

HEALING MINISTRIES IN NIGERIA: A THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

In these latter days there has been a proliferation of ecclesial communities popularly known as Pentecostal Churches, healing homes and ministries. This phenomenon to any sincere devout Christian must be a cause for great worry. The reason behind this in most cases is not necessarily the love for God, but using religion as a means to wealth and material acquisition. This is why the founders of these denominations cling to personal revelations which sometimes are hallucinations and misapprehensions and there is no way these can be verified since it is private and personal. This is the reason why some of them water down the gospel and preach only prosperity, crossless Christianity, and miracles which are often integrated with the African traditional religious approach. This paper discusses healing ministries in Nigeria from a theological perspective. The findings of this paper reveal that motives behind the foundations of these ministries are largely economic, material and are bereft of spiritual contents. This work recommends Christianity in spirit and in truth. This will not only obey the will of Christ but will curb the scandals caused by a divided Christianity. The methodology employed in this work is historic-descriptive, which implies that healing ministries in Nigeria were carefully studied and evaluated in the light of their implications to the future of Christianity in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Healing, Ministry, Nigeria, Theology and Discourse*

Introduction

Today, so many people both the clergy and the lay faithful, rush into healing ministry, some for economic reasons and others in quest for power, etc. Some of those who rush into the establishment of healing ministries more often than not experience the absence of the Holy Spirit in their ministry. This experience has led some into occult practices in order to effect healing and get the power of conviction especially in getting money from

their clients. This is why in some of the ministries the healing ministers play down ‘the power of the cross.’ This idea is demonic because Christ himself never rebuked nor destroyed the cross but went through it.

However, there are ministries spurred by the love of God that grew out as a result of an inner quest and urge irresistible in the mind of the minister involved. This is always seen by the selfless sacrifice of the individual involved and his or her attitude to money, whereas the counterfeit ministries are money oriented and exploitative. This materialism often is the goal behind the proliferation of Pentecostal churches. This work studies the aberrations of some of these ministries in Nigeria.

Healing and the Establishment of Ministries

An excursus of the history of the Church reveals that, healing was an essential part of the Church’s ministry and teaching from the beginning. The story of these healings was continued by the Apostles. In a simple offhand way, it affirms that the ministry carried on by Jesus was continued among his followers. They did not set out to make a point of the matter, it just was.

The early writings of Paul also testify to the continuation of the ministry and identity, power (*dunamis*), sign (*semeion*) and marvel (*teras*). The ministry of healing is referred by Paul as a gift of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12) (charism). The prescription of James 5:14-16 is the classic healing text, which indicates a procedure of the early church tradition, to be followed in praying for healing. The unfortunate rendering of the Greek word (*sosei*) is noted by Kelsey which means to save, to cure and to heal by the Latin (*salvare*) which means only to save. Today the more holistic understanding is being recovered.

Kelsey, drawing from the work of Frost, presented an evidence to show how the practice of healing was carried on uninterruptedly between AD100-250. He notes that despite a diminishing of enthusiasm after the edict of Milan in AD313, with the large number of nominal Christians entering the new religion of the empire, the ministry continued, and some Church Fathers particularly in the east developed a theology of healing. In his description and affirmation of a healing ministry in which “all kinds of bodily infirmity as well as many different diseases had been cured, Ireneaus stands out among the earlier Church Fathers. He was of the opinion that healing was given to the church the body of Christ as they express the creative power of God.

Some of the other Ante-Nicene theologians who affirm the healing ministry as an essential aspect of the Church were Origen, Cyprain, Clement of Alexandria and Lactantius. In their own time Chrysostom, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa continued to affirm the same. In developing his theological synthesis Gregory of Nyssa dealt with the issue of healing. He says that healing is “a manifestation of “the way Deity is mingled

with humanity” and an affirmation of the Incarnation.”(Bate1985:174).As a gift of the divine life healing becomes one of “the main doors through which men experience God. The healing miracles are central to people’s faith in the scriptures and open their eyes to an understanding that the resurrection was a possibility. Chrysostom affirms the value of prayer and emphasizes that healing comes only through God’s power.

In the west, it is particularly significant to note Augustine’s change of mind regarding healing. He is quite clear in his earlier writings that Christians are not to look for continuance of the healing gift. In one of his works he writes:

However, an ongoing experience of many healings in his own diocese of Hippo, sometimes before his own eyes, caused him to change his mind and affirm that miracles were still taking place in his time in the name of Christ. (Augustine 2004: 604).

Kelsey despite this detects a drift of reasoning within the Church which whilst continuing to recount and acknowledge the existence of divine healings interprets the gifts as of little importance or necessity since what counts most is not the healing of the body but the salvation of soul.

Jerome and Ambrose also see healing in this light. Thus a symbol of this greater reality is bodily healing which should not necessarily be sought. John Cassian was a major exponent of this Platonic theological view point. Kelsey quotes his comments on the gifts of healing as possessed by some desert monks, and goes on to show how negative his position is to healing gifts.

...when they did possess them by the grace of the Holy Spirit they would never use them, unless perhaps extreme and unavoidable necessity drove them to do so. These miracles, as Cassin saw it, were performed to demonstrate the power of the Lord to heretic or scoffers, or because a monk was “pestered” for healing. He thus expressed the most correct theology – the works were accomplished by the compassion of the Lord and not the merit of monks – but he himself seemed to have learned little about compassion. From this point on, the purpose of his discussion is clear. It was necessary to warn the Church about the dangers of using the gift of healing. If one were not fully aware of them, he might loose not only his humility but his inward purity and perfect chastity. Indeed, the implication was that one

could lose his very soul by too much attention to healing men's bodies. (Kelsey 1973:195).

In his "Book of Pastoral Rule" this theological position was enshrined by Gregory the Great. The influence of this Book in Northern Europe during the time of the Church's missionary endeavour can scarcely be over-estimated. Illness was a sign of God's chastisement for sin in an attempt to discipline and reform sinners, Kelsey quoting Gregory wrote:

The sick are to be admonished that they feel themselves to be sons of God in that the scourge of discipline chastises them. "He understood illness as one more blow of the hammer in shaping the stones of humanity placed in the heavenly wall on the other side (sic). Sickness brings a man to himself so that he can ponder his sins and repent." (Kelsey 1973:196).

The stage was set with the re-adoption of the Deuteronomic position by Gregory, for the demise of the healing ministry in the official church although it kept on re-occurring from time to time in the charismatic groups and fringe movement. The sacrament of anointing within the official church became a preparation for death in "Extreme Unction" and forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of penance was highly emphasized. On the role of healing in the church, the reformers too, were extremely circumspect. In his own time Luther dismissed miracles believing that, the healing gifts were given only in the early period of the church so that in the latter moment people could teach, convert and save men spiritually.

Similarly Calvin was unenthusiastic about the gift of healing. Later, based on the epistle of James, Luther mellowed down his position and even wrote instruction of how to pray for the sick. The change of his viewpoint like Augustine was based on a personal experience of healing. As Bate says:

It is only in the 20th century that the healing ministry begins to re-emerge as a powerful force in the Church. The beginnings can be traced to the emergence of the "Healing sects" and the Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the century. (Bate 1985:166)

Since the 1960's it has continued through the Neo-Pentecostal eruption which has seen into the mainline churches the movement of the ministry, as well as the emergence of another wave of "new Churches." The gift of the Spirit is called charism. His call to an individual believer is a gift of the Spirit. According to Gelpi (1989:26).

“God’s call to men brings with it the power to do what one is called to do. But the call is not coercive. It demands a free response from the one called”.

This call equally demands that in a manner that conforms to the vision of truth revealed in Jesus, man must use this power freely. One is rendered docile to the gifts of service in accomplishing the specific task God is calling one to do. If used in conjunction to the gifts of sanctification, the believer is united more closely to God. Extraordinary gifts are given to prepare those who are called to some special work of service in the community. Extraordinary gifts of prayer were for instance granted to great Saints, from which they derived the insight they needed to respond to the special call of God. This is seen in the writing of Gelpi (1989:47) where he says: “But because extraordinary gifts are unusual, they capture the attention and possess a more obvious visibility. They are, then, more evidently signs of God’s activity and presence. Hence they possess a greater degree of quasi-sacramentality than ordinary gifts.

In Nigeria the re-awakening of these healing gifts latter gave rise to the emergence of healing ministries and healing homes especially in the mainline churches. This could be traced to the advent of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement. Healing Ministry thrive much in Africa and in particular Nigeria. Majority of the people are poor. The preaching of prosperity by these groups gave hope to these poverty stricken populace.

Another major factor that came with Pentecostalism is, the bringing to consciousness , the presence of the devil and his influence in the daily activities of the people which is synonymous with the African Traditional worldview that is dominated by spirits; both benevolent and the malevolent. It is in this connection that Mbiti (1975:76) wrote:” belief in spirits is an integral aspect of the religious heritage of Africans.” Stressing this Owoeye (2018:1) went further to state that: “malevolent spirits are often believed to cause evils, accidents, diseases and sicknesses. They have possessive, oppressive and obsessive powers with which they afflict their victims... “These spirits are sent by the divinities to assist men when they are in-tune with them. Another major factor is the preaching in these ministries. They are usually lively, practical and appealing even though it is most often materialistic in approach.

Traditional Healing Ministry

Healing Ministries in Nigeria thrive because some of these ministries are rooted in the belief system of the African Traditional Religion. An overview of the African Traditional Religion shows us that before ever Christianity arrived on the coast of Africa, Africans already has a way of grappling with the problem of illness, restoring health on

the physical, social, moral and spiritual dimensions. An x-ray of the traditional healing methods in Africa shows that

Spirit Beings as Agents of Illness

Spiritual beings in African cultures are seen as important causes of illness, even though non religious sicknesses may even be more significant. In Africa ‘sorcerers’ ‘witches’ are known as human agents of disease. It must be noted however that there is an inter connectivity, an overlap between spiritual and religious causes and those that are biological and natural, human and social.

The Medicine Man

The medicine men in African society are one of the most treasured gifts and useful sources of help. This concept has suffered from American and European authors who often refer to them as ‘witch-doctors’ a derogatory term. In Africa every village has a medicine man who is accessible to every family and a friend of all and within reach. He is almost all times accessible to the people, at many points comes into picture in the community and in the individual life of the people.

In the “calling” of the medicine man there is no fixed rule as in the case of the traditional priest. This might come when he is still unmarried and young, or in his middle or latter life. In some cases the medicine man passes on the profession to his son or other younger relative. Other men however believed that spirits of the living dead or some spirits have “called” them in visions, dreams or in walking, to become medicine men. Both men and women are found in the profession and their personal qualities vary according to individuals talents, gifts and call. They are expected above all to be friendly, trustworthy, morally upright, willing and ready to serve, able to discern peoples needs and not be exorbitant in their charges. Their skills vary naturally from person to person. They are influential, though in some societies they have no position except those of their profession. It is believed in some societies that the medicine-men obtained through birth or eating of certain medicines some special gifts.

It is in the function of the medicine man to cure the sick and warn of an impending danger. He can harm or protect, kill or cure with his medicine he attacks witchcraft and magic. Nobles are said to patronize medicine men because their magic is good. It causes no injury to anyone and at the same time prevents them from harm. Diseases are believed in Africa to have been caused by the ill-will or ill-action of a person against another through magic or witchcraft. It is therefore the duty of the medicine man to discover. The cause of the sickness, find out who the criminal is, diagnose the nature of the disease, apply the right treatment and supply a means of preventing the misfortune from occurring again. (Mbiti 1973:221).

This process of the medicine man is partly physical and partly psychological. He therefore applies spiritual and physical means. He is thus both doctor and pastor to the sick person. In applying his medication he may practice such things like jumping over his patients, chanting incantations asking his patient to offer chicken, or goat sacrifices, He instructs his patients as well to avoid certain food and persons and observe some taboos as the case may be. All these take control of the psychological dimension. He may even as in some cases give him a charm for protection and this the western medication and treatment falls short of. In African tradition, diseases are religious experiences and a religious approach is required to deal with them. The medicine man gives much of his time and attention to the sick which (enables him penetrate deep into the psychological state of the patient). Even if it is explained to the patient that he has malaria because a mosquito carrying malaria parasites has stung him he will still want to know why the mosquito stung him and not another person. (Mbiti 1973:220).

The satisfactory answer to this question to people is that someone has “caused” or “sent” it. Suffering diseases, accidents are all caused mystically for the African. To cure this, the cause must be found, counteracted, and punished. This is where African traditional medicine has a different dimension from that of the west. Another major function of the medicine man is to take preventive measures against the wickedness of people and the bad spirits. This is done by the performing of rituals, in the homes of the people in question, preparing charms for them or applying medicines that are swallowed by the clients or rubbed on the body. They give aid to the increase of productivity. They assist or advice on how a man can win more love from the wife. They render help to impotent men and barren women. Treat people to be successful in politics or business and as well render help to students to pass their examinations. In fact medicine men could be summarized as the hope of the society.

The Herbalist

A distinction has to be made of the medicine man with the herbalist. Often we see one acting the two. There are no clear cut distinction in many cases, only that the herbalist is a native doctor who bases his treatment on the use of herbs, shrubs and parts of special trees. As in most cases he does not invoke any force to ward off any evil spirit; in the village he treats such things like snake bites, broken bones and fracture of many kinds, stomach upset, severe headache, etc. The herbalist above all believes in the curative power of his herbs he does not deal with any other form of medicine or charms apart from his herbs. In the training of herbalist he acquires his knowledge in matters pertaining to the medicinal value, quality and use of different herbs, leaves, roots, fruits, barks, grasses. (Mbiti 1973:218).

Mediums and Diviners

They belong to the category of the medicine men both in training and duties. In the African context these are often tied together in one. It is as a matter of clarity that we separate them. Only in rare cases do we have them separate in medicine man. The African names for them are often the same. The sole function of the medium is to link one with the spirits of the dead and the spirits. Through this means men obtain knowledge of things otherwise difficult to have been known and impossible. Through this medium approach a person could be directed how and where to find a lost article and to know who stole them and the why. The medium is a normal person with specialized abilities he comes to this knowledge only when he is “possessed” by some spirits. Their distinction is on the ability to be “possessed” by the spirits. But it equally depends on the willingness of the spirits in question to possess him.

The medium gives the information as regards the cause, the treatment and nature of diseases. It is then the duty of the diviner to interpret his information. In some cases the two are interwoven in one. During this possession the person loses himself and becomes simply an object a tool in the hands of the ‘spirit’ that he communes with. “He can then be led to act and speak according to the wishes of the spirit, seemingly without hurting himself.

Spirits that come into these mediums are friendly. They are not harmful and they remain in them for a while and goes. Normally most mediums are women. In some Traditional African religions some priest are mediums, the spirit possesses them especially when they want to perform their functions in the shrine of their gods as obtainable among the Ashanti, Baganda, Ewe, Fon, Yoruba, and a number of other peoples in Africa and in Nsukka they are called *Inyama*. As a rule diviners are mostly men and mediums women sometimes they act as husband and wife.

The African Traditional Priest

The functions and role of the priest in African religion is seen in his installation processes. He is the one who leads the community in matters of religion, through sacrifices, prayers, rituals, etc protects and removes obstacles for the community in its dealings with the spirit world which in itself is a healing function. There are four different rites that go with the installation of a priest of a particular deity in Igboland. We concentrate on one here without getting into the ritual intricacies, Onwubiko (1972:75) clearly presented it thus:

1. “The rubbing of one part of the priest initiate with Nzu, and the other with Uhie-cohise chalk and camwood respectively. This is the rite of

purification. The rite makes him a go-between man and the deity. He also shows his dual nature-half man half spirit. Nzu signifies that he is still living, that is, he is 'alive.' Uhie signifies that he is 'dead' and is more like a spirit. In Igboland Nzu is rubbed on a new born child as a sign of life, while uhie is part of the mortuary preparation of a corpse before burial;

2. The wearing of the priestly gab of the deity. It shows a concrete participation in the world of the deity;
3. The third rite is the wearing of the anklet (*Ola mmuo*) of the deity. This rite establishes a special union between him and the deity, a union which only death can dissolve. In some cases the priest initiate wears the tutelary ring in the ear,
4. The fourth rite is the carrying of the sacred symbol of the deity in the sacred pot or basket of the deity to the deity's market. This is *ipu ahia muo*. It is a public appearance of a new priest, and through it, he is openly acclaimed and proclaimed the priest of a particular deity"

In some cultures the funeral ceremony of the priest is performed while he is still alive to show that he is no longer man, a sacrifice, etc. According Onwubiko (1972:75) as obtainable in Ezinihitte traditional society. The priest after going to the market of a particular deity as a concluding and final rite, the priest must go to where *ihu Chineke* is located in the orie ukwu market.

The Spirit and Healing

For the African, it is believed that, each medicine contains a breath of life or power, that might be the abode of a minor god, a spiritual being or an impersonal force. There is essential to this medicine an apparatus or an outward form through which it can work. From this understanding, it differs then from a god who cannot act materially. This medicine naturally will act for everyone, if the proper ceremonies have been observed. In becoming the owner of the medicine, the proper taboos must be carefully observed. From this then the medicine could be bought and sold for.

The power in medicine may be latent or may thought to have no power in themselves but can only be aroused through the action of a medicine man. Invisible beings work through them as agents. The power of medicine is spoilt by various kinds of uncleanliness, this is buttressed by Parrinder (1987:158) thus:

No medicine can keep its force if it is taken to a latrine, so a man may be murdered in a latrine, for his protective charms do not work there, and hence chiefs avoid public latrines. Another uncleanliness is mensuration, and hence women are sent to a house outside the medicine-man's compound during their monthly period. It is blood that is powerful and can act for or against a medicine.

Upright character is said to be the chief necessity for the working of good medicine, and good medicines cannot be used for killing people. To be efficient the medicine must not only please the patient's soul but must be good in itself. A troubled soul is one of the commonest causes of sickness: remorse, anger, worry, witchcraft, sickness can be caused by all these.

The soul may need food, and if it is very ill it may require another power to come and wrestle with it and so the medicine-man is called in. He may just say, 'your soul needs a fowl', which is then sacrificed. But more usually he gives some potent medicine for washing or drinking. (Parrinder 1987:218).

In the preparation of an efficacious medicine various ingredients go into it. It must be prepared mixed with other elements not just a simple herb and have a spell uttered over it. Herbs are vital ingredients to most medicines and particular herbs are favoured by the gods often some animal content is needed either the blood or a sacrifice, fur or skin is used. An important third ingredient is alcohol and rum which usually is poured onto new medicine. In a large or important magical medicines prepared for protecting villages or chief's houses, a mixture of animal, herbal, and alcoholic elements is buried and often the animal part buried alive. A mound, clay, stone or cement is usually found in a doctors compound which is the burial-place of a potent protective medicine. In the case of a chief's house a cow may be buried outside it, but in the olden days. It was a man.

The Surgent Quest and Proliferation of Pentecostal Churches

Cultural Reasons

The Pentecostal church's sympathy for African culture was one of the key factors that attracted most people. Due to the values our people have for children, the practice of polygamy has already been in existence before the advent of Christianity. However, most people subscribed to Pentecostal churches because of this; in which the practice was simply compromised or ignored. Music, dance and religious syncretism were other cultural factors.

Political Reasons

The quest for leadership often drove people out of their original denominations especially when they loose to their opponents, to Pentecostal Churches to be leaders in them. Butressing this fact Ogu (1991:74).

Sometimes village political sentiments called for the establishment of Pentecostal churches they always wanted to be identified by a particular church and not to be molested by those who claim to have brought churches in their village.

The quest to be in control of others, to speak, which they may have been denied of in their former churches is the goal behind this.

Economic Reason

The establishment of Pentecostal Churches has been viewed by some people as a financial advantage to the people who establish them. Consequently because of this many people rush into it as a business and not as a religious body. Cases however abound where accusations were leveled against those who brought such churches as embezzling the funds and enriching themselves from the coffers of the church.

Theological Reason

The Pentecostal churches, it is believed by some have a very practical theology that is relevant to the realities of life of the people that makes its establishment an easy job. They were able to give the people that concrete religious satisfaction unlike the institutional churches in the practical way they worship God. More still, it tackles and provides solutions to African religious problems which it does not dismiss as un-real but in their theology admits it. People have to go for its establishment based on these

grounds. Apart from these, other major reasons include the use of drums, signing, clapping and dancing.

Musical entertainment is a strong communicative strategy that has the effect of attracting more followers into the Church, this cannot be de-emphasized. This musical role is dual in nature as it helps to sustain as well the already existing members of the congregation.

Among Pentecostals this is very much seen. There is no doubt that the love our Christians, especially the youths and women, have for music draws them into Pentecostal Churches. This is evident from what we see at every crusade of theirs. “Many of them who are tensed up by one problem or the other feel relaxed under the influence of the musical entertainments.” (Ogu 1991:75) The manner of conducting prayers in Pentecostal churches is another key factor. Many followers are drawn by these thus:

The leaders dispose their members to be fully engulfed by the spiritual aura that some members even fall into trance. With this type of involvement, they no longer see themselves as passive listeners but active participants in prayers. (Akindele (1989:2)

To enhance the system of recruiting more members almost all the Pentecostal churches have resorted to the use of electronic media, such as Television, Radio, free distribution of gospel tracts, handbooks and gospel novels, taped cassettes, and gospel crusade film shows all for evangelization. They are able to maintain a large number of followers with these and also in winning more souls for Christ every day. This as well, helps in consolidating the socio-economic position of the Church leaders.

Influence of the Media: Televangelism

Our society definitely is going electronic. Today almost every family can boast of a Radio set or Television. The preachers after such media – ministry give out their addresses, G.S.M numbers for their listeners to reach them or those of their pastors in the neighbouring villages and towns. The preaching and prayer for prosperity are also a great factor. With the present economic problem in Nigeria many people run to places where prayers are organized for breakthrough, deliverance from bondage, ancestral curses, etc. These seeds are sown after the prayers in monetary values for anticipated blessings from God.

The Pentecostal churches equally emphasize much on healing and deliverance from evil spirit which is one of the essential marks for the coming of the kingdom as preached by Christ. The de-emphasis on the cross is equally a greater factor for the surgent quest to Pentecostal Churches. But this is an aberration because Christ himself suffered for our salvation, and so were the Martyrs even the apostles, at every opportunity

given them to experience suffering or persecution for Christ, they rejoiced (Acts 5:40-41) even the apostle Paul in his missionary work lamented for the thorn in his flesh (Phil 2:25; 2 Cor. 12:7ff).

Aberrations in Healing Ministries

1. The Promise of healing for every disease:

Definitely the apostle Paul had the gift of healing. According to Acts Chapter 19:12. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. Acts 20 tells us that the dead were even raised by Him. But God even with this impressive record did not always answer the prayers of Paul for physical healing. Timothy was advised by him to stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of his stomach and his frequent illnesses. (1 Tim 5:23). We read in II Tim 4:20 that Paul “left Trophimus sick in Miletus.” And his three prayers for his thorn in the flesh” were not answered with physical healing (2 Cor 12:7-10).

2. Making Healing the Focus of Public Ministry

In the gospels and Acts, thirty-seven accounts of healing are detailed, twelve occurred in small groups and fifteen in private settings. Only ten occurred with a crowd present. In the words of Watkins (2018:2) “Rarely today do we hear Christ’s admonition to the healed, “Don’t tell anyone!” Instead, we have weekly television programmes featuring healing services, and monthly mailing with a plague of pictures of the “healer”. Genuine healers will be more concerned about God’s kingdom being built up than their own”

The leprous hand of Moses was healed not to impress the Egyptians, but ...so that they may believe that the Lord... has appeared to you (Exodus 4:5) Jesus says “Even though you don’t believe in me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the father is in me and I in the Father” (John: 38) The purpose of miracles as the Apostle John writes is; that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

Most often, God will heal where his healing will be instrumental to the advancement of his kingdom. The focus must always be the advancement of his kingdom.

3 Using Healing as a Fund Raiser.

There is no single account in the Book of Acts or in the gospels where money was exchanged or donated during a healing instead, when a recent convert Simon and ex-sorcerer, asked to “buy” the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles, Peter shouts. “May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God

with money!” You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God (Acts 8:20-21). Recently, there was a boast by a famous faith healer that he makes five million dollars annually from his healing ministry. Very different from Peter and John who “had no silver or gold”, when they healed the man crippled from birth (Acts. 3:6)

4 Belittling Medical Treatment

God has given us the wisdom and the knowledge to understand these “wonderfully and fearfully made” bodies. And it is our responsibility to treat our bodies well with medical knowledge and take advantage of the medical treatments available to us. And it can be humanly verified if we are supernaturally healed. When Jesus heals diseases and leprosy he often “ordered them to go to the priests who served as the public health officers of the day-to have the healing verified.” (Watkins 2018:3).

We should therefore not make any changes in own activities or medications if we believe you have been healed until a doctor can verify the healing. Unfortunately, there are tales of diabetics who felt they were delivered, ate a chocolate cake to celebrate their “miracle”, and immediately went into a near-fatal insulin coma. (Watkins 2018:3) In conclusion therefore, one should know that there are faith healers and there are fake healers. Thus:

Some “heal” actors from the audience. Some have mastered psychological techniques to make people believe they have been healed. Others use the victim’s normal remission of disease as “proof” of their healing powers. Some may even perform miracles using Satanic power. Matt 24:24 warns that “false Christ’s and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. (Watkins 2018:3).

But the power to discern those using the Satanic or the human powers to accomplish “healings” can be easily seen from this perspective; who is getting the credit for the healing? X-raying the scriptures one can see that “from the infertile ninety year old Sarah giving birth to Isaac to the dead who are raised in the book of Revelation God and His power is the focus. Not the “healer” or the “healed.” (Watkins 2018:3).

Recommendation

1. Some of the people who have the gift of healing in the mainline churches are often not encouraged. They are often than not persecuted. This is the reason why some of them establish their own ministry.

2. Among these ministers especially the genuine ones, some of them suffer because of the nature of work involved. Naturally many never wanted the gift but could not run away from it. This is because of an inner urge and quest irresistible in them to perform their task.
3. The gift of healing is but a practical sign of the kingdom that has come. Thus for effective evangelization, the gift of healing should be encouraged especially by the clergy.
4. In the main line churches, many healing ministries are often clamped down without any serious reason. And bans are given in some places against night-vigils. This bans often lead some of the Christians to wander out of their churches in search of miracles etc. thus falling into wrong hands. Church authorities therefore, should help and encourage this gift.
5. The gift of healing has been there from the beginning of the church. However, apart from these militating factors against healing ministry there are aberrations found in some. I recommend that the genuineness of the healing ministry be validated; the following may help in doing this:
 - (a) Self Sacrifice; the ability of the ministry/minister to sacrifice time, money, energy etc.
 - (b) Secondly; attitude to money and its acquisition.
 - (c) Thirdly; the spiritual life of the priest/persons involved in the healing ministry.
 - (d) The practice of humility by the minister.
 - (e) Discernment of gifts.
 - (f) Catechesis on healing and other gifts of the spirit.
 - (g) The practice of obedience to the competent ecclesiastical authorities. This is because obedience itself is a sign that the spirit is at work in the minister.

Conclusion

Healing is one of the gifts given to the Church by Christ. It does not belong to the person who has it but to the whole church, the body of Christ the people of God. It is not given as a result of any merit and like the gifts of God it is purely an unmerited merit. It is purely for service and therefore demands humility. This gift therefore should be enhanced and nurtured and not stifled, by the authorities. This is because once it is there it makes the gospel alive and practical and urges conversion more in the people.

The gift of Healing is real because it is the promise of Christ who is ever faithful to his promises. This promise is seen when God intervenes in the conditions of his people that are sick restoring them to health, miraculously through prayer or through

his human instrument. This gift therefore should not be commercialized in any form since this will tantamount to simony and abuse of the gifts of God.

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