexplained nature and unconventional operation or practices (Quayesi-Amakye, 2009, p. 2). There is a thin line between true and false prophets in the Old Testament. In other words, there are counterfeit prophets who were there only to mislead the children of God.

Consequently, not all prophets are of God. False prophets call people away to self or after other gods with abuse of power (Deut. 13; Jer. 23:10-12). According to Deke (2015, p. 14), a continuous abuse of people by false prophets tends to drift the hearers of the word away from God into idolatry. Biblically, the true prophets preached repentance and directed people to obey the laws of God and not shift the people's attention away from God. Moreover, failure to observe or to be consistent with the dictates of the Word of God, the Bible, is one of the signs of false prophets.

Prophetism in African Christianity

Prophetism is a social phenomenon in almost every religion in the world, although not limited to the religious sphere. It should be noted that before the arrival of Christianity in Africa, there were personalities who functioned under superhuman and supernatural influences as seers, diviners, prophets, and medicine-men in African traditional religion settings with an impact on prophetism in African Christianity (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 91-93). In other words, African

Traditional Religious is the religious and cultural context from which most Christians in Africa come and within which they still live.

Thus, the African worldview serves as a catalyst for the emergence of the prophetic phenomenon in recent times. According to Nihinlola (2021, p. 99), in the midst of life's challenging situation, "many African Christians have turned to African Traditional Religious practices to find solutions to critical human existential problems." Moreover, African Christians believe that certain persons have insight and divinatory talents; they patronize such individuals for guidance because they are anxious to know the will of the deity and the future for themselves and those close to them. Thus, these diviners, soothsayers, and prophets interpret life's mysteries, discover hidden secrets or knowledge, and pass them on to others. In addition, prophetism in African Christianity is practiced differently at various times with renewed characteristics to meet the demands of the time. However, the tenets of the ministry of prophecy in African traditional religion do not fit into the biblical understanding and practice of prophetism (Nimah, 2016, p. 107).

According to Abayomi (2016, p. 4), "prophetism is all-embracing, and it is an exhibition of practicality in relation to the prophetic ministry." In recent times, the claims of prophetic ministry have been numerous. The prophetic gift has become a spiritual gift claimed by some who hold spiritual leadership in certain circles. Yet, the tenets and theology of prophetism in present-day African Christianity continue to generate controversy among several African Christians (Nwaomah, 2017, pp. 213-214). It is common to see some individuals, particularly among African Instituted Churches, who either bear the title prophet/prophetess or assert this identity by utterances or predictions. However, the genuineness of some of these predictions or prophecies has been questioned over the years.

In addition, much of contemporary African prophetism is about foretelling. In recent times, African prophets claim the ability to tell their followers what lies ahead of them (Oshun, 2016, p. 33). However, the genuineness of some of these predictions or prophecies has been questioned over the years, for example, in the recent elections conducted in Nigeria, where many so-called prophets were found to give predictions regarding the outcome of the election

exercises. Unfortunately, the outcome of the election had shamefully proved that many of these prophets never got their boastful pronouncements from God in the first place (Nmah, p. 109).

Furthermore, prophetism is very prominent in African Christianity because of the immediate solution it offers to its seekers. In other words, African Christianity has witnessed an unprecedented flow in Christian prophetism and significantly impacted the Christian community. Through prophetic activities, many life challenges have been resolved. One may argue that prophetism offers a solution to human existential issues. As a perennial phenomenon in Africa, prophetism goes along with the African worldview and provides a solution to many African existential issues. However, in recent times, the prophetic ministry has often been characterized by physical and spiritual abuse with associated negative results on followers (Boaheng, 2021, p. 32). Some excesses associated with prophetism in contemporary African Christianity include the commercialization of the gospel, human rights abuse, syncretic tendencies, and others. Examples of these practices in recent times include the stories of a self-acclaimed prophet who ordered his congregation to eat grass and another prophet who asked his congregations to eat snakes and rats to prove that nothing is impossible with God (Tsekpoe, 2019, p. 285).

Similarly, in the name of prophetic utterance, some self-acclaimed prophets would ask people to come with a cane to flog their enemies, bring snails for special all-night prayer, and even bathing for the opposite sex in a river. In some quarters, these practices have led to the separation of several homes (Elekwa, 2021). Moreover, the presence of symbolism or rituals that tend to shift the attention away from Jesus Christ in the name of prophecy cannot be ignored in contemporary prophetism in African Christianity.

According to Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, prophetic practices or rituals are performed for spiritual protection, success, and security against enemies. These prophetic practices flourish because of the understanding that victory and freedom in Christ are mainly spiritual. In most cases, prophetic rituals and practices are meant not only to neutralize satanic powers but also to mediate and channel divine favour and assistance into the seeker's lives (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015,

p. 44). Meanwhile, several unsuspecting African Christians have fallen victim to false prophets who profoundly reference the Bible and exploit their clients' harsh economic conditions and spiritual, material, and economic challenges to manoeuvre or defraud them (MacArthur, n.d.).

However, the recent abuse associated with the ministry of some prophets should not make anyone downplay the importance of the prophetic ministry. Instead, it should be a call to pay more attention to this ministry by examining its strengths and weaknesses and the need to re-articulate the biblical truths that will enhance a biblical understanding and practice of prophetism in African Christianity through the Christian Education Curriculum.

Christian Education Curriculum

Christian education is the process by which people are exposed to and guided by the Christian gospel. It involves the Christian community's efforts to guide young and adult persons toward maturity in their Christian faith. Christian education takes place in the context of a biblical philosophy and a Christ-centred curriculum ("Philosophy of Christian Education," 2013). In addition, the Bible is the main curriculum in Christian education. The word curriculum comes from the Latin word *currere*, which means, "to run" or "a course to be run." The goal of any curriculum is to discover the truth. However, the Christian curriculum searches all things for the knowledge and wisdom of God (Moronkola, Akinsola, Abe, and Onuka 2019, p. 4).

Thus, the Christian Education curriculum in this paper implies a guide for the Christian community, institutions, or the Church. It involves a total experience of Christian education and formation. Moreover, the Christian education curriculum is the entire course of study embarked upon by the Christian community to guide both adults and the young people to maturity in their Christian faith. With an excellent Christian education curriculum over time, people have potentially received a well-rounded Bible education (Curriculum and the Ministry of Christian Education, 2015, p. 1).

The uniqueness of the Bible in the Christian education curriculum cannot be overemphasized. According to Pazmino (2008, p. 8) in the

Christian education curriculum, “the Bible is a critical instrument that discerns and judges the educator, the educatee, and the educational process.” Thus, by exploring the biblical and theological foundations of the Christian education curriculum, Christian educators can affirm transcultural universal truths that guide all educational conceptions and efforts.

In addition, the Christian education curriculum endeavours to make the universal and transcultural truths of God’s revelation real to those participating in an educational event. Christian education curriculum reflects on distinct core values of the Christian faith and doctrines (“Curriculum and the Ministry of Christian Education,” 2015, p. 1). However, there should be intentionality in the Christian education curriculum, which involves the effort to share biblical content, contend with its implications for life, and suggest avenues for appropriate response (Pazimino, 2008, p. 9).

Christian education curriculum involves a conscious and systematic selection of knowledge, skills, and values that shape how biblical teaching, learning, and assessment processes are organized. Moreover, the Christian education curriculum is a continual process of critical reflection on participation and practice in the light of the Gospel (“What Make a Quality Curriculum,” n.d.). In other words, it is an important part of the Christian community’s teaching and learning process by which knowledge and skills for the Christian life of faith and maturity can be acquired. Thus, the Christian education curriculum has a unique capacity to assist the Church in her efforts to guide young and adult persons towards maturity in their Christian faith and to assist the Church in her Christ-given mandate of making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them (Pazimino, 2008, pp. 9-10).

The Christian education curriculum’s goal is to develop a biblical worldview. As the primary source of Christian education, the Bible provides the foundation for the learner to reason about every subject and area of life (Prov. 9:10). Although the Bible does not provide the needed fact base essential to gain knowledge of most disciplines and subjects, the knowledge of biblical principles is necessary to develop understanding and wisdom, the high orders of learning and application in any given subject or discipline. Moreover, Christian

character development is primary in the Christian education curriculum (“Philosophy of Christian Education,” 2013).

Implications of Prophetism in African Christianity for Christian Education Curriculum

Prophetism is a perennial phenomenon in African Christianity. It goes along with the African worldview and provides a solution to many African existential issues. Many life challenges have been resolved through prophetic activities, and by it many people have converted to Christianity (Asamoah-Gyandu, 2008, pp. 52-53). According to Twongyeirwe (2021, p. 97), “much of today’s falsehood that is embraced as prophecy thrives unabated in an inadequate understanding of both the biblical role of prophecy and its practice.” Thus, the need to rearticulate biblical truths through a Christian education curriculum that will enhance biblical understanding and practice of prophetism in contemporary African Christianity cannot be overemphasized. Hence, the implications of prophetic practices in African Christianity for Christian education curriculum shall be discussed as follows:

1. *Christian Education Curriculum Should Emphasize the Need for Regeneration*

In Christian theology, regeneration is generally understood as God’s work in a believer’s life. Erickson (1994, p. 699) affirms that regeneration is a secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to us. In other words, regeneration implies that God brings a person to a new life from a previous state of separation from God. However, an unregenerated life is one primary reason why many in the Church become gullible to the deception of contemporary prophetism (Adeleke 2020, 116). Thus, Christian education curriculum should emphasize the need for a genuine conversion experience.

2. *Christian Education Curriculum Should Promote and Encourage Discipleship*

Discipleship is the process of becoming like Jesus Christ. In addition, discipleship is teaching biblical precepts while modelling and guiding others toward living righteously as followers of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship equips Christians with God's word, prayer, doctrine, worship, encouragement, and service. Moreover, discipleship is an ongoing process, and it is personal. Thus, to guide against deception in contemporary prophetism, Christian Education Curriculum should promote and encourage discipleship.

3. ***Christian Education Curriculum Should Revolve Around the Bible, the Word of God***

The place of the Bible in the Christian education curriculum cannot be overemphasized. The Bible is commonly referred to in Christendom as the Word of God and by evangelicals believed to be the final and sufficient authority in all matters pertaining to doctrines and the Christian faith and practice (Driscoll and Breshears, 2010, p. 41). Much of today's false prophecy takes advantage of Bible illiteracy in search of spiritual experiences that shift the attention away from Jesus, revealed in the Bible (Twongyeirwe, 2021, p. 98). Thus, the Christian education curriculum should emphasize biblical truths and principles essential for developing a biblical worldview that will guide against excesses of prophetism in contemporary African Christianity.

4. ***Christian Education Curriculum Should Emphasize the Importance of the Doctrine of Revelation and Bibliology***

In the face of strange and excesses of prophetic practices in contemporary African Christianity, the Christian education curriculum must recognize and emphasize the importance of the doctrine of revelation as the basis of nearly all religions claims about God, or theological praxis. Consequently, the doctrine of revelation is necessary to provide a biblical response and to check the excesses or abuse of prophetism in recent times (Motyer, n.d.). Thus, the doctrine of revelation and bibliology is a critical theological concept that is relevant in developing the Christian education curriculum.

5. ***Christian Education Curriculum Should Encourage Critical Thinking***

Since falsehood in today's prophecy takes advantage of Bible illiteracy, there is a lack of spiritual discernment and critical thinking. Moreover, some sincere and innocent God seekers seem to lack the

ability to distinguish between what is biblical and what is unbiblical. These people lack the ability to weigh their spiritual status, moral standing, or consequences. Thus, an excellent and appropriate Christian education curriculum should integrate and encourage critical thinking.

6. *Christian Education Curriculum Should Emphasize and Teach Christian Values and Virtues*

Many of today's prophets are self-seeking and emphasize miracles that fit the temporary demands instead of helping people cultivate Christian virtues for a life that will spend eternity with God. However, one significant aspect of the Christian education curriculum is that it does not just impact or teach academics but also instills healthy morals and values.

Therefore, to combat the menace emanating from the excesses and abuse of prophetism in contemporary African Christianity, there must be a combined effort by the Christian community to rearticulate biblical truths and principles of a biblical understanding of prophetism. In other words, there is a need for collaboration among Church leaders and ecumenical Christian bodies to curb unbiblical practices in the name of prophecy and protect innocent people from manipulation (Tsekpoe, 2019, p. 288).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine prophetism in African Christianity and its implication for the Christian education curriculum. As a phenomenon in African Christianity, prophetism is becoming more and more appealing to many contemporary African Christians. Generally, people want to hear from God, especially those who claim to speak for God. Thus, the recipients of the prophetic utterances fall gullible to the deception of contemporary prophetism. However, the examples and emphasis on falsehood in today's prophetism presented in this paper do not suggest that prophetic ministry in African Christianity is unimportant or something to be disdained. Instead, it is a call to pay more attention to prophetism in African Christianity by examining its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, Christian education curriculum that revolves around the Bible is

essential in responding to the challenges imposed by the excesses of prophetic practices in contemporary African Christianity.

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