

HEALING IN SOME PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Healing and casting of demons are common among the Pentecostal believers in Nigeria especially among the leaders of Pentecostal Churches. The Deeper Christian Life Ministry, the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Life Gate Ministries are known for their penchant for healing over the years. This paper looks at their healing activities in major areas especially in the area of terminal diseases like diabetes, hypertension, stroke, cardiovascular disorder and other malignant diseases like cancer, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). The paper compares their healing activities for three consecutive years, to see the efficacy of their healing apparatus – prayer, faith. The research also highlights the areas where one church is better than others. The paper after assessment concludes by looking at the inadequacy of prayer in healing HIV/AIDS victims.

Keywords : Pentecostal preachers, penchants, HIV/AIDS, Cardiovascular disorder

Introduction

The practice of healing, casting out of demons, deliverance from ‘the power of darkness’, and sometimes, from poverty by Pentecostal preachers have become an integral part of Christianity in Nigeria. The trend started in 1918 with the Precious Stone Society (PSS) after the outbreak of epidemics. It went through the periods of prophets Moses Tunolase Orimolade, Joseph Ayodele Babalola, Samuel Bileou Joseph Oshoffa, Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu, Ezekiel Olatidoye Babalola to the present healers such as Prophet Timothy Oluwole Obadare, Pastors William Folorunso Kumuyi, Enoch Adejare Adeboye, Bishops David Olaniyi Oyedepo, Samson Grace and Bayo Yusuf.

This paper is to show the concern of some Pentecostal preachers to stem the tide of the HIV/AIDS pandemic not only through their admonitions in sermons but also through divine healing of HIV/AIDS victims. This is why they include healing for the sick especially

for the HIV/AIDS victims in their handbills for crusades and conventions. They implore their members to bring their relatives who have been tested positive for healing.

Apart from H. Turner (1967), J.D.Y. Peel (1968), Adrian Hastrings (1976), R.J. Hackett (1980), Benetta Jules-Rosette (1981), J.A. Omoyajowo (1982), E.O. Oshun (1983) who wrote on the healing activities of the early prophets, scholars have also written on various topics of healing and exorcism, while the healing activities of a good number of prophets in Nigeria and elsewhere are not left out in their schemes. For instance, A.O. Igenzo (1985) and (1988) wrote on healing and exorcism, and healing and medicine in African Christianity respectively. G.O. Oosthuizen (1992) wrote on the healing activities of prophets in South African Independent Churches. C.C. Achebe (1992) wrote on the concept of health and ill-health among the Igbo of Nigeria. C.I. Ejizu (1992) wrote on exorcism and prayer-healing in Nigeria. R Eya (1992) wrote on 'Ailment and Distortion in Human Health'. G. Ikeobi (1992) wrote on 'Healing and Exorcism: the Nigeria Pastoral Experience', C.U. Manus (1992) wrote on 'Healing and Exorcism: The Scriptural Viewpoint' and A.O. Nkwoka (1992) wrote on 'Healing: the Biblical perspective.' However, there are still prophets whose healing activities are yet to be documented.

Really, illness and diseases have stalked mankind for many years. Plagues and sicknesses have been as inseparable from the history of civilization as the weather or people themselves. Sadly, news media reports are now filled with rising statistics and how the battle for life is being lost. Casualties, deaths and debilitating illnesses are exploding around the world. Hardly can any week pass without reports of new disease outbreak occurring somewhere on earth. Be that as it may, it thus appears that the Nigerian situation is compounded with poor economic condition and joblessness.

This is probably why in Christian religious circles; there has been an unprecedented interest in the phenomenon of healing. Many healers and prophets are springing up arrogating to themselves power to heal diseases. More frequently, announcement of invitation for miracles occupy a good portion of television programs and news media. Posters on walls and handbills are designed to invite people for miracles at revival meetings, crusades, conventions and retreats.

Necessity for Healing in Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, and other African countries, there is a general belief in spirits. Spirits are believed to be of two types: malevolent spirits and benevolent spirits. Malevolent spirits are often believed to cause evils, accidents, disasters and sicknesses. They have possessive, oppressive and obsessive powers with which they afflict their victims. J.S. Mbiti gives

credence to this belief by saying that 'belief in spirits is an integral aspect of the religious heritage of Africans' (1975: 73-76). H. Bolorunduro supports this belief⁵. Also, O. Ogunyemi believes that some spirits are benevolent while others are malevolent. These spirits are sent by the divinities to assist men when they are in tune with them⁶. Nevertheless, when there are dislocations in the harmonious flow of life, such occasions are for identifying the supernatural causes of problems through the activities of religious specialists like diviners and *babalawo* priests of Ifa, who through ritual appeasement would normalise the strained relationship either between them and the supernatural or between men and their neighbours.

Whatever they believe, it is clear that Nigerians from whatever tribe believes in the existence of ailments and that some of these ailments are attributable to spirits or mystical sources. Diseases, as they understand, lead to protracted suffering and at times untimely death. This is why they try all they can to preserve their lives either through the assistance of traditional or Pentecostal healers. This explains why prayer houses, miracle centers, crusade meetings are bombarded by people seeking for divine healing or divine intervention in their lives. From twentieth century to date, many Pentecostal pastors have arrogated to themselves power or gifts to heal all sorts of diseases.

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal churches, as I have explained elsewhere are protestant sects that emphasize spirit baptism as an experience different from conversion and evidenced by speaking in tongues in (Acts 2: 1 – 13). The churches teach the inspiration of the Bible, salvation by conversion, revival, instantaneous sanctification, divine healing; and claim to be a restoration of original christianity⁷. Pentecostal churches centre on the emotional, mystical, and supernatural: miracles, signs, wonders, and "the gifts of the spirit" (charismata), especially "speaking in tongues" (glossolalia), faith healing, and "casting out demons" (exorcism). The supreme importance is attached to the subjective religious experience of being filled with or possessed by the Holy Spirit.

The name Pentecostal is derived from the account of the day of Pentecost as described in chapters 1 and 2 of the Acts of the Apostles, when .the Holy Spirit descended upon the first Christians: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2: 1-4). Charismatic derives from the Greek

⁵ An oral interview with Bolorunduro Hezekiah (1996), a teacher, now 63 years, at his Press - (Fobol Press Ltd), Imo, Ilesa. He is a Lecturer at Osun State College of Education, Ilesa, Osun State.

⁶ An oral interview with Chief Ogunyemi - a herbalist now 77yrs (1996) at his residence 89, Aderemi Street, Ile-Ife.

⁷ S.A. Owoeye "Marriage in the Deeper Life Bible Church" *Asia Journal of Theology* Vol.22 No 2, 2008 p.294.

charisma, meaning supernatural gifts of the Spirit, which are listed in I Corinthians 12-14.

Further, J.Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2005: 95) defines Pentecostalism as:

The stream of Christianity that believes in, affirms and actively promotes the experiential presence of the Holy Spirit as part of normal Christian life and worship. Its most distinctive element is Holy Spirit baptism, which, it is believed, must be manifested in speaking in tongues. The earlier Pentecostal churches, including The Assemblies of God and various apostolic churches.... The conterminous expression charismatic is normally used for Pentecostal renewal groups operating within historic mission denominations, and para-church trans-denominational grouping like Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.... In addition to Holy Spirit baptism, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches also emphasize healing, prophecy, seeing vision and other pneumatic phenomena. However, manifestations of spiritual gifts tend to be more democratized and lay-oriented in the Charismatic movements because of their non-denominational nature. The conjoined expression 'Pentecostal/Charismatic' is used to encompass Pentecostalism in its various streams and diversities....

Moreover, the beginning of Pentecostalism in Nigeria cannot be directly linked with 1906 Azusa street revival in California. But in the early part of twentieth century, some part of Africa witnessed some conversion movements which were led by some indigenous prophets who were persecuted out of historic mission denominations. The prophets' activities were regarded as Pentecostal in nature. Such prophets include: Garric Sokari Braide of the Niger Delta, William Wade Harris of Liberia, Simon Kimbangu of Congo and others. In 1915, Garric Sokari Braide organized evangelistic crusades in an area where the Anglican Niger Delta pastorate had long functioned not too dynamically or effectively. Yet his preaching brought a wave of mass conversion, mass baptism, some divine healing and the destruction of fetishes.

Nevertheless, the beginning of Pentecostalism can partially be linked with some Pentecostal churches that came into Nigeria for evangelistic outreaches and partially too, can be linked with July 1930 Oke-Oye (Ilesa) revival by Joseph Ayodele Babalola who later left

the Faith Tabernacle for the Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C.)⁸. Of course, 1930 was regarded as the beginning of indigenous Pentecostalism in Nigeria. So, in Nigeria today, we do not only have major western mission-related Pentecostal denominations such as Assemblies of God originating from the U.S.A. but also African initiated ones like W.F. Kumuyi's Deeper Christian Life Ministry which started in 1973; The Life Gate International, 1981; The Winners' Chapel also known as The Living Faith Church, 1981; The Gospel Faith Mission International, 1955; The Redeemed Christian Church of God (R.C.C.G.), 1952.

These Pentecostal churches certainly present themselves as representatives of global Christianity - some have 'international', 'world' or 'global' in their names and claim to be able to provide correct knowledge about the state of the world. People attending these churches are taken beyond the scope of local culture, which is denounced, at times, as unbiblical and limited. They are then provided with revelations about what is going on behind the surface of the global political economy. There is a prevalent idea which is held on to through the book of revelation - that the end of the world is at hand and that satan is trying all over the world to prevent people from following God and be saved from eternal damnation.

Also, the Pentecostal Churches distinguish between the physical realm and the spiritual realm. The spiritual realm determines what goes on in the visible world. Sickness and misfortune are understood to be a result of evil spirits intruding into a person's spirit and body. All over the world there is a spiritual war going on between God and the devil (Meyer: 1996: 12). Pentecostal preachers claim to be able to penetrate the invisible through prayers to bring about physical healing for their members.

Given this context, therefore, it is important to understand why Pentecostal preachers in the South-Western Nigeria are always eager to exercise their spiritual powers to heal both their ailing members and other willing outsiders. The healing activities of some Pentecostal churches would be used as representative works of the Pentecostal preachers in the South Western Nigeria. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Life Gate Church International and the Deeper Life Bible Church are used here for illustration of the general healing in Yorubaland.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

Healing in the RCCG is spearheaded by Pastor E.A. Adeboye. He was born on March 2, 1942 into a polygamous and very poor family. He attended St. Stephen Anglican Primary School, Ifewara and Ilesa Grammar School between 1956 and 1960. He went to University of

⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu J.K. "Born of water and spirit": Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity in Africa in Kalu O.U. African Christianity: An African story (Pretoria: Dept. of Church History, University of Pretoria, 2005) p.395

Nigeria, Nsukka. He later transferred to University of Ife because of the civil war (1967-1970). He taught in various secondary schools before he went to University of Lagos for his Postgraduate Studies where he completed his Master's and Doctoral degrees in Mathematics (Hydrodynamics). He was converted on July 29, 1973⁹.

Adeboye often quotes Isaiah 53:5 or I Peter 2:23 where it was explained that by Jesus or Messiah's stripes we are healed'. He is of the opinion, as other people, that Jesus had paid for the healing of Christians. It is from this background that he explicates the theory of spiritual warfare. In the biblical view which Adeboye firmly believes in, Christians are fighting against principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesian 6: 12f). To Adeboye, deliverance implies that there is the captor, the captive and someone (a savior) who has come to deliver the captive. There are various methods, which the devil employs to launch attacks on Christians according to Adeboye. The methods are many among which are: "affliction", and the "caning" of the victims by evil spirits. This bears similarity to the affliction of Saul in the Old Testament. Another method of devil's attack is oppression, the practice whereby the victims are held up from spiritual advancement; spiritual repression is the 'spiritual pushing down, as their victims are struggling to come up, the forces of the devil push them down' (Ukah: 2003: 1967)¹⁰. However, the difference between the former and the latter is that while in the former the victims are completely down and evil spirits exercise relative mastery, in the latter, the victims are only partially down, they still have some strength and want to come up and out of bondage. The fourth is regression which is an attempt at pushing victims backward so that they might retrogress in their spiritual lives. The fifth is "distraction" which involves people's attentions being diverted to something else¹¹. The sixth is "confusion" which is the covering of the victims' spiritual insight so that they might not be able to understand, judge and make moral decision whenever they hear the words of God. Indecision and' lack of tenacity of purpose are characteristics of confused individuals.

The seventh method is "obsession" which often manifests in rigid addiction to particular habits in the victims. The worst attack by demonic spirits is "possession". This involves the total control of the victims. All that were attacked by the demonic spirits as stated above need urgent deliverance from the shackle of the devil in order to free them from

⁹ Asonzeh Franklin-Kennedy Ukah: "The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria: Local identities and Global processes in African Pentecostalism". An unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Bayreuth, Germany, in 2003, pp.92-93.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 196.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 195 – 198.

satanic bondage. This is necessary in order to help individuals contribute their quota to the work of God and the society at large. Without ridding possessed individuals of their demonic spirits, they are bound to misbehave. Many Pentecostals believe that demonic spirits in individuals account, to a large extent, for commission of evils in society, embezzlement of money, corruption of various descriptions, robbery, cultism and other economic crimes. Evil spirits are so powerful as to obstruct or hijack a country's sovereignty as they believe. C.O. Oshun (1983) also argues that Nigeria's present socio-economic and political difficulties and those of African nations can be explained in terms of evil powers. In the light of this, he advocates for spiritual solution to Nigeria sociological dilemma. 'Spiritual Weapons' such as prayers and fasting are suitable and appropriate weapons to solve problems as he believes. Healing of individuals that are sick and deliverance of people are necessary in order to liberate the country from the captivity of Satan. While they carry out their healing, they are oblivious of this fact that they are over-spiritualizing the problems of the country and that they gravitate away from the very structural factors accounting for the misery of the country. Nevertheless, Pastor E.A. Adeboye heals people of other sundry ailments

Healing in the Deeper Life

Healing is mostly done by Pastor W.F. Kumuyi in the Deeper Life Bible Church. W.F. Kumuyi, the founder and the General Superintendent of the Deeper Christian Life Ministry was born on June 6, 1941, at Orunwa, a small town near Ijebu-Ode. He attended Mayflower, Ikene and did his degree programme in University of Ibadan. He later went to the University of Lagos where he became a lecturer in the College of Education. He was converted on April 4, 1964¹². Since then, he has been teaching and preaching the Bible in buses, streets and from place to place. By 1973, at his residence in Lagos, W.F. Kumuyi started an in-depth study of the bible with his members (15 of them). The Ministry has now grown by leaps and bounds. By 1994, according to M.A. Ojo (2006:17), the membership had reached between 330,000 and 400,000 members apart from about 65,000 oversea members.

The Deeper Christian Life Ministry¹³ believes in divine healing and miracles. The major emphasis of the church however is "holiness" without which no man shall see the Lord". Nevertheless, the church believes that the redemptive works of Christ on the cross is not fully utilized without healing. Pastor Kumuyi believes that:

¹² M.A. Ojo, 'Deeper Christian Life Ministry: A Case Study of the Charismatic Movement in Western Nigeria' in *Journal of Religion, in Africa*, xviii 2, 1988, pp.161.

¹³ Deeper Christian Life Ministry was established in 1973. The ministry later started an arm known as the Deeper Life Bible Church when the ministry started services with the maiden service on November 7, 1982.

Man's redemption is not limited to removal of guilt; it covers all consequences of the broken law, which are sickness, disease and satanic oppression. Healing of sickness and disease as well as continued health is provided for all men through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, there was a divine plan by which God heals all those who were in covenant relationship with Him. Not everyone can enjoy this unfailing healing and health plan made by God for all mankind based on the fact that not all men are in covenant relationship with Him¹⁴.

The concept of healing as being taught covers the following areas, namely; spiritual, physical, deliverance from demonic attacks and healing from poverty (prosperity preaching). By extension, the Deeper Life and some Pentecostal pastors pray for the country to neutralize the negative effects of demons on the country, such step, as they believe, would promote the socio-economic and political stability of the nation. The Deeper Christian Life Ministry emphasizes the significance of spiritual healing. A sinner needs a miracle of healing since salvation is regarded as the greatest miracle which anybody can ever receive. To this effect, W.F. Kumuyi says that:

...Saul of Tarsus was a wicked and a troublesome persecutor of Christians. As he was going on his way to Damascus to continue his persecution, God met him and a great light shone all around him. He became changed. God gave him a new heart. He became a preacher of the gospel he had persecuted all his life. That was a miracle. He was not sick, but he received a miracle - a miracle of conversion¹⁵.

Not until conversion, a sinner is regarded as having been blindfolded from seeing his eternal doom which his life of abortion, covetousness, idolatry, deceit, and pugnacity would fetch him if he should die or if Jesus Christ should come for the 'rapture' of all 'born again' Christians. Physical healing is believed to be the right of all believers if they are going to enjoy "abundant life" which Jesus promises 'I have come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10). This 'abundant life' is a life of satisfaction, provision in excess from God which every Christian must enjoy. This claim contradicts the claim by economists that human needs are insatiable and that human life is operated through choice and opportunity cost.

¹⁴ Deeper Life's Doctrine Number.

¹⁵ W.F. Kumuyi *Hope for Our Generation*, (Lagos: Zoe, 1991), p. 7.

However, when problems of life have reached certain inexplicable extent, people believe that some evil powers are at work. The problems at such stage require the power or anointing of 'a man of God' to pray in order to counter or neutralize the effect of evil forces or even to cast out the demonic spirits. Miracles attract people to Pentecostal Churches but healing is emphasized after salvation, especially in the Deeper Life since a man can be healed and still go back to his sinful ways. Such a situation would make the ailment come back.

Healing in the Life Gate Church International

Healing is often carried out by the founder of the Life Gate Church, Bishop Samson Grace. Bishop Samson Grace was born in 1954 at Gbongan. As the founder of The Life Gate Ministry, he started his ministry in Ilesa in early 1981 and has since grown to be one of the leading healers of children ailments with his headquarters in Otta, Ogun State in Nigeria, claiming a membership of 8,000 adults and 4,000 children between the age of one day to 17 years. Amusan, his early name, was converted in 1980 at Gbongan during a crusade organized by some Christians. He was converted from a life of sexual immorality, frivolities and non-challant attitude to life. He, after a few weeks of conversion, saw a vision that he 'must work for God' as he claimed¹⁶. He started his ministry at Ilesa; he later relocated to an Ikeja hotel in Lagos from where he got a large expanse of land which he purchased at Otta in Ogun State for the construction of his headquarters. He has a TV Ministry on Ogun State Television (OGTV) and other normal Christian Sunday and Mid-week services. His OGTV focuses on preaching for the salvation of souls, prayers for healing and testimonies¹⁷.

Life Gate Ministry believes in salvation, physical healing and deliverance from demonic spirits. At times, their advertisements like other Pentecostal churches, promise much. Their advertisements promise something new and spectacular; where impossibilities shall be turned to possibilities and lack shall turn to abundance, where failures shall be transformed into success¹⁸.

The Healers Activities

In Nigeria of today, the solution to all problems of ill-health including HIV/AIDS pandemic, as of concern and anxiety generally, has been sought squarely within the framework of religion. Pentecostal healers are seen as agents of mission of Christ who have come to liberate oppressed humanity through their gifts. This belief draws many people to them for healing. This observation is upheld by C.U. Manus. He says:

¹⁶ An oral interview with Bishop Samson Grace on October 2, 2003 before his consecration as a Bishop on the following day at Otta, Ogun State

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ The messages are contained on his handbill for a "Night of signs and Wonders" on Friday, February 28, 2003 at: TU (Lagos Television), Agidingbi, Ikeja, Lagos

Faith healers have become agents of the mission of Christ who came to liberate oppressed humanity ... by their super human feats in arresting all manners of afflictions and by their pacification of all kinds of spiritual torments, (they) appeal to the common folk and the cream of the society¹⁹

Furthermore, the healers attract people because most of them heal their patients free of charge in Nigeria where socio-political problems are always on the increase and where many people find it difficult to eat, not to even talk of footing hospital bills.

The divine healing of these Pentecostal Churches hinges on the intoning of the name of Jesus Christ and faith in his healing power. Healing, as they claim, comes as a result of the empowerment which the Holy Spirit confers on them. This is also referred to as anointing. This anointing, as they claim, breaks the yoke of the devil. Although the question that may continue to agitate public mind is that for the healing of many ailments, there is almost unbridled recourse to the supernatural; when there are good orthodox hospitals around to heal them. Whatever the people's reasons are, the poverty that is prevalent in the country might be one of the obvious reasons why people have been finding it difficult to patronize public hospitals. On the other hand, many people have submitted that people want where their existential problems can easily be solved at minimal cost. This is why people patronize Pentecostal healers.

Also, people believe that it is the spiritual realm that controls the physical realm and that the physical serves as a vehicle for the spiritual. Any act of omission and commission on the part of man opens an avenue for demonic attack. Any demonic affliction can only be healed by anointed men of God. Demonic attacks cannot be opened to empirical evidence of scientific test of ultrasound, blood and stool tests or x-ray photography.

Besides, human conduct can only be transformed by the words of God through the preaching of men of God. Spiritual healing is otherwise referred to as salvation, that is, the radical break from the past violent, unclean, immoral, and fraudulent life. Both physical and spiritual healings are being undertaken by the Deeper Life General Superintendent, Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, the Redeemed Christian Church of God's General Overseer in person of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye and the founder of the Life Gate Church International, Bishop Samson Grace. The healing activities of the Churches have been surveyed over a

¹⁹ C.U. Manus "Miracle Workers/Healers as Divine Men: their Role in The Nigerian Church and Society" *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 3, No 2 (1989) p.665

period of three years 2000, 2001 and 2002. Their healing activities are summarized in the tables below.

Table 1 - Total Claims of Healing for Three Years (in their Headquarters)

Names of the Churches	2000	2001	2002
The Deeper Life Bible Church	300	306	302
The Redeemed Christian Church of God	300	305	301
The Life Gate Church International	200	202	204

Source: Church publication, interview and live testimonies²⁰

Table 2 – Year 2000

Name of the Churches	Spiritual healing or Salvation	Deliverance from power of darkness	Physical healing	Deliverance from poverty	Cancer patients healed	HIV/AIDS Patients healed	Percentage of HIV/AIDS healed
The Deeper Life Bible Church	150	48	34	38	15	15	5%
The Redeemed Christian Church of God	148	38	40	41	16	17	5.6%
The Life Gate Church International	100	28	27	21	14	10	5%

Source: Church publication, interview and live testimonies²¹

Table 3 – 2001

Name of the Churches	Salvation or spiritual healing	Deliverance from power of darkness	Physical healing	Deliverance from poverty	Cancer patients healed	HIV/AIDS Patients healed	Percentage of HIV/AIDS healed
The Deeper Life Bible Church	159	41	36	35	19	16	5.2%
The Redeemed Christian Church of God	155	43	38	31	20	18	5.7
The Life Gate Church International	100	30	28	21	12	11	5.4

Source: Church publication, interview and live testimonies²²

²⁰ The table emerged from interviews, live testimonies and church publications(Living Miracles Magazines for Deeper Life; Redemption Testimonies - (RCCG) and Life Gate Miracle Publication for Life Gate. I have attended

different services of the churches discussed

²¹ *Ibid*

Table 4 – 2002

Name of the Churches	Salvation or spiritual healing	Deliverance from power of darkness	Physical healing	Deliverance from poverty	Cancer patients healed	HIV/AIDS Patients healed	Percentage of HIV/AIDS healed
The Deeper Life Bible Church	152	37	36	38	22	17	5.6
The Redeemed Christian Church of God	151	38	37	39	19	17	5.6
The Life Gate Church International	102	30	23	23	12	12	5.8

Source: Church publication, interview and live testimonies²³

The tables reveal a marginal healing of the deadly diseases HIV/AIDS and other malignant diseases like cancer. Other categories of ailments such as physical, spiritual, financial healing and deliverance from the power of darkness are stated in the tables. Aside from spiritual healing which is tagged salvation, the other major achievements of the churches are in the area of physical and financial healing which evidently are as a result of poor economy. Nigeria economy has been characterized by increasing inflation rate over the years, mass unemployment, retrenchment etc. The state of economy had made many to be so poor, that they think they need deliverance from-poverty. The state of penury in turn had led to many people's inability to visit hospitals due to their financial incapability. Poor nutritional habits, of course, cannot be out as one of those things that have been responsible for people's ill-health. Besides, HIV/AIDS which may not have been caused totally by poor economic conditions could have come as a result of promiscuity and careless blood transfusion or negligence on the part of the medical practitioners.

Even though the churches have tried in the area of healing of some HIV/AIDS victims, the percentage is still negligible, but the churches could only attempt to heal those who brought patients to the church or to the healers. They cannot pray for patients in absentia. The church has attempted to heal HIV/AIDS victims however insignificant the percentage might have been. The tables have shown the church's growing concern for the HIV/AIDS victims and the church attempt to curb the spread of the pandemic in the twenty first century.

Different Methods of Healing

Pastors W.F. Kumuyi, E.A. Adeboye and Bishop Samson Grace healed various ailments through simple prayers of faith in the name of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, pastors W.F.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Kumuyi and Adeboye through 'words of knowledge' while praying, would be well acquainted with the diverse needs of the congregation. Having thus been so acquainted, they then mention specific ailments and they would ask the affected people to raise their hands, after which they would pray for them. After the prayers, many had claimed that they received instantaneous healing. People often raise questions as to how they know the problems of others. At times, people suggest that those people must have confided in them. But, that cannot be proved.

In one of Pastor W.F. Kumuyi's crusades in Lagos, Nigeria, one Rosaline Joseph who was resident at 50, Olota Street, Abule Egba, Lagos, who for two decades was under a state of siege due to a bull-headed chest pain and a yoke-like heavy burden on her head that was causing her dizziness received her miracle after a short prayer from Pastor W.F. Kumuyi as she claimed²⁴. Also, Orji Okorie, a twenty-eight year old man, a chronic 'Area Boy' claimed to have met the Lord and changed completely. Orji Okorie, who was often referred to as 'Double-Dollar' and 'A-garacha' (a flirt), was a heavy smoker, as well as an addict to marijuana, cocaine and heroine. His style of life was characterized by violence, flirting with women and pugnacity²⁵. Testimonies are often relied upon as authentic proofs of miraculous healing since nobody forced them to give their testimonies.

Now that Deeper Life is using Satellite transmission to reach so many nations in Africa and beyond, many people have claimed that the prayers which the General Superintendent offered have delivered them from their various ailments. For instance, in 2006, Joseph in London explained how his pregnant wife who had developed complication for which two London hospitals had planned to operate on her got healed. He said:

The foetus in her was lying in too much water in the womb (medical term, polyhydramnios), a potentially dangerous situation putting the foetus at risk. Through the prayers of Pastor Kumuyi, the problem vanished ...²⁶.

In fact, many people have claimed healing from different African-city-wide crusades through satellite in Nigeria, Ghana, Lebanon, and London.

In the same vein, Pastor E.A. Adeboye has prayed for many who have claimed their healing. Besides, people that were interviewed, the redemption testimonies issues of 2000, 2001 and 2002 carry more than a hundred testimonies each of healing from various diseases.

²⁴ *Living Miracle Magazine*, vol.3. No. 3, October 1996, p.6-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *The New Africa Magazine*, October, 2006, pp.16-17.

Pastor E.A. Adeboye normally prays for people at the Monthly Redemption Auditorium and during the Faith Clinic (a healing, deliverance and blessing programme) which the General Overseer started sequel to a particular instruction from God in 1980 as he claimed. He may or may not lay hand on his patients like Kumuyi and Bishop Samson Grace of the Life Gate International Church in Otta, but the important thing is that healing would take place.

These healers strongly believe in deep communion with God through prayer and fasting before they come out to offer public prayers for healing. Prayers are regarded as indispensable in any healing exercise especially when it comes to exorcism where some stubborn spirits may want to put on resistance. From different interactions with healers, this area is often emphasized.

Before any healing programme, Pastors W.F. Kumuyi and E.A. Adeboye would have preached salvation messages after which they now signify their intentions to pray for the sick. Before they heal, they remind their patients of the spectacular works of God on the Israelites. They often ask their patients to remember the past healing, forgiveness of sins, mercies, blessing, miracle, victories and wonders of God and that they should believe that with God, nothing should be impossible. After this, they pray to God and heal their patients. Similarly, in the Life Gate programme, Bishop Samson Grace would have finished his sermons before he would pray or, at times, permits some choral songs to precede his prayers for healing. Such choral songs are: There is mighty power in the blood, there is mighty power, in the blood of Jesus Christ, there is mighty power in the blood; and There is power in the blood of Jesus / twice, there is power in the blood of Jesus / twice

However, Bishop Grace concentrates more on expectant mothers, barren mothers, low-sperm count cases and various ailments of children. This is not to say that he does not embark on exorcism or prayers for adults. Sometimes, people look at him as performing the role of gynecologist and at times, as a 'pediatrician' variously from his healing activities in the church and on the television. He sometimes lays his hand on his patients and, at another time, he prays generally on ailments²⁷.

Their priority on salvation according to them is based on the fact that God wants everybody to be 'saved' and that sick people who have not decided for God may not be healed by God. This is because after their healing they may go back to their sins. God would not want to heal somebody after which he/she would now use his or her health to commit sins

²⁷ This was observed during my visit to participate in their worship on two occasions - September 2002 and October 2003.

or to provoke God. But how do we really know when somebody has decided for God, in these days when many people are fond of telling lies?

Pastors W.F. Kumuyi and E.A. Adeboye seem to be more gifted than other healers simply because when ailments are suspected to have supernatural origin, some healer-prophets would prescribe fasting and prayer for the relative of the patients or the patients just as the healer-prophets would also embark on the same. But these two healers would just pray on the ailment not minding the source of the ailments. The two healers pronounce words of command to possessed individuals 'get out of him or her in Jesus name'. These words of command are enough to exorcise demonic spirits. The healers, including Bishop Samson Grace, pray on all kinds of problems ranging from headache, malaria, stomach discomfort, high-blood pressure, asthma, unemployment, AIDS, family disharmony, bad luck, tuberculosis, insomnia, witchcraft attack, depression, financial embarrassment, diabetes, madness, and curses.

Generally, many kinds of unfortunate and disastrous incidents are now taken to be influenced by demons. At times, students' violent actions are seen as having been engineered by demonic spirits. In July 10, 1999, five Obafemi Awolowo University Students were killed by cultists²⁸. Later, Pastor Adeboye was invited to come and preach to the students and to chase away the demonic spirits on campus. After his sermon, many students signified their intention to be saved and they were prayed for. After this, he prayed to chase away demonic spirits. In fact, he sanitized the campus environment through his prayers. But students' riots for which the school is often closed down have not departed from Obafemi Awolowo University. Indeed, too much belief in the malicious activities of the demonic spirits in societal affairs seems to be gaining much prominence nowadays. Perhaps this is why Hackett (1998) says that the discourses of demonism and Satanism are increasingly prevalent in Africa especially among the Pentecostals and have a deleterious effect for the civil society, religious pluralism and freedom of religion."

Conclusion

Many of the Pentecostal healers lay emphasis on 'salvation', or the transformation of human life from the filthy past and reconciliation with God. Healing, deliverance and prosperity for their members are regarded as 'abundant life' which the gospel offers for Christians. Any poor member is regarded as either being unfaithful to God or somebody who

²⁸ *The Newswatch Magazine* of Monday July 12, 1999, pp.5-6

does not know his right to claim his healing through the name of Jesus. The beneficiaries of miracles and many pastors believe that the "Signs and Wonders" at crusades and other places are a manifestation of God's presence in a gathering. They therefore believe that miracle and healing are an essential part of the gospel.

These Pentecostal churches are relevant in responding to the challenging religious quest in the Nigerian and, by the way of extension, in African heart. Their emphasis on direct access to God through the Holy spirit means for many of their Nigerian adherents, the ability to live the Christian life without recourse to the traditional ritual symbols that the older African Independent churches incorporated into Christianity, and to which many people continued to resort to in the face of vicissitude and cerebral Christianity of the mission churches. The churches emphasize personal direct encounter with God that causes profound changes in the life and circumstances of the person who experiences it. In this context, the churches under study have achieved much more than in other area. The Deeper Life Bible church achieved 50.7% in the area of transformation of life. The greatest miracle, which in Pentecostal circle, is often referred to as spiritual healing. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (R.C.C.G.) achieved 50.1% and the Life Gate achieved 49.8%

In other areas of healing (physical, deliverance, poverty and terminal diseases), the Deeper Life achieved 43.9%, the R.C.C.G. 44.1% and the Life Gate 44.3%. This successful healing and deliverance ministry, according to their belief, paves way for good health, success and prosperity in life and makes the realization of God-given abilities possible. However, in the area of HIV/AIDS, the achievement is not much. The Deeper Life healed 5.2%, the R.C.C.G. 5.7% while Life Gate Church International achieved 5.4%.

Moreover, of all the malignant diseases in the world today (cancer, cardiovascular ailments, hypertension, diabetes and other sexually transmitted diseases), human immunodeficiency virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) appear to be the major health hazard among the youths. Of the 2.5 million people infected yearly, young people of ages 15 – 24 account for 40 percent of new infection²⁹. Poverty, unemployment, lack of education, sexual violence and gender inequality increase the vulnerability of young people to HIV infection. Consequent upon the debilitating effect of AIDS, many Pentecostal churches have shown serious concern about this seemingly uncontrollable disease. A good number of them have taken various steps to curtail the spread

²⁹ <http://www.youthaidscoalition.org/>downloaded on 25-09-09

of the disease. Pentecostals educate their congregations through sermons, bible studies and seminars in their conventions and retreats.

Furthermore, they counsel all their members especially the young ones to abstain from reckless or frivolous sexual behavior. They educate them on the devastating consequences of the pandemic. More importantly, they prevent any male or female members of their churches who have tested positive to HIV from being joined with innocent ones in holy wedlock. This is a deterrent measure to lessen promiscuity if they cannot totally eliminate it from their members.

In addition, they heal various victims of HIV/AIDS though the percentage as revealed above is still insignificantly small. Although on one hand, many victims of HIV/AIDS have not been coming for healing, this, perhaps, is due to the fact that they would not want known people to easily identify them among the crowd since many of the pastors always enjoin them to raise up their hands before they pray for them, but on the other hand, even if many have been coming, there is no assurance that all of them would be healed. This is because not all people who turn up for healing are often healed. The simple explanation for this is that God does what pleases him. Therefore, anything divine cannot be predicted unless such healer, as it is popularly believed, is using extraneous power.

It is also important to know that a few of HIV patients that were healed were already attending some hospitals for antiretroviral drug therapy. Antiretroviral drug therapy, according to information, has suppressive power³⁰. Its goal is the suppression of viral replication. According to some medical doctors, this goal may be unattainable³¹. That is, failure to achieve this end is common in clinical practice, occurring at a ratio of 40 to 70 percent. Knowing therefore that there is no total cure as at today besides divine intervention, members are advised to bring their relatives who are HIV/AIDS carriers and victims of other diseases to crusade and revival meetings for divine cure.

However, the claims of T.B Joshua of the Synagogue of All Nations, C. Oyakhilome of the Christ's Embassy, C. Okotie of the Household of God's Church, and other miracle pastors to some unproven miraculous feats have elicited questions of genuineness. Although this is not new, but many have insinuated that many of the so-called healers have connections

³⁰ Pastor (Dr) Deji of the Obafemi Awolowo University Hospital Complex during his sermon on March 15, 2009

³¹ Interview with Professor K.A. Adelusola of Morbid Anatomy Department, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife on August 4, 2009. The same opinion was expressed by Dr. (Mrs) F.O. Ogini of the Department of Oral Maxillofacial Surgery, in the Faculty of Dentistry, in the College of Health Sciences, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife during her lecture with women in the women monthly meeting at the Deeper Life Bible Church, Hospital District, Ile-Ife

with occultism³². Critics of miracles allege that claims of divine healing are largely call cards for pastors. The techniques which some of them employ at crusades, the regularity of the miracles, and the unverifiability of the claims have added to critics' doubt.

Although seeking for solution through religious means may appear impracticable to philosophers, scientists and other rational thinkers in the context of Nigerian Pentecostal churches, seeking for solution to individual problems, sociological dilemma and political logjam are indeed practicable and feasible. Asamoah Gyadu (2005: 93-113) has supported this when he says that: 'quick African resort to sphere of religion in search of solutions to life difficulties'. Such solutions to problems and HIV/AIDS pandemic are supposedly offered by W.F. Kumuyi, E.A. Adeboye and Samson Grace as evident from their various performances. With time and more enlightenment, their performances will improve.

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³² *The News Magazine*, May 24, 2004, pp. 42-43

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