

RELEVANCE OF MARK 2:1-12 TO HEALING MINISTRY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH, IKOT NTUEN OKU AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE.

By

Iniabasi, Udoh Anedi
MA Student
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Akwa Ibom State University
&
Dr. Vincent A. Olusakin
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Akwa Ibom State University
vincentolusakin@aksu.edu.ng
+2348074953812
&
Dr. Stella P. Essien
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Akwa Ibom State University
stellaessien@aksu.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Through the ages, the phenomenon of divine healing has been approached with varying attitudes. The first attitude is that divine healing was only for the apostolic age and it ceased after that period. The second is that divine healing belonged only to the early centuries and is no more needed since the Church is well established. The third attitude is that divine healing has ceased in the churches because of the deterioration of Church organization. The fourth attitude is that divine healing has never ceased among true believers; that it occurred in the Apostolic Age and is still in use. The fourth view, being the position of Pentecostals, has been greeted with skepticism by some scholars, particularly the Cessationists, who believe that divine healing ceased after the Apostolic age. This conflict of position makes it imperative to verify claims of divine healing among Christians. The researchers, therefore, set out to examine the phenomenon of divine healing in The Apostolic Church (TAC) which is one of the leading Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, using Ikot Ntuen Oku Area, Uyo Field as a case study. Using historical, descriptive (phenomenological), and hermeneutical methods, the researcher gathered materials from textbooks, interview of certain key players, and participant observation. It has been discovered that healing ministry is deeply entrenched in the Area, and that the methods used in administering such healings are in line with Jesus' method in the healing in the New Testament. There is hope that the healing ministry will continue unabated, although there is room for more emphasis on the word of God, considering that over-emphasis on healing can make the church to forget about the message of salvation and holiness.

Introduction

Divine healing is the act of evoking divine involvement in physiological healing, particularly in religion. Believers claim that religious faith may heal sickness and incapacity utilizing prayer or other rituals, which can encourage divine presence and power following their faith. Divine healing is an important aspect of Christian religious doctrine (Kinoti, 2021:667). Through the ages, this phenomenon has been greeted with varying attitudes among Christians. John (2021:2) highlights four of such attitudes. The first attitude is that divine healing was only for the Apostolic Age and it ceased after that period. The second is that divine healing belonged only to the early centuries and was no more needed as the church got well established. The third attitude is that divine healing has ceased in the churches because of the deterioration of church organization. Finally, the fourth attitude is that divine healing has never ceased among true Christians; that it occurred in the Apostolic Age and still occurs now. This fourth attitude is mostly characteristic of the Pentecostals (categorized as the continuationists) who believe that all the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit found in the early Church are for the Church of all ages.

The modern Pentecostal movement embraced the doctrine of divine healing from its very beginning in the early twentieth century. Adherents accepted this position as their legacy from pre-pentecostal holiness and healing movements and the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. They believed that God gave a remedy for all the effects of sin in the atonement and this included healing of both physical and spiritual issues. Pentecostals are committed to the “full gospel,” which requires them to proclaim the name of Jesus as savior, healer, Spirit-baptizer, and soon-coming king. Some are also committed to preaching Jesus as sanctifier, but all of them believe

that healing is one of the signs that should “follow them that believe” (Mark 16:16). This theological commitment to divine healing has remained a major theme in classical pentecostalism in Nigeria and it is credited for its unmatched growth (Mathew, 2018:305).

This position is true of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria, which is one of the Classical Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Right from inception, the movement that metamorphosed into what we now have as The Apostolic Church, Nigeria has divine healing as a major emphasis, not just in theology, but in praxis. The doctrine of divine healing is implied in her Tenet No.6, which talks about beliefs in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, part of which is the gift of healing (Fatokun, 2017:385).

However, due to the popularity and criticisms that have greeted the healing ministry in Nigeria, it is important to evaluate this belief and ministry in the Apostolic Church within the domain of practical theology in the light of the healing pericopae in the New Testament. That is the focus of this paper. Using historical, descriptive and evaluative hermeneutical methods, the paper set out to examine the healing ministry of The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area in the light of Mark 2:1-12. While the historical method was used to trace the history of the Apostolic Church, the descriptive method was used to present the reality and nature of healing ministry the Apostolic Church, Ikot Ituen Oku Area, the Justin Ukpong’s evaluative model was used to critique the healing ministry in the Church in the light of the chosen text. According to Olusakin (2024:191), the evaluative model, especially the second approach, while recognizing the historical-critical method as its starting point, employs a Biblical text to critique a particular phenomenon in society or church life. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the reality of healing ministry in the Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area; find out how members of The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area understand Mark 2:1-12; investigate the attitude

of the members of The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area towards healing; find out the influence of healing ministry on The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area; and suggest ways of improving the healing ministry in The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area in relation to Mark 2:1-12.

The Concept of Healing

The word ‘healing’ comes from the Old-English term *haelen*, meaning “wholeness”, and often refers to the process of moving toward a desired wholeness or achievement of cohesion. Healing is an intervention, an outcome, and a process, and at times, all the three. It also describes an ability or power, energy, and cleansing of grief, trouble, or evil. The concept is relevant in a wide range of disciplines, including medicine, nursing, psychology, public health, education, religion, and spirituality. Healing occurs in multiple dimensions—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, familial, social, communal, and environmental (Firth et al, 2015:46).

In medicine for example, healing involves a basic logic of transformation from sickness to wellness that is enacted through culturally salient metaphorical actions. Kirmayer (2004:34) lists common healing practices to include:

The use of medicines that are drunk, smoked, injected or otherwise taken into the body; methods of getting things out of the body by emetics, cathartics, purgatives, bloodletting or surgery; manipulations of the body through touch and gestures or with specific materials; diagnostic or divinatory practices that establish the nature of the affliction in terms of its causes, consequences or some other classificatory scheme; and the use of rituals and ceremonies incorporating words, music, costumes and other theatrical devices that may involve the afflicted

individual or the healer alone, interaction between patient and healer, or the participation of a whole group or community.

Kirmayer's point is two-fold: Healing is a holistic concept and not limited to few practices geared towards restoring an individual's health. Secondly, the concept of healing predates the use of orthodox medicine. Before the advent of orthodox medicine, many cultures of the world already had long-standing healing practices. Beyond traditional, psychological and scientific approaches to healing, however, religion has been seen as a key factor in the concept of healing.

The relation of Judaism to the themes of healing and curing, and to sickness and health, may be found throughout biblical sources and in later textual and folk interpretations of those sources. Ancient Israel's covenantal relationship affirmed God alone as healer, source of both health and illness, and restorer of body and spirit. Sickness, therefore, was viewed as a divinely ordained form of individual or collective punishment, rather than attributed to independent, demonic forces, as in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite cultures. God's healing, moreover, was linked to individual and communal forgiveness, restoration, renewal, reward, and deliverance from destruction (Praglin, 1999:6).

In the New Testament, there are three principal terms used for the healing work of Jesus in the gospels. The first of these is *iasthai*, which refers to the kind of healing done by a physician (*iatros*). It appears seventeen times in the gospels, especially in Luke. The second term used is *sozo*. As well as meaning healing, it also means to save, rescue or maintain integrity. It always refers to the healing of the whole person, not individual members of the body. This term appears sixteen times for healing in the gospels and thirty-five times in a less clinical sense, referring to other forms of saving a person. The third term used for healing is *therapeuo*. This is the most common term used. It is used in the gospels in the sense of to heal and always in such a

way that the reference is not to medical treatments which might fail but to real healing. It is used thirty-three times for healing in the gospels (Bate, 2012:83).

Surveying the healing accounts of the Gospels, one notices a broad variety in which Jesus brought about healing: sometimes he touched the sick (Mt. 8:14, Lk.14:1) or was touched by them (Mt.9:20-22; Mk. 5:25-34), while at another time he applied some mud or saliva to the affected body part (John 9:1-12; Lk.8:22-25). Jesus also exorcised unclean spirits from sufferers by the power of his word (Mk. 1:39; Mt. 4:23) and healing came about occasionally by Jesus simply assuring supplicants to grant them what they pleaded for (Mt. 15:28; Mt. 8:13; Lk. 17:11-19). Jesus, unlike faith-healers, did not always demand faith by those seeking his help. While there are several incidents in which Jesus alluded to faith, there were also times where his healing was not occasioned by faith at all (Mt. 8:14-15, 12:9-13; see also Lk. 7: 11-17) but rather by his compassion for the suffering (Mt. 9:35-36) (Grundmann, 2015:241).

In the post-Pentecost Church, the apostles did many signs and wonders among the people (the 'signs of a true apostle', 2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Rom. 15:19), and the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits were healed (cf. Acts 2:43; 3:6-8; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12; 19:11; 28:9). Christians are said to minister to Christ himself by 'visiting those who are ill' (Matt. 25:39). Christians prayed for one another 'that you may be in health' (3 Jn. 2). There were recognisable 'gifts of healings' in the early church (1 Cor. 12:9), and the practice of anointing with oil and prayer for ill people who called for the elders is referred to in James 5:13 (Atkinson, 1993:26-27).

Although the theological lenses through which sickness and healing have been regarded in Christianity have varied across time and among denominations, there are two general views of spiritual causes of illness that consistently run through Christian thought and belief. The first is

the idea that sickness and affliction can be caused by forces or spirits opposed to God. The cause of illness, according to this view, is Satan, demons, unclean spirits or other malevolent powers that sicken a hapless individual--often an innocent victim. Healing in these cases involves seeking the intervention of divine powers to face down and defeat the spirits or demons. This is the view that predominates in the Gospels. The second view is that trials, including sickness, are caused by God. God may effect sickness for different purposes--as punishment for sin or as impetus for spiritual growth and development. Sickness and other trials, in this view, are means by which God teaches people or tempers their lives and experiences in order that they may become examples of faith and righteousness for others. Healing in this type of case involves the individual's acceptance that he or she has in some ways deserved the illness or that there is some divine reason for it. The person seeks to understand God's purpose in bringing on him/her the condition, and strives to grow spiritually and/or alter the nature of his or her life. This perspective is more prevalent in the Epistles and is the fundamental orientation around which most Christians have come to regard illness and health. Although these two perspectives seem to be oppositional, the NT contains many examples of both perspectives (D'Atri, 2020:2).

Healing in Mark 2:1-12

Greek Text of Mark 2:1-12

1. Καὶ εἰσελθὼν πάλιν εἰς Καφαρναοὺμ δι' ἡμερῶν καὶ ἠκούσθη ὅτι ἐν οἴκῳ ἐστίν.
2. καὶ εὐθὺς συνήχθησαν πολλοὶ, ὥστε μηκέτι χωρεῖν μηδὲ τὰ πρὸς τὴν θύραν, καὶ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον.
3. καὶ ἔρχονται φέροντες πρὸς αὐτὸν παραλυτικὸν αἰρόμενον ὑπὸ τεσσάρων.
4. καὶ μὴ δυνάμενοι προσενέγκαι αὐτῷ διὰ τὸν ὄχλον ἀπεστέγασαν τὴν στέγην ὅπου ἦν, καὶ ἐξορύξαντες χαλῶσιν τὸν κράβαττον ὅπου ὁ παραλυτικὸς κατέκειτο.
5. καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ· Τέκνον, ἀφιένται σοί αἱ ἁμαρτίαι.
6. ἦσαν δέ τινες τῶν γραμματέων ἐκεῖ καθήμενοι καὶ διαλογιζόμενοι ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν
7. Τί οὗτος οὕτως λαλεῖ; βλασφημεῖ· τίς δύναται ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ Θεός;

8. καὶ εὐθὺς ἐπιγνοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως διαλογίζονται ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, λέγει αὐτοῖς Τί ταῦτα διαλογίζεσθε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν;

9. τί ἐστὶν εὐκοπώτερον, εἰπεῖν τῷ παραλυτικῷ Ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, ἢ εἰπεῖν Ἔγειρε καὶ ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει;

10. ἵνα δὲ εἰδῆτε ὅτι ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, — λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ

11. Σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ ὕπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου.

12. καὶ ἠγέρθη καὶ εὐθὺς ἄρας τὸν κράβαττον ἐξῆλθεν ἔμπροσθεν πάντων, ὥστε ἐξίστασθαι πάντας καὶ δοξάζειν τὸν Θεὸν λέγοντας ὅτι Οὕτως οὐδέποτε εἶδαμεν.

Historical Analysis of Mark 2:1-12

Like the other canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Mark nowhere identifies its author, nor even, as is the case with Luke (1:1-4) and John (20:30-31), the occasion of writing. However, as Cranfield (2000:5) argues, the unanimous tradition of the early Church that the author of the gospel was Mark, the associate of Peter, is not open to serious doubt. The *pericope* under discussion is one of the *pericopae* that have parallels in Matthew 9:1–8 and Luke 5:17–26 and, therefore, a synoptic material (Ayegboyin, 2015:48). It is important to note that the text falls within what scholars have identified as the first half of Mark, which begins after the Prologue (1:1-15) and ends at 8:22 (Mann, 1986:178). Following the healing of the leper in Mark 1:40-44, Jesus sternly charged the man not to tell anybody about who it was that healed him. However, the man “went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news” (verse 45). As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people came to him from everywhere. The next time he entered Capernaum is the opening of chapter two, where the account of healing of the paralytic, which is the focus of this paper, is recorded.

A Close Reading of the Text

1. **And again He entered Capernaum after *some* days, and it was heard that He was in the house.**

“Πάλιν” (“again” or “once more”) is a peculiarity of Mark – the recurrence of scenes and places in his narrative (Abolarin, 2020:36). “After some days” separates the present narrative from Jesus’ preaching tour of 1:21-45. The house where he was (*en oiko estin*) could be a reference to the house of Peter, of Jesus himself or a house in general (Stein,2008:116). According to Wessel (1984:632), “the house” was a kind of base of operations for Jesus in the northern part of the country.

2. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.

Though Jesus did not openly enter Capernaum (1:45), his secret visit could not be hidden. His presence in town was soon discovered. Even the place Jesus called home afforded him no privacy. They no doubt flocked to him because they wanted to see him perform more miracles (like the earlier healing of the leper), but Jesus was not working miracles inside the house. He was preaching the gospel to the people.

3. “Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four *men*. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying”.

As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, there was an interruption by the arrival of those who brought the paralytic on a mat, *κραββαττόν*. It was “a rude pallet, merely a thickly padded quilt or mat, held at the corners, and requiring no cords to let it down” (Abolarin, 2020:36-37). When they were unable to get to Jesus through the crowd, they carried the paralytic to the roof by the stairway on the side of the house to the flat roof which then was unroofed. Roofs of Palestinian homes, which were accessible by outside stone staircases, were typically flat, supported by beams resting on the exterior walls of the house. The beams were cross-hatched by smaller poles

and sticks, which were covered with thatch, which in turn was covered with a surface of mud (hence the reference to “digging through it,” v. 4).

The mention of the crowd (*ochlos*), a term analogous to ‘*am ha ‘aretz* (people of the land), who in the first century C.E. referred to the lower class, poor, uneducated, ignorant of the law (Mathew, 2018.:50-51), further fosters an understanding of the low situation of the sick man and the kind of people among whom he lived. More than that, it clearly indicates that the people who thronged to Jesus were predominantly poor. The mention of the number of men who brought in the paralytic man is peculiar to Mark, and has signs of being a detail remembered by an eyewitness (Mann, 1986:223).

Verbrusse (2000:437) also notes that the Greek word παραλυτικὸν(*paralutikon*) is late, not being found in the classical literature or in *LXX*. Παραλυτικός (paralytic) is ‘a disease that begins in one’s legs and proceeds quickly to the arms and neck, generally being fatal within three weeks’. It is a neurological disease, which was very prevalent in Palestine the time of Jesus. In modern medicine, stroke is seen as the cause of paralysis in most cases. Παραλυτικός during the era of Jesus began as paraplegia—paralysis of the lower half of the human body, and graduated into quadriplegia—paralysis of both arms and both legs. In today’s understanding, the situation of the paralytic man is represented by the many crippled people, some with diminished limbs, who are either carried by friends/family members from place to place or manage to trudge themselves along with the aid of a wooden palate that is rolled with small tyres.

5. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

In miracle discourses, usually there was an appeal to Jesus for healing, after which he would respond. In this narrative, there was no appeal to Jesus to forgive sin or heal. Probably, the

tenacity of the four in digging through the roof and letting down the paralytic person had appealed to Jesus, hence, before he declares the man's sins forgiven, Jesus is described as ἰδῶν τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν (lit. "seeing their faith").

The author attributed to Jesus that he referred to the paralytic as τέκνον. Τέκνον (child) can be used to refer to a relationship between a child and parents, an elderly son, descendants, the relationship between a disciple and a master, or as an address. In this context, it is used as an address, to show affection (Harrington 2002:602). This is in agreement with the use of οἶκος (house) in the opening and closing of the pericope, because one experiences unconditional affection in οἶκος (Aryeh, 2018:9, 10). "Your sins are forgiven" (Mk. 2:5b) has been interpreted by some as Jesus taking God's prerogative to forgive sins. Mathew (2018:52) argues that this interpretation overlooks two things. First, there are no known texts in which the messianic figure or Son of Man forgives sins by virtue of his power. Second, Jesus speaks in the passive voice, which means that the man is forgiven not by Jesus but by God. The sense of the passive voice indicates that the issue here is the right to declare sins forgiven, outside the cult, without repentance and sacrifice as laid down in the Law and enacted by the priest. Thus, the scribe's question is not on the offer of forgiveness in response to the disease, but rather on who declares forgiveness. Through his declaration of forgiveness of sins, Jesus does here what only a priest can do, thereby challenging the mediation of forgiveness of sins through temple cult and priesthood.

6-7. And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Upon hearing Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness of sins on the paralytic man, some scribes reasoned that Jesus was arrogating to himself what he did not possess – power to forgive

sins, which constituted blasphemy. The focus in 2:1-12 thus shifts from the physical paralysis of the lame man to the spiritual paralysis of the scribes (Edwards, 1994:222).

8. But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?”

⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’?

¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic,

But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit – “Immediately” (*euthus*) is one of the words that Mark, being an action gospel, uses many times. The word occurs more often in Mark than in the other three gospels put together. Using this word, the rapidity of action is evident in the way his narratives move quickly from one event to another (Ayegboyin, 2015:76). The word translated “perceived” here is ἐπιγινούς – *epignous*. Together with the preposition *epi*, meaning on or upon, the verb *epiginosko* means to recognize. However, the “knowing” being referred to here is different from knowledge acquired through the senses. Without the scribes saying anything, Jesus knew inwardly what was going on in their minds.

Jesus’ rhetorical question to the scribes presented healing as harder than forgiveness because healing can be verified through observation. The heart of the answer of Jesus to the scribes’ question came in the healing of the Paralytic. He did not answer them directly but asked them to see for themselves the evidence that “the Son of man has authority to forgive sin” (Abolarin, 2020:38).

In Mark and Matthew *exousia* (authority) is reserved specifically for Jesus or the apostles. The term is found nine times in Mark—six with reference to Jesus (1:22, 27; 2:10; 11:28, 29, 33), twice of the apostles (3:15, 6:7), and once in the simile of the man who “gave

authority over his house to his servants" (13:34), which doubtless is an allusion to the disciples of Jesus. In the three instances where Jesus is not the subject, *exousia* connotes the conferring of his authority on the disciples. Thus every occurrence of *exousia* in Mark reflects either directly or indirectly the authority of Jesus. The use of *exousia* here contrasts with *dynatai* in v. 7. There the scribes ask: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" As noted by Edwards (1994:222), the shift from to *dynatai* in verse 7 to *exousia* means that the Son of Man not only has the power but the right to forgive sins. Jesus wants the scribes to know (v. 10) the truth of which he speaks (v. 9). His power to forgive, no less effective because of its invisibility, will be proved by the healing of the paralytic. The power to forgive and the power to heal are one.

¹¹ "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

¹² Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw *anything* like this!"

The expression of onlookers is the climax of many miracle stories. At the command of Jesus, the paralytic took his mat and began to walk, but he never said anything to Jesus about what happened. This is proof that the paralytic's sin had been forgiven, because many in 1st century Palestine attributed affliction to one's sin (Aryeh, 2018:12). It is for this same reason that Greenberg (2018:16) avers that implicitly, Jesus had healed the paralytic moments earlier when he told the man his sins were forgiven (thus justifying the attribution of affliction to sin) but nobody, including the paralytic, realized that until Jesus told him to get up.

In conclusion, few insights can be derived from the text. In the context of the pericope, Jesus was teaching the people God's word when the friends of the paralytic broke into the room through the roof. As already pointed out, Mark seems to deliberately portray that the community

in which Jesus lived and ministered comprised of very caring people. The pain taken by the paralytic's friends to open the roof in order for their friend to be attended to by Jesus is both didactic and commendable. "When Jesus saw their faith" portrays the fact that, for the Markan Jesus, faith can be seen through one's action. In fact, the perceived faith of the paralytic's friends prompted Jesus' immediate response which eventually led to the man's healing. This therefore shows the importance of faith in eliciting the power to heal from the healer

Although Jesus explained his unexpected absolution of the man as an attempt to show the scribes that he (the Son of Man) had power to forgive sins on earth, the statement on forgiveness has been theologically understood as a pointer to the Jewish belief that sin is at the root of all of man's predicament. Thus, there are two instances where the healing of the man could have taken place: when Jesus pronounced the absolution and when Jesus asked him to take up his mat and go home. Out of the two, the researcher aligns with the first school of thought, specifically because it was Jesus' direct reaction to the faith of the man's friends. The awe elicited by the miracle of healing was proof that Jesus surpassed the teachers of the law in demonstration of power against forces that keep humanity in bondage, including sickness. It is also noted in this healing narrative that Jesus did not touch the paralytic before the healing took place. The spoken word seemed to do necessitate the healing. This shows that Jesus did not adopt only one method in healing. In what follows, the research explores the history of the Apostolic Church in Nigeria and Ikot Ituen Oku Area and the nature of healing ministry in the Area.

The Apostolic Church Nigeria, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area

What we have today as The Apostolic Church Nigeria existed in its history as Precious Stone Society, Faith Tabernacle and, finally, The Apostolic Church in its different stages of

metamorphosis. The final stage came into place when, in 1970, the autonomy of The Apostolic Church Nigeria was ratified and celebrated throughout the then 19 states of Nigeria and Pastor E. E. Okon emerged the first indigenous National President (Fatokun, 2017:197). It is worthy to note that today, The Apostolic Church Nigeria comprises of the following 5 (five) Territories: LAWNA (Lagos, Western and Northern Area) Territory, Cross River Territory, Igboland Territory, Maritime Territory and Akwa Ibom State Territory (Isaiah, 2017:193). At present, Akwa Ibom State Territory is made up of eight fields: Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Oron, Ikot Abasi, Etinan, Ikono and Itu (George, 2022:8).

The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area is under Uyo Field. Its headquarters is at No. 3 Akpan Essien Lane A, in Ikot Ntuen Oku Village which is about 2.3 kilometers from the University of Uyo Town Campus in the city of Uyo. The Area comprises of four districts namely: Ikot Ntuen Oku District at No. 3 Akpan Essien Lane A, Uyo, Nsit District at No. 30 Udo Eduok Street, Uyo, Peter Uboh District at No. 1 Ibanga Ikpe Close, off Old Ring Road, Uyo and Ebong Essien District at No. 9 Ebong Essien Lane, Uyo. The Area has about three thousand members worshipping in the twelve assemblies that make up the Area.

The Apostolic Church Nigeria, Ikot Ntuen Oku originated from a Prayer Fellowship by a group of tenants at No. 56 Iboko Street, Uyo, the compound of Elder O. S. Udoh of Qua Iboe Church in the year 1986. In 1987, the Fellowship Centre was moved to the present Government Primary School, Ikot Ntuen Oku, popularly known then and identified with the peculiar giant tree called “Afiato” along Ikot Ekpene Road, Uyo. From there, it acquired a land in the present location, No. 3 Akpan Essien Lane, Uyo; built the first Church building and moved in. In 1988, the Prayer House was upgraded to an Assembly with Pastor S. A. Isaiah as the Assembly Pastor and in 1990, Ikot Ntuen Oku Assembly was created and inaugurated as a full District

Headquarters under Uyo Area. This went along with the first Assembly Pastor being promoted to the District Pastor under the supervision of the Uyo Area Superintendent, Apostle (Dr.) A. M. Ikpe. In the year 2002, the District was upgraded to the status of an Area with Pastor S. Isaiah as the Area Supervisor. Other Pastors that served in the Area are as follows: Pastor B. U. Inyang (Supervisor) 2002 – 2003, Pastor M.E. Umana (Area superintendent) 2003 – 2007, Pastor U. U. Afia (Area Superintendent) 2007 – 2012, Pastor S. O. Okpoh (Area Superintendent) 2012 – 2015, Pastor J. J. Udoh (Area Superintendent) 2015 – 2017, Pastor P. E. Etim (Area superintendent) 2017 – 2020, Pastor G. E. Akpan (Area Superintendent) 2020 to Date. (George 2022 :240).

Divine Healing and The Apostolic Church Nigeria

Divine healing has always been recognized and practiced in Christianity, but became more emphasized with the emergence of Pentecostalism (Folarin, 2017:17). This position is true of The Apostolic Church Nigeria. Right from inception, the movement that metamorphosed into The Apostolic Church Nigeria had divine healing as a major emphasis, not just in theology, but in praxis. At least two examples can be pointed out. From the beginning, members of the Precious Stone Society were praying seriously for divine intervention on the deadly epidemic that struck every part of the world, called Asian Flu, killing over ten million people in 1918 (Fatokun, 2017:11; Olusakin, 2014:243, Olusakin, 2024:47). Moreover, in the days of the affiliation of the movement with Faith Tabernacle Congregation (USA), there arose a great healing figure in the person of Joseph Ayodele Babalola, who was entrusted with the message to cure all manners of sickness through prayer and *Omi-iye* (water of life- that is sanctified water) and to destroy all native medicines. “The attendant effect of the Great 1930 Pentecost episode

was so tremendously felt throughout the colonial nation of Nigeria that it gave birth to The Apostolic Church Nigeria” (Fatokun, 2017:16-17).

On affiliation, according to Fatokun (2017:385), there was mutual consensus between The Apostolic Church in Great Britain and the Apostolic Church in Nigeria for the latter to add a twelfth tenet to its tenets, which centers on the doctrine of divine healing, owing to her deep historical and doctrinal roots in her founding days in the Precious Stone Society. However, for the sake of uniformity, the National body of the Church in Nigeria decided to drop the 12th Tenet on her constitution and imply it only with an asterisk on Tenet No.6, which talks about beliefs in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, part of which is the gift of healing (Fatokun, 2017:385).

Healing Ministry in the Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area

There are various programmes of The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area in which healing takes place. They include: Sunday services, midweek prayers, Tuesday morning healing prayers, all night prayers, fasting and prayer both at Assembly, District, and Area levels. Specifically, healing is administered in the following ways:

i. Laying on of Hands: The laying on of hands is a physical act which communicates something of spiritual significance. It falls into the same series of church practices and disciplines as anointing with oil and fasting – outward expressions of a spiritual event or movement (Tipei, 2015:1). According to Ephraim Monday (personal communication on October 7, 2023), members of The Apostolic Church in general and Ikot Ntuen Oku Area in particular believe in the efficacy of laying of hands on individuals who are sick and trusting God for their healing through the transfer of healing virtue from the one who administers the healing in the name of Jesus. Using Luke 4:40: “At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sicknesses, and laying hands on each one, he healed them” as the biblical basis for this

act of faith, he further submitted that many who testified of being healed within the Area claimed to have been so healed through laying on of hands by a Pastor or an Elder. Such laying of hands takes place during revival services or special mid-week prayer organized for deliverance of the oppressed. Akanimo Essien (personal communication on October 7, 2023) affirmed that many people miss out on the blessedness of this channel of healing because they expect to fall when hands are laid on them. When they do not fall, they do not believe that any change has been wrought in their bodies. Utibe Jumbo (personal communication on October 7, 2023) adds that sometimes, some members refuse to identify with the laying of hands because of over-familiarity with the one who is administering the grace.

Worthy of note is the submission of Uwem Silas (personal communication on October 7, 2023) that not all who trust God for healing actually get healed when hands are laid on them. When asked what could be responsible for that, he replied that the power to heal belongs to God and he dispenses it as he pleases. He added that, for some who are healed, the healing does not take place immediately. He recounted the testimony of a sister who was trusting God to heal her of ulcer. After hands were laid on her, the pastor assured her that she was healed. However, she was still experiencing severe pain. Two days later, while bathing, she felt a serious rumbling in her stomach and felt like stooling. After using the toilet, she felt a strange but sweet relief in her system. That was the end of that infirmity. Efforts made by the researcher to interview the sister in question in order to verify the claim were not successful, however.

ii. Prophetic Declarations: A prophetic declaration is a bold pronouncement based on the word of God. It means to call forth or pronounce upon people or situations a desired result by faith in the name of Jesus Christ. It was revealed that some members of The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area received their healings during prophetic declarations by preachers, usually Pastors or

Elders. Speaking on this, Effiong Usen (personal communication on October 7, 2023) reports that prophetic declarations from the pulpit are viable tools for healing in the hands of God. He recounted an occasion he witnessed, where a pastor was declaring healing after his sermon on a Sunday morning and suddenly, a boy in the congregation screamed. A force that felt like an electric shock surged through his body. When he got home, he discovered that he had just been healed of a skin infection that had trailed him from birth, concerning which all medical attempts had proven abortive. His healing was verified by a physician.

Such declarations are sometimes laced with words of knowledge, where the Pastor calls out situations of some members through a revelation inspired by the Holy Spirit. Although it rarely happens in this fashion within the Area, there are scanty cases.

iii. Use of Olive Oil: Members of The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area interpret literally the imperative in James 5:14-16: “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” For them, the use of olive oil by faith also administers healing to the sick. Thus, this is practiced during prayer sessions in church and at home. Some members even ask their pastor to pray over anointing oil for their private use (Janet Peter, personal communication on October 7, 2023). Commenting on this, Fred Udofia (personal communication on October 7, 2023) asserts that members of The Apostolic Church are taught not to idolize elements that are used for healing such as anointing oil. Rather, they are to see these things as signs that represent the virtue communicated in Jesus’ name. For instance, seeing the olive oil as a sign that represents the blood of Jesus is a common viewpoint. Idara Okon (personal

communication on October 7, 2023) submits that this oil is not only used externally; some members drink it while others use it to prepare meals.

iv. Healing Home: In Ikot Ntuen Oku Assembly, there is a place called healing home. According to Ekwere Friday (personal communication on October 7, 2023), the healing home was established in 2001 by the pastor who was serving there at the time, Pastor John Udofia. The healing home is a place where those who are trusting God for healing and other miracles stay for some days or weeks in order to receive constant prayers from the pastor and the prayer band. Ekwere reported that most of the people who stay in the healing home are pregnant women.

The concept of healing home may sound promising, but it is fraught with challenges. For instance, sometimes, issues that require urgent medical attention are approached through prayers until it gets to a point where the pastor realizes that the issue should have been approached medically from the beginning. In most cases, this realization comes late as the situation would have degenerated beyond repair. By the time such patients are taken to the hospital, it is discovered that the medical personnel cannot help the situation any longer. It is necessary, therefore, for matters that need medical attention to be referred to the appropriate quarters on time while continued prayers are made on behalf of the sick.

Healing in The Apostolic Church Ikot Ntuen Oku Area in the Light of Mark 2:1-12

The following lessons from the text (Mark 2:1-12) can be used to improve upon the already existing healing ministry in The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area:

i. Mark seems to deliberately portray that the community in which Jesus lived and ministered comprised of very caring people. The pain taken by the paralytic's friends to open the roof in order for Jesus to attend to their friend is both didactic and commendable. This stands tall as an example to those within the Area who find the sick and weak people as nuisance. In one of the assemblies within the Area, it was reported that some Elders ganged up and drove those in the healing home away, claiming that their assembly was an urban congregation and that they (the sick) were constituting an eye sore especially before visitors (Aniekan Johnson, personal communication on October 13, 2023). Although the healing home is not to harbour people who need medical attention, the action of those Elders is highly condemnable in the light of the text. Such Elders need to learn from the friends of the man in the text that the compassion and empathy of caring friends can facilitate one's miracle.

ii. Jesus' method of healing confirmed what had been said of Him earlier – that He taught as one with authority. He did not do an intercessory prayer; He only gave a command which the sickness obeyed. Even His reaction to the scribes further settled the reality of His audacity. It is true that Jesus came as God incarnate and not mere mortal, yet the depth of His spiritual deposit which manifested in His actions and words is something to emulate. Pastors, Elders and other believers who are gifted in the area of healing have something to emulate from Jesus. The researcher reckons that if much work is done by them in the closet, they would only make declarations in the public and things would happen, to the glory of God.

Of course, accessing divine healing does not come without the faith connection on the part of those in need of the healing. Most importantly, Pastors, Elders and Leaders should always emphasize the relationship between forgiveness of sins and healing as demonstrated by Jesus in

the text, for even the need for healing points to a deeper spiritual need – cleansing from both the guilt and penalty associated with sin.

Conclusion

The healing ministry, flying on the wings of divine healing, is part of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the New Testament Church. Although it was never completely lost in the body of Christ, it was gradually deemphasized in classical Christianity until the turn of the twentieth century when, under Pentecostalism, resurgence occurred. The Apostolic Church Nigeria, part of the worldwide Pentecostal movement, has also experienced this. The reality of healing ministry in Ikot Ntuen Oku Area, Uyo Field has been ascertained. It has also been discovered that the methods used in administering healing in Ikot Ntuen Oku Area are in line with Jesus' healing methods in the New Testament. There is hope that the healing ministry will continue unabated within the Area, but there is room for more emphasis on the word of God, considering that over-emphasis on healing can make the church to forget about the message of salvation and holiness. The researchers therefore conclude that the healing in Mark 2:1-12, if properly understood and contextualized, could serve as a model for improvement of the healing ministry in The Apostolic Church, Ikot Ntuen Oku Area.

REFERENCES

- Abolarin, I. O. (2020). Jesus' personal identity disclosure: An exegetical study of Mark 2:1-12. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(16):34-43.
- Aryeh, D. N. (2018). An exegetical discussion of Mark 2:1-12: Lessons for forgiveness and healing in contemporary Christianity in Ghana. *Conspectus—The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary*, 25:1-20.
- Atkinson, D. (1993). The Christian church and the ministry of healing. *Anvil*, 10(1):35-42.
- Ayegboyin, D. (2015). *The synoptics: Introductory notes on the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.

- Bate, S.C. (2012). A theological model of healing to inform an authentic ministry. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 144:69-91.
- Cranfield, C. E. (2000). *The gospel according to Saint Mark: An introduction and commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- D'Atri, K. (2020). Health and healing in the New Testament. <https://www.scribd.com/document>. Accessed on 17th April, 2023.
- Edwards, J. R. (1994). The authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, 37(2):217-233.
- Fatokun, S. A. (2017). Organization and administration of The Apostolic Church Nigeria from autonomy till date, 1981-2017. In Fatokun, S. A. (Ed.), *History and distinctiveness of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, 1918-2017*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.
- Fatokun, S. A. (2017). Persecution of the 1930 great Pentecostal revival and the state of affairs in Nigerian Faith Tabernacle's affiliation. In Fatokun, S. A. (Ed.), *History and distinctiveness of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, 1918-2017*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.
- Fatokun, S. A. (2017). The great schism: The divine healing controversy and the emergence of Christ Apostolic Church, 1939-1943. In Fatokun, S. A. (Ed.), *History and distinctiveness of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, 1918-2017*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.
- Fatokun, S. A. (2017). The precious stone or diamond society: The emergence of the first indigenous Pentecostal movement in South-western Nigeria, July 1918-1923. In Fatokun, S. A. (Ed.), *History and distinctiveness of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, 1918-2017*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.
- Fatokun, S. A. (2017). Towards autonomy and golden jubilee anniversary of the adoption of The Apostolic Church as denominational name in Nigeria. In Fatokun, S. A. (Ed.), *History and distinctiveness of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, 1918-2017*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.
- Firth, K., Smith, K., Sakallaris, B., Bellanti, D. M., Crawford, B., & Avant, K. (2015). Healing: A concept analysis. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 4(6):44-50.
- Folarin, G. O. (2017). The theology and practice of Christ Apostolic Church on divine healing in the context of Pentecostal theology. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, 7(1):15-36.
- George, I. N. (2022). *Apostolic memoir: Reminiscence of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, Uyo Field*. Uyo: Onefold Media.
- Greenberg, G. (2018). *Proving Jesus' authority in Mark and John: Overlooked evidence of synoptic relationship*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Grundmann, C. (2015). Faith and healing – what faith-healing is about, with special reference to the Christian tradition. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 80(3):233-247.
- Harrington, D. J. (2007). The gospel according to Mark. In RE Brown, JA Fitzmyer, and RE Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: Burn & Oates.

- Isaiah, S. A. (2017). A panoramic history of The Apostolic Church in the old eastern region of Nigeria. In Fatokun, S. A. (Ed.), *History and distinctiveness of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, 1918-2017*. Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers.
- John, A. P. (2021). "Understanding of divine healing in the classical Pentecostal churches and its relation to the church growth in the Kerala context". Thesis submitted to Indian Bible College and Seminary.
- Kinoti, M. K. (2021). Faith and healing. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, 9 (9): 666-670.
- Kirmayer, L. J. (2004). The cultural diversity of healing: Meaning, metaphor and mechanism. *British Medical Bulletin*, 69:33-48.
- Mann, C. S. (1986). *Mark: A new translation with commentary*. New York: The Anchor Bible Doubleday.
- Mathew, T. K. (2018). Oral Roberts' theology of healing: A journey from Pentecostal "divine healing" to charismatic "signs and wonders" to spirit-empowered "whole person healing". *Spiritus*, 3(2):303-323.
- Olusakin, V.A. (2014). Gender Issues in 1 Corinthians 14: 33b-36: Implications for Christ Apostolic Church Women in Port Harcourt. *Akwa Ibom State University Journal of Arts*, Vol 1: 234-249.
- Olusakin, V.A. (2024). Pandemics in the Bible and Church History. In Afis Ayinde Oladosu, Abdulrazaq Kilani and Samuel Okanlawon (Eds) *Christians' and Muslims' Responses to 788 the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: Battling the Unknown*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 34-49.
- Olusakin, V.A. (2024). Parable of the Unjust Manager in Luke 16:1-13: Lessons for Leadership Accountability in Nigeria. *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Vol. 39, Nos 1&2 (April & October): 189-211
- Praglin, L. J. (1999). The Jewish healing tradition in historical perspective. *The Reconstructionist*, 63(2):6-16.
- Tipei, J. F. (2015). The function of the laying on of hands in the New Testament. *Journal of the European Pentecostal Association*, 20(1):93-115.
- Verbrusse, V. D. (ed.) (2000). *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation.
- Wessel, W. W. (1984). "Mark". In Gaebelein, F. E. (Ed.), *The expositor's Bible commentary*. Michigan: The Zondervan Publishing House.

APPENDIX

List of Interview Respondents

| S/N | Name of Respondent | Age | Gender | Date of Interview |
|------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Emediong Eno | 29 | Female | October 7, 2023 |
| 2. | Ephraim Monday | 38 | Male | October 7, 2023 |
| 3. | Akanimo Essien | 46 | Male | October 7, 2023 |
| 4. | Utibe Jumbo | 45 | Female | October 7, 2023 |
| 5. | Uwem Silas | 44 | Male | October 7, 2023 |
| 6. | Effiong Usen | 58 | Male | October 7, 2023 |
| 7. | Janet Peter | 41 | Female | October 7, 2023 |
| 8. | Fred Udofia | 49 | Male | October 7, 2023 |
| 9. | Idara Okon | 46 | Female | October 7, 2023 |
| 10. | Ekwere Friday | 45 | Male | October 7, 2023 |
| 11. | Mfon Ekpa | 42 | Female | October 7, 2023 |
| 12. | Atim Iton | 39 | Female | October 7, 2023 |
| 13. | Aniekan Johnson | 49 | Male | October 13, 2023 |