

DIVINE HEALING: A CHALLENGE TO CHURCH GROWTH

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BY  
JOHN AKANBI OJO

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### ABSTRACT

The two versions of the Great Commission of Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18) combine to form the basis of this thesis. Both versions opened with the charge to go and proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers. Matthew's special emphasis was that the disciples should educate the new converts doctrinally and nurture them for their spiritual edification. This implies the coming together of all the saints to form a church. It implies church planting. Mark's special addition was an unveiling of a comprehensive list of spiritual gifts which mark out believers from unbelievers. Among these was the gift of divine Healing: "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18b). Both internal evidences from the scriptures and external evidences from literature review in addition to churches and hospitals from far and near have shown the value of this gift for accelerating the rate of the numerical growth of churches.

Divine Healing in its broad sense covers all non-pagan modes of healing such as healing through pure herbal medication, healing through scientific medication, and healing through prayer of faith to God in Jesus' name. However, the last named is the focus of this essay, and for expediency, it is sometimes referred to as absolute divine healing.

Though adherence to Absolute Divine Healing gives the devotee a special joy and confidence in God probably unknown to non-devotees, it is not the requirement for acceptance by God. Furthermore, an

abuse of divine healing is dangerous and must be guarded against with utmost seriousness.

Finally, in Luke 10:9, Jesus commanded the seventy disciples on evangelistic outreach that wherever they were received, they should heal the sick and also announce to the people the coming of the Divine Kingdom. In Luke 10:20, however, as the disciples returned rejoicing, He cautioned them regarding their motive for rejoicing. They were not to rejoice because they were able to heal the sick in His name, but because their names were written in heaven. For effective ministry of soul-winning and church-planting with healthy numerical church-growth in view, both the command and the caution are necessary and inseparable. The command, we note, is to heal the sick and the caution is to regard, not healing but salvation, as the optimum purpose of evangelism. This is the gist of the essay.

## CONCLUSION

### A. PASTORAL COUNSELLING ON SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH

A number of missionaries and reputable evangelists have expressed a variety of views from the wealth of their experiences on the rudiments of successful evangelism and church growth. These views will certainly be useful for building a strong viable church. This researcher deems it expedient to adapt and incorporate some of these ideas into the counselling scheduled for this section of the essay.

Russel and Veda Locke jointly say "Man's sinfulness, his condemnation, and his eternal doom call for evangelism by God's people. An evangelistic church is a growing church."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Clyde M. Narramore has this in one of his books: One of the greatest privileges in life is to share the Gospel with another. There is no experience to match that of being used of God to lead a person to a saving knowledge of Christ. Contrary to what people may think, soul-winning is not limited to adults. Children may also have this experience. One of the best ways to help your child grow in faith is to show him how to witness to other boys and girls, and in fact, to adults.

Your own example will mean more to your son or daughter than anything else. It is also important for you to talk with your

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<sup>1</sup>Russel and Veda Locke, Evangelism and Church Growth (Ibadan: The Publishing Board, Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1990), p.6.

child about witnessing.<sup>2</sup>

John Ferguson, a former Professor of Classics at the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) asked a rhetorical question and answered it: "Do we in the churches show what true Christianity is? A picture of the true church is beginning to emerge, and our churches are but distorted reflections of it."<sup>3</sup>

Donald C. Posterski on his own part observes that

The world needs to see what Christian life looks like. People who think God is unnecessary, or just optional in life need fresh images of how life is meant to be lived. They need hard evidence that following Jesus really makes a difference. Otherwise, those who have no regard for God will continue to bypass the Christian faith as a worthwhile option.<sup>4</sup>

The renowned international Preacher, T. L. Osborn says:

World evangelism is every Christian's task. This is the purpose of being filled with the Holy Ghost - not just to "talk in tongues," but to give proof of the resurrection, to boldly witness of Christ to believers. Many young people lose interest in their church because the real meaning of Christian living is not held before them. If it is just "to be regular", to "sing pretty", to "give tithes", etc. this does not challenge them.<sup>5</sup>

The popular Baptist Evangelist, Billy Graham in his foreword to another author's book, asked a most heart-touching question

<sup>2</sup>M. Narramore, How to Help Your Child Develop Faith in God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p.30.

<sup>3</sup>John Ferguson, Christian Byways (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1968), p.57.

<sup>4</sup>Donald C. Posterski, Re-Inventing Evangelism (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), p.31.

<sup>5</sup>T.L. Osborn, The Purpose of Pentecost (Tulsa: T.L. Osborn Evangelistic Association, n.d.), p.17.

and left it for us to answer;

The question arises, he said: HOW do we go forward with our evangelism - a widening of the circle of faith so that it includes more and more people who have transformingly trusted Christ as Saviour - that is continuous, contagious, and compelling?<sup>6</sup>

At the close of a great crusade in Chile, South America, a Presbyterian Pastor said, "More has been accomplished in these three weeks of miracle evangelism to convince this city of the Gospel than in the past hundred years of preaching our traditional sermons of theology."<sup>7</sup> Rev. Antonio Sandoval, a Presbyterian Pastor who participated in one of the Central American Campaigns held by the T.L. Osborn Evangelistic Association, said:

How can a church call itself a church and not believe in miracles? I cannot read four pages anywhere in the Bible without encountering miracles! And the God of the Bible is the same today!<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the Crusade, Rev. Sandoval's church grew by an addition of over one hundred and forty new families.

Reinhard Bonnke in his book titled Evangelism by Fire testifies that when he was a young missionary in Africa, he worked on what was considered to be the proper methods of missions without any significant result of soul-winning. But when he discarded those methods and gave himself properly to God, God responded by filling his soul with the Holy Spirit and a tremendous change came into his ministry. As a result of this,

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<sup>6</sup> Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993), p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Osborn, The Purpose of Pentecost, p.32.

<sup>8</sup> Osborn, p.19.

he has seen as many as 150,000 people claiming salvation in a single meeting and two million in a single year. "Our crowds are greater than ever," he continued. "Multitudes have been healed and filled with the Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup> He tries to inspire greater involvement in spirit-filled evangelism by stating that God will not give the whole world to any one man or woman. He wants to raise up an army of anointed people widely spread all over the world. He said that God has laid down the basic means for the salvation of souls. The answer is not to be found in human schemes and mechanical faithfulness to a prescribed method, but in full-yieldedness to Christ and commitment to spiritual principles. Bonnke closed this section of his challenge to evangelism by saying "To die in the work of Christ may be the purpose of somebody's life. Christ is glorified whether people are won for Him by our deaths or by our lives. It is all the same."<sup>10</sup>

To correct the lopsided emphasis on miracles in several "power crusades" today, we want to reiterate that "signs and wonders" are not an end in themselves but means to an end. The following dialogue between Jesus and the seventy disciples who had just returned from an evangelistic tour corroborates this:

And the seventy returned again with joy saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions

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<sup>9</sup>Reinhard Bonnke, Evangelism by Fire (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1991), p.10.

<sup>10</sup>Bonnke, p.11.

and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:17-20)

Jesus is clearly saying here that our rejoicing should not end with the physical advantages we have as a result of our delegated authority and superiority over Satan. Rather, it should be climaxed by the joy of salvation. However, we should not overlook the fact that the importance of soul-winning underscores the value of the means by which the soul-winning is achieved. And of course, in the context of this thesis, the means to soul-winning is divine healing. On this too, Jesus' word comes to focus: "EXcept ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48). This sounds like an honest statement of a fact rather than teasing, scoffing or scolding.

The need for Pastors and churches to be tender-hearted and yet thick-skinned to criticism is our next point of counselling. Dedicated and committed Pastors should learn how to cope with persecution because such ministers will certainly succeed in the ministry, and of course outstanding success will certainly attract further criticism and persecution. Dr. Oyedepo expresses this fact in the most impressive and comprehensive form:

Several things, accompany success. Success brings fame and glory. It brings material abundance. Besides, it brings fulfilments. Such achievements cannot escape the whip of persecution.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus' answer to the disciples on rewards for faithful Christians supports this. He said:

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<sup>11</sup> David O. Oyedepo, Towards Excellence in Life and Ministry (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 1992), p.242.

verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and children, and lands with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

Every lifting from God is enveloped in persecution from the world.<sup>12</sup> This researcher's counselling emphasis here is that an evangelistic church will always be a progressive church and this will incur the jealousy and wrath of other churches and individuals. Therefore, the progressive church, while continuing to be steadfast in godliness and aggressive in evangelism, should also learn to be tolerant of deliberate misrepresentation by detractors. Bonnke expresses this idea as follows:

If God calls, the best proof, is our patience when we are misjudged and criticized. The man who knows God has sent him will rest in God, and leave those who disprove for God to handle. "Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (I Peter 5:6).<sup>13</sup>

John Sanderson too opines that:

What does call for great wisdom on the part of Christians is the forming of a strategy to react wisely to opposition, and turn such antagonism to its own advantage. Christians must meet opposition with concern, and hatred with love.<sup>14</sup>

A successful ministry is highly dependent on a successful family life. The Pastor and his ministry cannot be dissociated

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<sup>12</sup> Oyedepo.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnke, Evangelism By Fire, p.40.

<sup>14</sup> John W. Sanderson, Jr. Encounter In the Non-Christian Era (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p.1.

from his family. A man who has strife and division in his family is most likely to have hot disagreement and factions within his ministry. Dr. Oyedepo has aptly given vent to this view in the following statements: "Someone said, behind every successful man there is a woman, and I say behind every successful ministry, there is a successful family life."<sup>15</sup> The Bible supports this view by saying "If a man knows not how to rule his house, how shall he take care of the church of God" (II Timothy 3:5). The man is given a divine grace to rule his household, He is to instruct, correct, and rebuke with firmness, though with love. The woman ~~also~~ must be alive to his/her responsibilities. Her role is to be a help-mate to the man. She is not to lord it over him in anyway. She is meant to help her husband in carrying out his God-given commission on earth. God instituted the home to further His plans and purpose on earth even as He made Eve for Adam to help him in the fulfilment of his life's mission in the garden.<sup>16</sup>

The final part of this sub-section is on the importance of prayer for a successful ministry and church-growth. Prayer, as this researcher sometimes defines it, is asking God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Someone may feel the impulse to say he can do virtually everything by himself. He may think his claim is scriptural and also proven by practice. But in the first place, the Scripture does not say through Paul that "I can do all things," and stop. What Paul did say is

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<sup>15</sup>Oyedepo, Towards Excellence in Life and Ministry, p.247.

<sup>16</sup>Oyedepo, p.248.

that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). The clause makes a world of difference. At any rate, no matter how many things a human being can do by himself, the list can not include true healing and genuine salvation - "I am the Lord that health thee" (Exodus 15:26), says God; and only Jesus can save (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Therefore, for a church to succeed in numerical growth and be spiritually strong enough to stem the storms of life, that Pastor and the church must be prayerful. The popular adage says "a prayerless church is a powerless church."

#### B. PASTORAL COUNSELLING AGAINST ABUSE OF DIVINE HEALING

Abuse is a natural phenomenon. It is an error that stems from one of the weaknesses or natural tendencies of man. It may be committed inadvertently, but often, it is deliberate. When purely societal or institutional privileges are abused, such as misappropriation of public funds or illicit sexual cohabitation, penalties are attached which may be humanly bearable. It is not so with a deliberate distortion of purely divine arrangements or a contravention of spiritual laws. Such a thing is Divine Healing. The penalty for abuse of Divine Healing is manifold and transcendent. That is how serious it is.

This essay will treat four types of abuse of divine healing. The commonest is the tendency to take the gift for granted. It is very easy for any person to fall into this temptation. This is true of all the gifts of God with which human beings are endowed. We tend to take them for granted. We therefore become unmindful of the Giver, either careless or arrogant with the gifts and

consequently either lose them or sell them out to the demons. Pastors and churches should avoid the error of taking God's gift of divine healing for granted, for, such an error may affect not only the physical lives but also the eternal. This is because it may cause premature death to the patient and rob him of a chance for repentance.

The second type of abuse that must be guarded against is a show of attitudes that may cause division in a church. For instance, some arrogant youths in the church may be boasting of being spirit-filled and therefore superior to others in the sight of God. The earliest example of a demonstration of this kind of divisive attitude is found in Jesus' parable depicting a Pharisee and a Publican (Lk. 18:9-10). This is religious polarization which often leads to strained relationship and physical splits in the membership of the church.

There is nothing intrinsically bad in division per se, for divisions and separations may be necessary for church growth, or separation may be by mutual agreement for the purpose of encouraging greater involvement in evangelism and enhancing church growth. But divisions that may result from antagonism and bitterness are unchristian and must be avoided.

The third type of abuse of divine healing is commercialization. Commercializing of God's gift is a most heartless practice. Today, many so-called prophets and faith-healers are involved in it without any feeling of guilt. They charge victims of various circumstances, particularly those of persistent ill-health various amounts of money for their "treatments". And they disguise

under "Deliverance" or "Divine Healing". They should examine themselves to see if truly they are in the faith (II Cor. 13:5).

The fourth and final abuse to be guarded against is adulteration of divine healing. Adulteration is deviation from the ideal in quality or substitution of the genuine with a counterfeit. It is practised when the ideal or the genuine is difficult to obtain and cheap substitutes are deceitfully used or offered on the pretext that it is the original, the genuine. Adulterations of divine healing abound. Even in the days of Jesus, there were people prophesying and casting out demons and doing miracles in Jesus' name, but He said He did not even know them (Mt. 7:22-23). In the book of Acts, we read of Simon the Sorcerer, "to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying: This man is the great power of God, and to whom they had regard because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries" (Acts 8:9-11). Magic, mesmerism, and psychological gimmicks are some of the modern-day adulterations of divine-healing. Churches and all Christians must watch out against subtle infiltrations of these counterfeits as well. Malinowski has stated that science is founded on the conviction that experience, effort, and reason are valid; magic on the belief that hope cannot fail nor desire deceive.<sup>17</sup> But this researcher believes that Christian religion is founded on the conviction that God is love and never fails.

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<sup>17</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1948), p.12.