

Church Leaders Still at Odds Over Credibility of Faith Healer T.B. Joshua

Some have condemned him as a fraud, while others endorse him
Prominent Nigerian church leaders have labeled T.B. Joshua a fraud, but that has not stopped Christians in South Africa, Europe and the United States from supporting the controversial faith healer.

Joshua, 39, hosts daily services that attract thousands of visitors to his Synagogue Church of All Nations in Lagos, the country's largest city. Pilgrims flock to the sprawling compound seeking cures from terminal diseases, infertility and other ailments. Reports of alleged healings from cancer, AIDS and multiple sclerosis have circulated widely through videotaped testimonies.

Pastors of Nigeria's largest churches say Joshua mixes Christianity with occult practices. During a leadership summit held near Lagos in July, they firmly denounced him while discussing the issue with a group of Americans that included theologian C. Peter Wagner, Colorado pastor Ted Haggard and prayer leader Chuck Pierce.

"Without exception the Nigerian leaders said they believe [Joshua] is not a legitimate minister of the gospel. There was no debate about it," said Haggard, pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs.

The summit was held at the world's largest church building, Winner's Chapel in Ota, pastored by Bishop David Oyedepo. At

one point the pastors joined hands and prayed that God would prevent Joshua from deceiving Christians with false miracles. The Nigerian leaders included Oyedepo; Mike Okonkwo, head of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria; Enoch Adeboye, general overseer of the fast-growing Redeemed Christian Church of God; and Ayo Oritsejafor, pastor of the 26,000-member Word of Life Bible Church in Warri.

“T.B. Joshua is dangerous to the body of Christ, both in Nigeria and globally,” said Joseph Thompson, a facilitator of the summit who is an associate pastor at Haggard’s church. A Nigerian himself, Thompson said he is concerned that some charismatics who tend to “chase after miracles” will be duped by Joshua’s use of Christian terminology.

“Americans don’t realize that witchdoctors have healed many people” in Nigeria, Thompson told Charisma.

There is no question that Joshua sends mixed signals. Although he prays in the name of Jesus, many of his methods are unorthodox. He converses with angels during sermons, speaks of traveling to other places in the spirit realm and has been known to ask people to walk through the audience naked to prove their healings.

Some Nigerian leaders claim that animal sacrifices have been performed in Joshua’s church to generate a source for occult power. The pastors contend that this is the reason Joshua does not travel to other countries to conduct meetings.

Earlier this year, supporters of Joshua claimed that a 76-year-old man from South Africa was raised from the dead at the Synagogue. A videotape shows Joshua blowing into the man’s

face after commanding him to rise. The account was posted on FarShores, a Canada-based Web site devoted to paranormal phenomena including sightings of ghosts and UFOs.

Yet several prominent charismatic leaders have visited Joshua's compound and returned with favorable impressions.

These include Canadian renewal leader John Arnott, Pittsburgh pastor Joseph Garlington, Louisiana evangelist Marvin Gorman and New Zealand minister Bill Subritzky.

Arnott said that although Joshua is "secretive and mystical," and his Nigerian followers seem "zombielike," he is not ready to denounce him as a false prophet.

"Lots of desperately ill people have been healed there," Arnott said. "There seemed to be definite miracles going on, and they were done in the name of Jesus."

Arnott also noted that a South African evangelist, Kobus van Rensburg—who has been heavily influenced by Joshua—has established a healing center in the town of Stilfontein, near Johannesburg. This month, van Rensburg will be speaking at Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, which Arnott pastors.

South African charismatics were at one time flocking in large groups to Lagos to attend Joshua's meetings, but Charisma has learned that such support is waning.

"T.B. Joshua is no longer the flavor of the month there," said Peter Vandenberg, executive vice president of Christ for All Nations (CFAN), the ministry of evangelist Reinhard Bonnke.

Two years ago CFAN sponsored a huge outreach in Lagos that involved more than 2,000 local churches—and none of those churches endorsed Joshua, Vandenberg said.

“Every one of them said that Joshua does things that are occultic and that what he is doing is not doctrinally correct,” he added.

Although Bonnke’s organization has not condemned Joshua publicly, CFAN has adopted a firm stance and will not work with Joshua in Nigeria. Added Vandenberg: “We stand with the majority of Christians there who have denounced him. Our brothers in Nigeria are on the ground there, and they know best.”

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