

8.0 CHAPTER EIGHT: 'VOICE OF HEALING-PRAYER MINISTRIES'

8.1 Introduction

The issue of divine healing in Christianity is an age-long tradition that goes back to before the New Testament. During the era of faith healing, it could be traced back to the 'Irvingites' in Scotland, the Blumhardts in Germany, and A.J. Gordon and A.B. Simpson in America, to mention a few. This tradition has been prominent among the Pentecostals and Charismatic circles.¹ Both evangelicals and faith healers believe that sin and sickness are not the original intentions of God for humanity, but a breach caused by Satan at the fall of man.² However, faith healers take this further by stressing that the atonement does not only provide for the forgiveness of sin and salvation, but for healing *all* diseases.³ Therefore, Christians are not supposed to be sick.⁴ Essek William Kenyon, the father of faith healing, puts it succinctly: 'It is an abnormal thing in the mind of the father for a child of God to be sick'.⁵ It is not God's will that Christians should suffer, that is, experience sickness. Sickness and suffering come from the devil.⁶ The expression 'God's will' as understood by faith healers has its attendant confusion and ambiguity. Is it God's 'decretive' will or God's 'permissive' will? If the faith healers meant the former, there is a difference between God's sovereignty over all things and the existence of evil. The sovereignty of God over his creation does not imply nullification of

¹ Douglas Moo, 'Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel' *Trinity Journal*, No. 9 (1988), pp.191-209 (191); Paul G. Chappell, 'The Birth of the Divine Healing Movement in America', in Pieter G.R. de Villiers (ed.), *Healing in the Name of God* (Pretoria, South Africa: C.B. Powell Bible Centre, 1986), pp.60-78; Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1987), pp.35-60.

² Vernon L. Purdy 'Divine Healing', in Stanley M. Horton, *Systematic Theology* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2007), pp.489-522 (489).

³ Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p.55; Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), p.4; Hugh Jeter, *By His Stripes* (Springfield Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1977), p.11. Some evangelicals share with the faith-based healers on the ground that divine healing focuses on the whole person. See D. A. Carson, 'Matthew', in Frank E. Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp.205-207; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1918), pp.176-177; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p.457; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), p.216; Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p.203; J.H.S. Burleigh (ed.), *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp.165,180; Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical Theological Study* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1982), p.155; Douglas Moo, 'Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel', *Trinity Journal* No. 9 (1988), pp.191-209.

⁴ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Must Christians Suffer?* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1982), p.23.

⁵ Essek William Kenyon, *Identification* (Lynnwood, Washington: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1995), p.19.

⁶ C. Harinck, *The Charismatic Movement: Tested in the Light of Scriptures* (Houten, The Netherlands: Den Hertog, 1994), p.105.

suffering resulting from evils. If the faith healers meant God's 'permissive' will, suffering strengthens the faith of a believer.⁷

This Chapter attempts to examine the progressive shaping of thought that led to exclusive faith healing. The study endeavours to trace the life history of Bitrus Samaila, a faith healer, the shaping of his thought and the root of his experience discourse as it links sicknesses to mystical causation. The study shows how the early Pentecostal 'spiritual experience' influence traced back to Essex William Kenyon consciously or unconsciously shapes the beliefs and practices of the ministry.

8.2 Bitrus Samaila's Life History

Bitrus Samaila was born on 17 November 1974 at Benkaho, to a Christian couple, Bitrus Kakhi Danjuma and Deborah Bitrus Danjuma. He is a teacher by profession. However, he once worked as a banker from 2000-2003 after obtaining his National Certificate of Education (NCE) at the College of Education (CoE), Jalingo.⁸ Being born into a Christian family, he thought of conversion as heredity. The first glimpse of his conversion came when he was a member of the Associate Fellowship of Christian Students (AFCS) while undergoing his NCE course at Jalingo, Taraba State. Moses Ande, a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) official guided him through the Scriptures to understand that conversion has to do with personal commitment to God.⁹ After this contact, beginning in 2001, he started experiencing a series of dreams and also voices telling him, 'The hour has come that you will work for me... I will use you as a servant in my vineyard.'¹⁰ His dramatic experience of the healing gift started on 2 January 2003, at an annual dinner of friends, where he prayed for a sick woman and she received instant healing.¹¹ This dramatic scenario continued to manifest at different occasions.

⁷ Blue, *Authority to Heal*, pp.21-40.

⁸ Bitrus Samaila, adapted from his typescript Curriculum Vitae.

⁹ The precise date of the contact with the NYSC is uncertain. However, it was during his NCE course between 1996 and 2000.

¹⁰ Bitrus Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011, Wukari.

¹¹ The friends' family annual meeting was meant for socio-economic welfare and spiritual purposes. The meeting featured dinner, discussions, financial contributions, praise and worship, exhortation and prayers. Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011.

While he was working as a banker, a series of revelations came to him, urging him to resign his appointment as a banker. According to him, the voice echoed tirelessly, saying, ‘Leave this job because it will hinder your ministry’. He was sceptical about the source of the voice and uncertain of his fate if he should resign from his job.

While still in circumspection, an anonymous person suddenly brought a job application form for him. He still resisted and did not apply because he doubted if it was God’s mandate.¹² However, the grip of the voice made him to later apply but without any personal conviction. To his chagrin, he was given a teaching appointment with Marmara Government Girls Secondary School (MGGSS), Wukari in 2003. This made him succumb to believing that it was from God. It also opened an opportunity for house-to-house prayer-healing pursuits after working hours. This time the friends’ annual meeting had waxed cold without apparent cause.

In late 2004 to mid 2005, he joined an evangelistic ministry team called ‘Mission Light House’ led by a lay youth, Miracle Ishaya. However, he left the team in late 2005 because of internal dissension.

Bitrus’ initial conversion experience, as he has narrated, involved fierce spiritual warfare about the source of his call to mission. However, he later succumbed when he perceived that it was ‘God’s call’. Bitrus’ narration of his personal experiences tends to show that these were ‘experiences’ that guided and mandated the establishment of his ministry. Bitrus considered the voice he received as a fresh revelation from God. Spiritual experience has been throughout the progressive revelation of God to humankind. The basic tool for measuring ‘spiritual experience’ is an examination of the outward expressions or fruits, to determine whether or not they are at odds with what is said to have been experienced.

Unlike the other ministry founders discussed in the preceding Chapters who had strong traditional religious backgrounds, Bitrus’ case is slightly different. His parents were converts to the Christian faith before he was born. Since they were no longer deep in traditional religious practice, they could not train him to follow suit. However, since he lived in the society that also practices African traditional religion, it seems he learnt from his social interaction in the society about the reality and dynamism of the spirit world and its impact on human wellbeing.

¹² Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009.

He may have also learnt this as a Christian living in such a society. As this study seeks to show, Bitrus' mission was shaped both by his charismatic background in schools and his traditional society, although his charismatic background tends to have shaped him more than the latter. He may not completely admit that his ministry is a rejuvenation of Charismatic practices, blended with traditional beliefs and practices. Yet the truth remains that the role of 'experience' is key in the beliefs and practices of his ministry.

To the faith healers, failure to receive divine healing is due to ignorance, doubt or lack of faith. The provision has been there but there is a need to step out in faith and claim it. Faith does not need to say, 'If it be your will' when praying for healing. Kenneth Hagin, a prominent exponent of 'positive confession', argued that the 'if' prayer is to be used only in prayers of 'consecration', while the 'non-if' prayer is the appropriate pattern for prayers of petition.¹³ Hagin interpreted the expression of 'humble dependence' as 'self-doubt'. Faith then becomes a means of getting *whatever* God promises for His children. The believer has the right to 'name and claim' those things that the Bible has promised the believer in faith. In this case, during prayer, the believer needs to appreciate God for the answered prayer, even if the physical symptoms are not yet evident.¹⁴ The teaching about divine healing rests on two main contentions: that God has promised healing to every believer, and that only ignorance or lack of faith can prevent this promise from being realised.

The teaching that healing had been part of the atoning work of Christ is drawn from the vision of the 'Suffering Servant' in Isaiah 53:4-5 [cf., Matt. 8:17; Mk. 11:24; Lk. 6:19; 1 Pet. 2:24; Exod. 15:26; Ps. 103:3; Ps. 107:20] which indicates that he 'has *borne our infirmities and carried our diseases*' and by his 'bruises we are healed' [emphasis mine].¹⁵ The liberation from sin through spiritual warfare gives genuine believers power and control over the devil. Some faith healers show ambivalence on medication because of their belief in faith healing and their view that no medicine can successfully avert sickness, which is generally

¹³ See Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, pp.107-108.

¹⁴ Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, pp.71-73; Harinck, *The Charismatic Movement*, pp.105-106.

¹⁵ T.L. Osborn, *The Message that Works* (Tulsa: OSFO Publishers, 1997), p.132; F.F. Bosworth, *Christ the Healer* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), pp.23-30; Kenyon, *Identification*, pp.14-15; P.G. Chappell, 'Healing Movements' in S.M. Burgess and G.B. McGee (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp.353-374 (356); Edwin Howard Cobb, *Christ Healing* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1933), pp.1-7.

connected with spiritual problems.¹⁶ This perception had cost the lives of some faith-based healers. For example, William Marrion Branham, father of the post-World War II healing revival, died of injuries sustained in a car accident in 1965; A.A. Allen, the famous tent evangelist and faith-healer, died of liver sclerosis in 1967; Kathryn Kuhlman, faith healer, died of heart failure in 1976;¹⁷ Ruth Carter Stapleton, a faith-healing sister, who refused medical treatment for cancer, died in 1983;¹⁸ Hobart Freeman died of pneumonia and heart failure in December 1984.¹⁹

The validity of experience activated by faith made some Charismatic leaders discard medication on account of divine healing.²⁰ It is believed that medical remedies have demonic influence.²¹ This has always caused enormous psychological and physical damage.

However, a few sympathetic faith healers allow their followers who have inadequate faith to seek medical attention. Kenneth E. Hagin, faith healer, perceives medical professionals as ‘preservers’ of patients. They set good grounds for faith healers to get the Word of God into the patients for them to get healed.²² In spite of this allowance, faith healers generally perceived medication as demonic and believed that it had no place in divine healing or salvation.

¹⁶ J.R. Goff, ‘The Faith that Claims’ in *Christianity Today* (February 1990), pp.18-21 (21); Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, pp.83-86; Daniel R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), pp.153-154; Robert M. Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), p.91. Bitrus Samaila, Interview, 22 February 2012, Wukari; Jonah Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012, Wukari.

¹⁷ John Fullerton MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Oasis International, 1992), p.195, citing Jamie Buckingham, *Daughter of Destiny* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1976), p.282ff.

¹⁸ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.195, citing Frances Bixter, ‘Ruth Carter Stapleton’, in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1988), p.810; see also, Rod Mattoon, *Mattoon’s Treasures: Treasures from James* (Database WORDsearch 2013), p.283.

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.194, citing Chris Lutes, ‘Leader’s Death Gives Rise to Speculation About the Future of His Faith-healing Sect’, *Christianity Today* (January 18, 1985), p.48.

²⁰ Charles Farah, *From the Pinnacle of the Temple* (Plainfield: Logos International, n.d.), pp.151-152; Hank Hanegraaf, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), pp.61-63, 237-239; William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, (Orlando: Creation House, 1996), p.227; Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, pp.46-47, 127-131; A. Brandon, *Health and Wealth* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1987), pp.48-49; John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on the Faith Movement* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), pp.40-41.

²¹ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp.33-35, 38

²² Kenneth E. Hagin, *Understanding the Anointing* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1983), p.25; Kenneth E. Hagin, *Mountain Moving Faith* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1993), pp.44-48. Hagin holds this view because he allowed his wife to be operated of her goitre and he was treated for an injured elbow. See Kenneth E. Hagin, *I Believe in Visions* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1984), pp.91-92, 97-102.

8.3 Experience: An Analysis

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the influence of Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts and Benson Idahosa, among others, permeated the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS) and Associate Fellowship of Christian Students (AFCS) in Wukari and its environs. For example, the magazines of Hagin's ministry flooded para-church youth fellowships. Bitrus, not converted then, had access to such sources. When Bitrus later converted during his NCE training, he was able to access other faith-healing sources. Second, when he associated with Jonah Tsonatu, one of the earliest Jukun who attended Benson Idahosa's Seminary in Benin and completed in 1977, he was further influenced with issues of divine healing.

To begin with, it is worth tracing the historical antecedents of divine healing as shared by faith healers in the history of modern Christianity. The Charismatic theologies of 'Word of Faith'²³ caught theological discourse over time. The major underlying thought of the doctrine is that 'Word' and 'Experience' are activated by faith. Humankind is infinite and has the ability to commune with God or mystical powers. Words are determinant means of fate and destiny and experience validates itself, not necessarily from God or His Word. Scholars across religious persuasions – Evangelicals and Charismatics – have endeavoured to trace the roots of this theology, to determine whether or not it is biblical.

The Evangelical Alliance's study of Charismatic theology traced the root of faith healing to the Charismatic Movement, which arose in the United States after World War II. However, it was distorted with mystical and philosophical thoughts.²⁴ This view is at variance with Daniel R. McConnell, a Charismatic writer, who did his doctorate degree at Oral Robert's University.²⁵ He traced the root of faith healing to 'metaphysical cults' which influenced Essex William Kenyon's belief and practices. Kenyon then influenced Kenneth Hagin and other faith-healing Charismatic lay leaders. The following section discusses the 'spiritual experiences' of the early faith healers.

²³ Faith-healing is known by various names: Word of Faith, Word Faith Movement, the Faith Movement; or Word, Faith Formula, Hyper-Faith, Positive Confession, the Message of Prevailing Word, the Prosperity Gospel, and Health and Wealth Gospel. A more derogatory description of the teaching is the 'Name it and Claim it' or 'Blab it and Grab it' Gospel. Andrew Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), p.xvii; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.265.

²⁴ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.77.

²⁵ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.289; citing Daniel R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988); Walter J. Hollenweger *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), p.231. MacArthur, Hollenweger, and others attest that McConnell did a detailed study of the root and development of 'Word of Faith' movement.

McConnell argues that faith healing originated with Kenyon. He derived his influence from non-Christian mysticisms, including Christian Science, Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, Science of the mind and New Thought.²⁶ These non-Christian religious thoughts generally teach that the human mind has the ability to interact with the spiritual world, and sickness could be cured through ‘healthy attitudes’ and positive thinking.²⁷ Andrew Perriman corroborates this as he cites Phineas P. Quimby who said: ‘If I believe I am sick, I am sick, for my feelings are my sickness, and my sickness is my belief, and my belief is my mind. Therefore, all disease is in my mind or belief’.²⁸

This assertion presupposes that sickness is drawn from emotions, feelings and beliefs, all of which have their base within spiritual experiences. Quimby’s ideas were developed by his patients, among whom was Rev. Mary Baker Glover Eddy, who founded the Christian Science movement in 1866.²⁹ Christian Science teaches that sickness, sin and death all have mental causes and effects. It teaches that the human mind has the power to commune with the transcendent. Experience can help one have direct communion with the divine, and reason has no room for such access.

Two patients of Eddy, Julius Dresser and Warren Evans, eventually founded the New Thought movement in the 1880s which stressed ‘affirmative thought or suggestion, employed with conviction that man produces changes in his health, his finances and his life by the adoption of a favourable mental attitude...and...that all diseases are mental in origin.’³⁰ This means that faith produces healing and prosperity. Besides, Emmanuel Swedenborg who founded Swedenborgianism claimed to have had an encounter with the spiritual world through the opening of his spiritual senses. Drawing from this mystical experience, he taught that there is a direct correspondence between natural and spiritual things.³¹ He believed that both the physical and spiritual universes operate on certain spiritual laws.

Another influential mysticism is Theosophy, ‘which proposes [that the human mind is able] to attain intercourse with God and superior spirits’. Moreover, the mind has the potentiality of ‘superhuman knowledge, by physical processes’. This is because it has ‘a direct knowledge

²⁶ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.289; Hollenweger *Pentecostalism*, p.231; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*.

²⁷ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.67.

²⁸ See Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.67.

²⁹ *Webster’s 1913 Unabridged English Dictionary* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2013), n.p.

³⁰ *Webster’s 1913 Unabridged English Dictionary* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2013), n.p.

³¹ *Webster’s 1913 Unabridged English Dictionary* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2013), n.p.

of God, a direct insight into the processes of the divine mind, and the interior relations of the divine nature'.³²

The above 'spiritual experience' advocates all teach the superhuman status of the human mind, cordial communion with the divine, and the ability to change circumstances by the power of words. The power of the mind, whether innate or physical, works through the activation of the transcendent power. To buttress this point, Perriman quoted H. Emily Cady who wrote that 'Our affirming, backed by faith, is the link that connects our conscious human need with His power and supply';³³ and that 'there is power in our word of faith to bring all good things right into our everyday life'.³⁴ The views of the 'spiritual experience' advocates oppose the orthodox thought that belittles the ability of the human mind in interacting with the transcendent power. The Word of faith teaching was influenced by these mystical thoughts. The thoughts validate the authority of experience, but denigrate reason. Experience is divine and therefore immune to any criticism and challenge.

The work of McConnell³⁵ exposes the flaws of the Word of Faith movement. He undoubtedly argues that Kenyon attended and adapted the ideas of Christian Science in Charles Emerson College of Oratory which trained people about mystical thoughts;³⁶ that he assimilated mystical thought and terminology, and that he finally blended evangelical fundamentalism with New Thought.³⁷ The essence of New Thought ideology was to enhance the ability of the human mind that would control human circumstances and to develop a notion of mystical reality. The New Thought raised humanity to a position where humankind has the creative power of constructive thinking that can change physical reality.³⁸ This power works by activating the transcendent power through the power of words. The Word of Faith developed the understanding of faith as a positive force that can bring about healing and prosperity.

³² Webster's 1913 Unabridged English Dictionary (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2013), n.p.

³³ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.68; citing H. Emile Cady *Lessons in Truth* (Unity Village, MO: Unity Books, n.d.), p.56.

³⁴ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.68; citing Cady *Lessons in Truth*, p.52.

³⁵ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*.

³⁶ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.68; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.289, citing McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, pp.15-56.

³⁷ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, pp.71-72, citing McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, p.48;

³⁸ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.68.

Having been influenced by these mystical powers, Kenyon transmitted the thought to Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and later impacted other healing Charismatic lay leaders, particularly William Marrion Branham, Oral Roberts and T.L. Osborne.³⁹

McConnell compares the conceptual parallels between Word of Faith doctrines and earlier New Thought teachings. For example, Kenyon teaches that ‘every man has a God in him’, while Hagin teaches that a believer is ‘as much an incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth’; Kenyon teaches that ‘sickness is a spiritual condition manifested in the physical body’, while Hagin teaches that ‘all disease is spiritual disorder’.⁴⁰

However, three Charismatics, William DeArteaga, Joe McIntyre and Robert Bowman, among others, did not share McConnell’s ‘biased’ analysis of Kenyon’s view. DeArteaga maintains that Kenyon repudiated many of the core principles of the New Thought, only that he adapted and modified essential ones to strengthen faith against the corrosive effect of higher criticism.⁴¹ He argues that after Kenyon’s conversion he associated with Pentecostalism rather than the New Thought. Similarly, McIntyre asserts that Kenyon actively opposed the New Thought and challenged ‘those deceived by the metaphysical cults to return to the simple truths of the Bible’.⁴² McIntyre buttresses his point by quoting Kenyon, who said, ‘There are several Jesus (*sic*) today whose advocates are challenging us to worship. The Jesus of the various cults has very little resemblance to the Jesus of the apostle Paul’.⁴³ Bowman also disagrees with McConnell for categorising Kenyon as a non-Pentecostal evangelical healer.⁴⁴ He argues that conservative leaders of the Holiness Movement endorsed Emerson

³⁹ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.72; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.289, citing McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, pp.8-12, 57-76. Hagin plagiarised a large portion of Kenyon’s writings verbatim. He also plagiarised the writings of John A. MacMillan, a Christian and Missionary Alliance minister. It is possible that Hagin lifted a large portion of MacMillan’s *The Authority of the Believer*. See W.R. Scott, ‘What’s wrong with the Faith movement?’; Finis Jennings Dake, a minister with the Assembly of God, *God’s plan for man* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Dake Bible Sale, 1949). Hagin’s plagiarisms cast a doubt on his credibility and invalidate his claims of divine inspiration.

⁴⁰ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.72.

⁴¹ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.74; DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, pp.165-167, 173, 175, 217-219; J. McIntyre, *Essek William Kenyon and His Message of Faith* (Orlando: Creation House, 1997), pp.125, 223-224.

⁴² McIntyre, *Essek William Kenyon and His Message of Faith*, p.13.

⁴³ McIntyre, *Essek William Kenyon and His Message of Faith*, p.151.

⁴⁴ Roberts M. Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), p.64.

College.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is possible that he was not affected by the mystical thought in the course of his training.

Deduced from varied writings of Kenyon, it may be possible that Kenyon employed the expressions of the mystical ideologies to develop this argument that would safeguard him against straying from faith. However, it is difficult to distinguish between expression and influence. It is possible that similarity of thought may not necessarily be mere dependence. Moreover, it may be possible that ideas either flow directly from the source to others or they may be reshaped in the course of time. Besides, it may be possible that only the language or expressions may be transferred, while the thought remains. All these are assumptions of analysing the influence of the expressions and thought of the New Thought on Kenyon. It is possible, though, that the expressions and thoughts of the New Thought were functional at the time that various religious persuasions were emerging. All the extreme currents at the time intermingled and shared common interests, exchanging terminologies and arguments.⁴⁶ In spite of these, McConnell maintains that the Word of Faith teaching is drawn from the New Thought and not classical Pentecostalism.⁴⁷ By contrast, the Evangelical Alliance's studies perceived it 'as an offshoot of post-World War II Pentecostal revivalism'.⁴⁸ It is worth noting that the Evangelical Alliance does not deny the theological flaws of the Word of Faith teaching due to distortion from the New thought.

The Charismatic Word of Faith is developed from the teachings of the early advocates of 'spiritual experience'. The 'Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministry' shares this doctrinal strand. As the name of the ministry reveals, the 'voice' or personal experience is core in its beliefs and practices.

8.4 Emergence of 'Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries'

Bitrus Samaila asserts that 'I did not initially intend to establish a ministry'.⁴⁹ However, two things motivated him to do so. First, he had unending spiritual experience through dreams – 'hearing God speaking to him' – to avail himself of the opportunity for evangelistic work.

⁴⁵ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.75; McIntyre, *Essek William Kenyon and His Message of Faith*, pp.16-18; Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, p.65.

⁴⁶ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.76; see also DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, p.246.

⁴⁷ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp.290, 292; McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, pp.15-56, 119-120.

⁴⁸ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.77.

⁴⁹ Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009.

Second, he attempted merging with others to boost his calling and carry out the task, but failed to yield befitting fruits for God.⁵⁰ Therefore, early in 2006 he began to host evening prayer meetings in his house with eight people who shared a similar vision with him. The meetings were held on Mondays – preaching; Wednesdays – Counselling; Thursdays – Bible Study and Questions; and Saturdays – spiritual warfare day.⁵¹ In late 2006 and early 2007, the attendance grew within the range of 20 and 40 people per meeting. A small structure (he calls it a ‘tent’⁵²) was raised for this purpose. By 2008, the tent could not accommodate the attendance growth because 200 to 300 people were attending the programmes. The structure was therefore expanded to accommodate 400 to 800 people maximum (see *Appendices 16 and 17*).⁵³

In 2009, he named the ministry, ‘Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries’.⁵⁴ The target of the ministry was to counteract the evil forces causing various forms of sickness through prayers without the mediation of medical systems.⁵⁵ Bitrus developed this perception through his interaction with some freelance preachers and founders of faith-healing ministries,⁵⁶ as well as younger CRCN ministers⁵⁷ who partly share in Charismatic beliefs and practices. Bitrus believed that evil forces are the root causes of diverse ailments among individuals in the community.⁵⁸ Therefore, only divine healing could adequately deal with all cases of evil powers, physical and spiritual.

However, biomedical systems could *only* be employed to attest and confirm the divine healing received. He denies the traditional medical system as a God-given agent for healing. This is because, according to him, most (if not all) herbalists get their healing gifts from evil

⁵⁰ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

⁵¹ Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011.

⁵² In Samaila’s explanation, the ‘Tent’ (as Tabernacle) is so rendered in reference to where people gather for worship and not necessarily a building or church. For example, after the Israelites left Egypt, and were in the wilderness, God asked Moses to build a ‘Tent of meeting’ outside the camp where people would gather for prayers (Exod. 33:7-11). Bitrus, Interview, 8 February 2011.

⁵³ Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011.

⁵⁴ The name ‘Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries’ was chosen because of the voices of God he has been receiving at various occasions and places directing him about divine healing. Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

⁵⁵ Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011.

⁵⁶ A few among them are Miracle Ishaya of ‘Mission Light House’, Jonah Tsonatu, a faith healer, Adda Kefas of Dunamis Church, Abuja and Zachariah at Langtang in Plateau State.

⁵⁷ Enoch Aboki, Peace Nuhu Nyajon and Isaiah Jirapye Magaji, all ministers still serving in the CRCN. These ministers are not totally in opposition to medical systems. However, they resent any medical system that does not give glory to God but rather acknowledges spirits as the source. Moreover, these ministers believe that God can heal without any conventional intervention but the same God gave wisdom to humanity to use nature to complement prayers for healing.

⁵⁸ Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011.

spirits which are always detrimental to human wellbeing. Moreover, both biomedical and traditional medical systems only give temporary solutions by focusing on the symptoms and the removal of the diseased part or on restoring the physical functionality but lack the salvation of the soul.⁵⁹ In other words, biomedical and traditional health care systems bring a cure to physical dysfunctions but cannot heal the soul. For him, divine healing and salvation are inextricably connected. Divine healing is necessary because it deals with sickness which results from natural and spiritual root causes, respectively.

This belief seemed to have been drawn from the Word of Faith teaching that distinguishes between faith and reason.⁶⁰ The former is considered to come directly from God while the latter from the devil. Medical science falls under the auspices of reason, but divine healing comes from God. It denies the empirical reality of the symptoms of sickness once ‘healing’ has been claimed. It believes that rational enquiry is satanic as it denies the power of faith.⁶¹ Moreover, Bitrus is drawing from the early faith healers, especially Kenneth Hagin, who maintains that medical professionals are just ‘preservers’ of patients.⁶² Hagin was partly sympathetic in his view on medication because of past biological malfunctions experienced. He and his wife experienced sickness that resisted prayers. As a last resort, he allowed his wife to be operated upon for her goitre⁶³ and he was treated for an injured elbow.⁶⁴ He described the experience as weakness on his side and believed that God was disciplining him. Hagin took this position as concession, and not a part of the belief systems of faith healers. Records have shown (as indicated above) that many faith healers died of their sicknesses in the name of denouncing medical care. Indeed, Bitrus sees medical care as a forum for confirming healing that has already been received.

Samaila and his fellow leaders perceive satanic operations leading to sickness on two major levels: ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ operational levels.⁶⁵ In the former, Satan sends spirits to inhabit people in three ways: transmission of spirits from progenies to posterity, initiation of occult spirits and other ordinary spirits due to character weaknesses such as anger, bitterness,

⁵⁹ Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009, 8 February 2011 & 22 February 2012.

⁶⁰ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1984), p.3.

⁶¹ Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.32.

⁶² Kenneth E. Hagin, *Understanding the Anointing* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1983), p.25; Hagin, *Mountain Moving Faith*, pp.44-48.

⁶³ Kenneth E. Hagin, *I Believe in Visions* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1984), pp.91-92.

⁶⁴ Hagin, *I Believe in Visions*, pp.97-102.

⁶⁵ By ‘short-term level,’ they meant sickness that could be dealt with within a short period or instantaneously. By ‘long-term level,’ they meant the sickness that needs a prolonged spiritual encounter without a defined period. Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012, Wukari.

unforgiveness, fear, lusts and more. The latter level is more extensive. First, Satan sends spirits to control villages, towns, cities and nations. Second, he sends other spirits to institutions such as churches, government offices and educational institutions. Third, he sends some of the spirits to engage in various vices and moral misconduct, for example, through natural evils such as plagues, epidemics, floods, drought, famine and other disasters; some of the spirits cause socio-religious problems such as curses, rape, abortion, flirting, barrenness and impotence, prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood, widowhood, drug addiction, smoking and alcoholism, poison, armed robbery, theft, banditry, trauma and madness, deformity, sudden death; still some spirits cause economic problems such as bribery and corruption, poverty, infertility of the land, business failures, demotion, retrenchment and unemployment; other spirits are involved in religious violence, political conflicts and ethnic clashes. Fourth, some spirits are linked with objects, trees, water bodies, tools, buildings and more.⁶⁶

All the above aspects of sickness are believed to be the handiwork of Satan through his messengers, especially witches, sorcerers, occult powers [including diviners, herbalists, medicine men, traditional priests and priestesses, and mediums].⁶⁷ In the ‘long-term’ operation, spirits under the auspices of Satan assign and supervise the works of the ‘short-term’ operation spirits.

In divine healing, the short-term level spirits can be adjured by the superior power through the laying-on of hands and words of command with less resistance. In most cases, the spirits involved will not hesitate to submit. The restoration of the victim is therefore instantaneous or occurs after a short while. In contrast, in the long-term, the superior and inferior powers normally engage in serious confrontation. The restoration always requires a prolonged process without a specific timeframe. On this level of operation, once a person lays hands on the sick to cast out the evil force, it will resist vehemently in word and action.⁶⁸ The ‘long-term’ operation is compared to the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs.19), or between Moses and the gods of Egypt (Exod. 7-12). In contrast, the ‘short-term’ operation is compared to the several encounters of Jesus with demoniac powers through possessed people. The difference between these two operational levels is that the ‘short-term’

⁶⁶ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

⁶⁷ The officers believe that from the superficial level, the herbalists and medicine men among others, are good health care providers, yet are mostly used by Satan to wreak havoc on relationships – with self, God and others. This is one of the basic reasons why the Ministry resents the traditional medical system.

⁶⁸ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

requires instant solution, whereas the ‘long-term’ needs a prolonged process due to the extensiveness and intensity of the encounter involved.

Bitrus deduced these understandings from spiritual experiences and testimonies received from members during ministry meetings. As in other faith-healing ministries, experiences are considered fresh and new revelations, and no one dares to question or critique the ‘voice of God’. The spiritual experience makes him capable of communing or communicating with the transcendent power. However, testimonies, which may be fabrications, are not always examined and analysed. Rather, as MacArthur observes, such ‘spiritual experiences’ are accepted always as valid and considered deep truths of a sort.⁶⁹ Therefore, challenging them is seen as a denial of God’s sovereign power of revelation. Other contributing factors leading to sickness such as environmental hazards, ignorance of medical science and voluntary failure to observe hygienic conditions are altogether relegated to the background. This is not to say that experiences, emotions and feelings are entirely fake and nonsensical. Rather, they point to an internal awareness in response to the truth of God’s Word, guided by the Holy Spirit. However, the question is: Does any spiritual experience imply a *response* to the truth of God’s Word? One cannot determine for sure unless its expressions and fruits are in tune with the truth of Scripture; and not at variance with it. The Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries mainly teaches that sickness always has spiritual forces behind it.⁷⁰

8.5. Causes and Aspects of Sickness

The teachings of this ministry revolve around mystical causes drawn from the Charismatic mystical thought and indigenous mystical causality. The two extremes are inseparable because of the validity and authority of spiritual experience. On the one hand, the teachings seemed to favour the Charismatic, while on the other hand, elements of indigenous beliefs simultaneously surface.

This ministry links the threat of sickness over humanity to the sin of failing to appropriate the atoning work of Christ which encompassed healing.⁷¹ The failure to affirm the already

⁶⁹ See MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp.25-30, 36.

⁷⁰ Musa, Interview, 8 March 2010, Wukari; Patience H.N. Agbu, Interview, 9 March 2010 & 22 February 2011, Jalingo; Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011; Martha C.J. Sabo, Interview, 11 October 2009 & 15 February 2011, Wukari.

⁷¹ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

bestowed healing is tantamount to a denial of the scriptural promises as inerrant and infallible. Second, the ministry understands sickness as a spiritual problem resulting from demonic attack.⁷² Lloyd Patterson, among others, debunked this because biblical passages distinguish between sicknesses linked to a demonic origin and those that have no link.⁷³ Moreover, God sometimes allows Satan to inflict sickness upon His servants to ensure their dependence on Him.⁷⁴

On the aspects of sickness, the ministry has categorised sickness into two broad classes, namely, social and religious problems. From the social aspects, drug addiction, smoking, alcoholism, flirting, rape, among others are attributed to parents' failure to provide life's necessities for their children. A few ministry co-officers cited 1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 18:24a and Psalm 119:10, maintaining that peer group pressure, acting through agents of seducing spirits, also causes sickness.⁷⁵

Other social issues are theft, banditry and armed robbery due to bad child upbringing, failure to improve living conditions and joblessness. Desecration of farmland from its fertility is attributed to evil attacks. This is because of the failure and negligence of victims in appreciating God's blessings through their tithes, seed sowing and thanksgiving from their farm produce. It is these failures that attract the depredation of evil forces. In the view of the ministry, appreciation-blessing and failure-infertility are reciprocal. Educational problems, especially dullness, are attributed to heredity and children's lukewarm attitude to study.

Social problems such as corruption, selfishness, envy, greed, decline, suspicion, sectionalism, tribalism, conflicts, clashes and violence⁷⁶ are always believed to be caused by an underlying

⁷² Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012; see also, for example, mute and blind (Matt. 12:22), epileptic boy (Matt. 17:14-16; Mk. 9:20-22), a crippled woman bound by Satan for 18 years (Lk.13:11-17), the mute man (Matt.9:32-34). See Eduard Schweitzer, *The Good News According to Luke* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), p.222; I Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), p.561; R.T. France, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), p.173; John Michel, 'Demon' in Johannes B. Bauer (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Biblical Theology* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1981), pp.191-194.

⁷³ Lloyd G. Patterson, 'Healings', in Everett Ferguson *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1990), p.413; See Matt. 4:24; 8:16-17; 9:32-33; 10:1; 12:22; 15:21-28; 17:14-18; Mk.1:32-34; 9:25; Lk. 6:17-18; 8:2; 9:1; 13:10-17; Acts 10:38.

⁷⁴ For example, Elisha (2 Kgs.13:14), Hezekiah (2 Kgs.20:1), Job (Job 1-2) and Paul (2 Cor. 12:7-10, Gal. 4:13-14). Murray J. Harris, '2 Corinthians' in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p.396; Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p.133; Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Waco Texas: Word Books, 1986), p.415.

⁷⁵ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012, Wukari; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012, Wukari.

⁷⁶ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011; Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

spirit that disrupts the intended harmonious relationship with God. Other social problems are madness, epilepsy and deformity. The use of mind-altering substances and excessive alcohol intake may be a major factor leading to madness. However, the ministry maintains that there may be spiritual causation as well. For example, there is also the ‘pictorial altar’ where the evil priest in the spirit world would pronounce the type of madness intended on the victim and then hit the sculpture. The victim in the physical realm would develop a headache that gradually results in madness.⁷⁷ Closely related to madness is epilepsy which may be caused by disease, environmental hazard, heredity and evil spirits.⁷⁸ Deformity is caused by natural phenomena or evil forces, or because God is punishing a sinner.⁷⁹

From the religious aspects, the ministry holds that natural evil is inflicted on the society because of the failure of posterity in fulfilling the treaties made between forebears and evil spirits. The suffering of the inhabitants reflects the transfer of failure from the progeny. The spirits are now turning around to fight their posterity.⁸⁰ These natural evils manifest in different forms: plagues, epidemics, floods, drought and famine. With the plagues, sometimes yam leaves dry out as early as August when they should be blossoming. At other times, pests would eat up the yam tubers or puncture them all over.⁸¹ Epidemics, floods, drought and famine often break out as punishment on their posterity due to the failure to constantly offer sacrifices as vowed by the progeny. According to the ministry leaders,⁸² the devil uses this forum for spiritual attacks. Although the ministry believes that natural evils sometimes come from the inexplicable counsel of God, the general perception is that evil spirits and man’s disobedience, not God’s unrevealed counsel, cause natural evils. The ministry finds it difficult to differentiate between natural evil and moral evil, while moral evil is interpreted as natural evil.

Moreover, misfortunes such as barrenness and impotence, prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood, widowhood and curses, which are supposed to be classified under social problems, are interpreted as religious problems. Barrenness and impotence are believed to be self-inflicted due to flirting, fornication, infidelity, drug abuse and abortion, which may damage the uterus. It could also be inherited from one’s progeny or an act of God, as in the

⁷⁷ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

⁷⁸ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

⁷⁹ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011; Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

⁸⁰ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

⁸¹ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

⁸² Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

case of Abram and Sarai (Gen.16:2), Rachael (Gen. 30:2) and Hannah (1 Sam.1:5-6),⁸³ who were impotent and barren for some time. Jonah Tsonatu argues that this does not mean that God cherishes barrenness and impotence. For God exonerated himself by raising rhetorical questions: ‘Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth? says the LORD; shall I, who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God’ (Isa. 66:9, ESV). Moreover, Gen.1:28ff talks about the multiplication of offspring to care for God’s created world.⁸⁴ Tsonatu maintains that barrenness and impotence are caused by an evil spirit called *asimody* which always deprives people of offspring. The man or woman would usually have nightmares of having sexual relations with spiritual spouses. When this happens, the woman is unable to conceive or, even if the woman was already pregnant, the pregnancy would be aborted. On the other hand, the spirit would render the man’s semen inactive and unable to fertilise the female egg.⁸⁵

Prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood is another religious problem caused by unknown spiritual spouses who often come and to have sexual relations with either of them during nightmares.⁸⁶ Tsonatu, the patron of this ministry and a faith healer, asserts that even if a gentleman and lady are betrothed to each other for marriage, the *asimody* spirit will set confusion between them through fault-finding and thus destroy the pledge between the two.⁸⁷ Bitrus Samaila, the ministry leader, adds two other ways of hindering marriage: first, the ‘pictorial altar’, where the perpetrator may take the picture of a bachelor or a spinster to the spirit world and invoke curses against his or her intended marriage. Second is the ‘effigy’, whereby an evil priest in the spirit world would make a statue of a female deity, pronounce some incantations onto the black cloth, tie the face of the ‘effigy’ with it and then hide it. While the evil priest does this in the spirit world, it would manifest simultaneously on the bachelor or spinster who intends to find a marriage partner. However, neither of the victims would get a marriage partner, let alone marry. Both Tsonatu and Samaila revealed that the knowledge of this experience came to them vividly through dreams, trances and visions. They claimed that the father, mother, or maternal aunt of the gentleman or lady in question would usually carry out this evil. Hence, *asimody*, the ‘pictorial altar’ and ‘effigy’, are major spiritual encounters that result in chronic bachelorhood and spinsterhood.

⁸³ Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012; Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011 & 22 February 2012.

⁸⁴ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012.

⁸⁵ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012.

⁸⁶ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011 & 22 February 2012; Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

⁸⁷ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012.

Sudden deaths (and widowhood) may be caused by biological and environmental hazards, moral misconduct and failure to meet the demands of the cultic deities of the land.⁸⁸ As with barrenness and impotence above, Tsonatu believes that the *asimody* spirit causes sudden death.⁸⁹

A curse is a religious problem connected with the pronouncement of misfortune on one's kith or kin due to disobedience. This is because the Bible describes a curse as a flying bird looking for a tree to perch on (Prov. 26:2).⁹⁰ According to Samaila, Tsonatu and Iliya,⁹¹ curses are not the believers' portion because Jesus Christ had already cancelled their effects on the Cross of Calvary when he said, 'It is finished'. Believing in the continuity of curses on believers is therefore a lack of faith. Curses can also continue on unbelievers by causing diverse misfortunes such as sudden deaths, a cycle of marriage-divorce-re-marriage and widowhood, among others.

Another religious problem is caused by omens which often occur when the house is not kept in good hygienic condition. Bats and rats may penetrate the ceiling and prey upon weaker animals, depriving people of sleep. Beyond these, the root causes are witches and other malignant spirits which often possess these animals, objects and plants. Their presence compromises and interrupts God's golden rule which says, 'Thy sleep shall be sweet' (Prov. 3:24; Eccl. 5:12).⁹²

An analysis of both the social and religious aspects of sickness shows that there are myriads of causative factors, all of which are attributed to mystical causation. Hence, the physical manifestations are either an offshoot of the underlying spiritual causation or induced by the spiritual cause. On the whole, the ministry stresses vehemently that those causes constitute a satanic attack due to a failure to affirm God's promises of protection in Scripture. Nevertheless, the perception of this ministry underscores the potency of spiritualising almost every incident or experience or attributing it to the devil as the author of all evil. The leaders of this ministry also link most of the problems to spiritual causes: *asimody*, 'pictorial altar' and 'effigy' inducement.

⁸⁸ Samaila, Interview, 22 February 2012.

⁸⁹ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012.

⁹⁰ Samaila, Interview, 22 February 2012; Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

⁹¹ Samaila, Interview, 22 February 2012; Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

⁹² Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011; Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

As discussed in Chapter Two, this ministry, like others, seems to show that she is consciously or unconsciously drawing from the Jukun belief that natural evils are repercussions on the society due to the failure of the traditional leaders in providing a cultic apparatus for sacrifices and the failure of the ancestral cultic priests in performing their assigned roles in making the necessary sacrifices.⁹³ Consequently, the *Jô Pi* (evil spirit that causes diseases) uses malignant forces to inflict misfortunes on the community. If this view is true, it means that the ministry is building on traditional religious experiences to develop its theology. For from the enumerated aspects of sickness, most (if not all) are linked to experiential interpretation, whether subjective or objective. The issue of God using his sovereignty for His unrevealed counsel is almost absent. This builds on the stand of Kenneth Hagin and John Wimber, for example, who deny that God may use suffering on his servants for his providential purposes. However, Hagin is not consistent in his view. He rejected suffering, but turned round to admit that it was helpful. Hagin noted that the church (evangelicals) has ‘preached a “cross” religion, but we [the Word of Faith ministry] preach a “throne” religion.’⁹⁴ He then turned around again to acknowledge that ‘suffering will make you grow spiritually in a hurry.’⁹⁵ Wimber rejects the biblical principle that physical ailments may be God’s sovereign plan for believers.⁹⁶ On the general level, experience is considered valid and authoritative in the interpretation of incidents as well as life’s experiences. The Bible is then ranked second.

8.6 Divine Healing: A Spiritual Battle

Divine healing almost always involves a power encounter with evil forces. The leaders of Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries claim to have received guidance by the ‘Spirit’ at various times through dreams, visions and vocal utterance on what to do and how to respond in cases of sickness.⁹⁷ In dreams, they would simultaneously experience the same painful experience with the sick person.⁹⁸ In the leader’s explanation, during worship or spiritual warfare sessions, he often sees [in the ‘Spirit’] the sick conditions of his clients. For example, he would see the problem of a client written boldly; or he sometimes hears a voice speaking to

⁹³ Fari Gambo, Interview, 31 May 2012, Wukari.

⁹⁴ Hagin, *The Believer’s Authority*, p.16.

⁹⁵ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Must Christians Suffer?* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1982), p.12.

⁹⁶ John Wimber, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p.152.

⁹⁷ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

⁹⁸ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

him about the condition of his client. All these experiences guide him to diagnose the sickness. In such cases, he would reveal to the sick person the condition he envisaged if the ‘Holy Spirit’ mandates him to do so.

In contrast, many Evangelical ministers interviewed questioned the validity of the spiritual experiences reminiscent of traditional medical spiritists, which the leader termed a ‘spiritual experience’ from God. For example, Caleb S. Ahima observes that ‘some practitioners [faith-healers] claimed to have spiritual eyes that see beyond the natural, and to be able to foresee one’s problem, interpret one’s problems and sometimes hypnotise and make the health seeker look inconsequential.’⁹⁹ Joseph U. Ajaver adds that such experiences are a prototype of the traditional spiritists: ‘Traditional seers engage in disclosing the sick person’s enemy through incantation and invocation, prescribing what the health seeker needs to do for his wellbeing’.¹⁰⁰ The problem with the ‘spiritual experience’ is the lack of long-term examination to determine whether or not it is godly. Spontaneous reflections are often (or usually) upheld as divine revelations. What is the difference between God revealing an issue to the healer for self-edification and the one that needs to be disclosed? Do all the voices that mandate disclosure necessarily come from God? How does it become a routine that God reveals to the healer prior to the coming of the health-seeker? If, indeed, God revealed to the healer, must he then disclose it to the health-seeker?

The ministry has no precise steps for spiritual warfare. Citing Jn. 5:19-20; Jn. 8:26, Jn. 28-29 and 1 Cor. 2:10-16, the ministry maintains that the ‘Holy Spirit’ guides as to how to address particular issues at a particular time. This is because the ‘Holy Spirit’ does not usually prescribe the same approach to every sickness, be it short-term or long-term level. In whatever category, the ‘Holy Spirit’ searches the heart, plants a Word and teaches the healer how to address the sick condition.¹⁰¹ Obviously, human beings cannot control the Holy Spirit, nor does the Holy Spirit cause confusion or disorderliness. If the ministry does not have guiding procedures in its spiritual warfare, but waits for spontaneous action, any ‘source’ thought to be the Holy Spirit can manoeuvre its way into the process and take control. The implication of not having a definite procedure is that it opens the health-seeker to a chaotic manipulation of powers for an end. The underlying cause of this is that the faith healer raises

⁹⁹ Caleb S.O. Ahima, Interview, 19 October 2009, TEKAN Headquarters, Jos.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph U. Ajaver, Interview, 25 October 2009, CRCN Lagos.

¹⁰¹ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

the role of spontaneous ‘experience’ as always authoritative, without progressively weighing its genuineness.

One of the ways that this ministry deals with sickness is by the so-called mandate of laying-on of hands and anointing the sick person (cf. Matt. 16:15-18; Mk. 6:13; Jas. 5:14-16). This is a common part of this ministry’s spiritual warfare. It has been practised across faith movements and other denominational institutions. The Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, for example, believes that the laying-on of hands while praying is a means of power encounter to ensure healing.¹⁰² Charismatics employ the laying-on of hands to heal, empower and commission people.¹⁰³ The ministry leader is the only one who mostly does the laying-on of hands. However, he does it occasionally because it is believed that there are power encounters in the practice if one is not empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁴ On several occasions, when he attempts to lay his hands on the sick and feels unusual power, he will quickly withdraw his hand and start interrogating the spirit.¹⁰⁵ He notes his experience as follows:

If I feel strange power in me in the course of laying-on my hands, I usually withdraw my hand. In such episode, the Spirit of the Lord is cautioning me about impending danger if I do so. Next, I will hear a voice commanding me to first interrogate the force. I will observe the person keenly with a ‘spiritual eye’. The Spirit will begin to tell me what the person has been doing or intends to do. In such a situation, I will pose questions and the agent will affirm that it is a reality. If this happens, I often rebuke the force in the person using the Word of God.¹⁰⁶

This shows intermittent power encounters in the course of laying-on of hands, and it depends on the preparedness of the exorcist to overcome it.

The ministry also accompanies the laying-on of hands with the application of anointing oil on the sick as recommended in Mark 6:13 and James 5:14.¹⁰⁷ However, the use of the anointing oil seems to be taking centre stage in its healings. The anointing oil is no more used as a sign

¹⁰² J.O. Ogunsusi, ‘The Approach of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement to Sickness and Health from a Wholistic Perspective’, in Jan Harm Boer & Dennis A. Ityavyar (eds.), *Wholistic Health Care: Medical and Religious Dimensions*, Vol.1 (Jos, Nigeria: CHAN Wholistic Health Care Project, 1994), pp.100-105 (p.104).

¹⁰³ J.R. William, ‘Laying-on of Hands’, in Stanley M. Burgess & Eduard M. Vander Maas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp.834-836.

¹⁰⁴ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Observation, Wukari, Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, 8 February 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

for the consecration and social recognition of a person, as in biblical times.¹⁰⁸ However, it is only in Mark 6:13 that the anointing oil is used to address illness.¹⁰⁹ In James 5:14 and Mark 6:13, the uses are placed on the value of prayer.¹¹⁰ God can heal with or without a means. In this ministry, oil is regarded as a cure for every disease, no matter its nature. Yet neither Jesus nor the apostles¹¹¹ resorted to oil for healing during their ministries. Perhaps God wanted to curtail the ‘indiscriminate abuse’ of it.¹¹² The contemporary theological flaw among the faith-based healers is that the oil is used exclusively in opposition to its sacred and social use noted above.

The second issue commonly emphasised by the ministry for immediate healing is ‘positive confession’. This teaches that God has already granted healing at the atonement, and it is left to the sick to appropriate it by faith.¹¹³ The ministry cites several passages to back up this belief (cf. Mk.11:20-26; Heb.11:1; Rom.10:17; Matt. 8:17 cf., Isa. 53:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:24; etc).¹¹⁴ The ministry, drawing from Hagin’s experience (cf. Mk. 11:23-24), teaches that the sick person should have faith that the sickness is healed even if the physical manifestation is not yet evident.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Hebrews 11:1 stresses faith rather than hope. Faith is considered the activator and motivator of immediate healing. In the belief of this ministry, faith is what is within the reach of a person presently.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Chenevix Trench, ‘χρίω’, ‘ἄλειψω’, in *Trench’s Synonyms of New Testament*, ninth edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), pp.136-137; Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1933), p.65; William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2013), n.p.; ‘ἄλειψω’, ‘χρίω’, in *AMG’s Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2007), pp.119, 1485-1487; Stephen D. Renn, ‘χρίω’, in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2007). p.39; Daniel R. Hayden, ‘Calling the Elders to Pray’, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol.138 (July-September 1981), p.264.

¹⁰⁹ W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-Lexicon on the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.34; Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit & Tremper Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2006, p.35; H. Schlier, ‘ἄλειψω’, in Geoffrey Bromiley, Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, Vol.1 (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2008), p.37; Stephen D. Renn, ‘χρίω’, in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2007), p.39.

¹¹⁰ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word pictures in the New Testament* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2007); ‘ἄλειψω’, ‘χρίω’, in *AMG’s Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Database WORDsearch Corporation, 2007), pp.119, 1485-1487.

¹¹¹ John Wilkinson, ‘Healing in the Epistles of James’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 24 (1971), pp.326-345.

¹¹² John Calvin, *Commentaries to the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

¹¹³ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012; Samaila, Interview, 12 October 2009 & 8 February 2011; Iliya, Interview, 6 March 2012.

¹¹⁴ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

¹¹⁵ Tsonatu, Interview, 24 February 2012.

In contrast, hope involves doubt or a fear of affirming healing to take place in time. Hope always comes with a condition, ‘if’, and a future expectation. Hebrews 11:1 however reads ‘Now faith means that we are confident of what we hoped for, convinced of what we do not see’ (Moffatt’s N.T.). In the words of the leaders of this ministry, ‘Faith is an action always in the present tense, while hope is a process always in the future tense (Eph. 2:8; Rom.10:9-10, 13).¹¹⁶ Faith is based on hearing and believing the Word of God (Rom.10:17). For example, Mark 11:24 says ‘... whatever you ask in prayer, believe that *you have received it*, and it will be yours’ (ESV, emphasis mine). Anyone who needs divine healing therefore [as it applies to all other areas of needs] must believe in the Word of God, that God always means what He said, and says what He means (Heb. 13:8; Mal. 3:6).¹¹⁷ Faith always says, ‘I will receive right now,’ or ‘I have it now’, ‘It’s mine’. Hope says ‘I will get it sometime’.

The ministry teaches that one does not necessarily receive God’s healing immediately through hope, but by faith. So, people do not receive instant divine healing because they hope *they will be healed*, and do not believe that *they have been healed*. In the perception of the ministry, there is a sharp difference between ‘belief’ and ‘hope’. One does not seek divine healing in the future but now. Faith in divine healing stresses that God has done it and He is doing it. God did not promise divine healing but He has done it. ‘...He *took* our illnesses and *bore* our diseases’ (Matt. 8:17, ESV; cf., Isa. 53:4-5; emphasis mine).

Another passage often cited is 1 Peter 2:24: ‘He himself *bore* our sins in his body on the tree, and that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, *you have been healed*’ (ESV, emphasis mine). According to the ministry leaders, all these are not only promises but statements of fact that it has already happened.

In all the passages they cited, they focused on the grammatical constructions from specific versions of Scripture which indicate the completed action in the past. They presuppose that faith is the yardstick for healing. Yet they lose sight of the fact that not all healing in the scriptures is linked explicitly to an expression of faith.¹¹⁸ There are occasions in which the sick did not necessarily exercise personal faith but still they were healed. If healing is exclusively based on ‘positive confession’, it denies the sovereignty of God and His compassion for the suffering humanity. Moreover, this ministry like the older faith-healing

¹¹⁶ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

¹¹⁷ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

¹¹⁸ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p.244; Ronald A.N. Kydd, *Healing Throughout the Centuries: Models for Understanding Healing* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p.13.

movements upholds the creative power of words. Whatever one says determines one's fate or destiny. That is to say that whenever one believes the scriptural promises and affirms them, God is obliged to fulfil them.¹¹⁹ The preoccupation of this ministry seems to show that faith in regard to healing becomes a matter of what one says more than whom one trusts or what truths one embraces and affirms in one's heart.

Nevertheless, in recent times, Charismatic lay leaders and members seemed not to be unanimous in their views on the role of God in healing, as regards the concept of 'positive confession'. It is said that God's faithfulness and God's freedom are two basic grounds why God heals and fails to heal. In God's faithfulness, He requires sufficient faith from the patient to minister healing. In God's freedom, He may choose not to heal the patient at that time. On the former, faith is the force for healing as one trusts and affirms the promises of God.¹²⁰ In this case, one simply claims healing based on scriptural promises, and acts upon the confession in faith, without doubt or fear, in spite of physical negative symptoms.¹²¹

The irony is that negative confession (doubt or fear) will yield negative results, but positive confession (affirmation of scriptural promises) will activate healing. Hence, those who confess that they are healed will be healed, but those who do not confess their healing will stay sick. Therefore, all those who are not healed are blamed to have made negative confession or lacks faith.¹²² The thrust of the 'positive confession' is that the sick is entitled to the right of this universal law to claim the scriptural promises and God is obliged to meet his promises.¹²³ The notion of only affirming and appropriating the already bestowed healing shows that man's word rather than God and His Word has become the determinant object of faith.¹²⁴

The theology of positive confession tends to rule out the place of sin and the need for a confession of sin.¹²⁵ This theology emphasises God's faithfulness at the expense of God's

¹¹⁹ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

¹²⁰ W.K. Kay, *Pentecostals in Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), pp.91-92.

¹²¹ T. Smail, A. Walker and N. Wright, "Revelation Knowledge" and Knowledge of Revelation: The Faith Movement and the Question of Heresy', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol. 5 (1994), pp.57-77 (65).

¹²² MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.283.

¹²³ Henry H. Knight III, 'God's Faithfulness and God's Freedom: A Comparison of Contemporary Theologies of Healing', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol. 2 (1993), pp.65-89 (69); T. Smail, A. Walker and N. Wright, "Revelation Knowledge" and Knowledge of Revelation: The Faith Movement and the Question of Heresy', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol. 5 (1994), pp.57-77 (63).

¹²⁴ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.284.

¹²⁵ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.282.

freedom. Faith is regarded as trusting in God's promises recorded in Scripture, rather than trusting God himself.¹²⁶

On the other hand, a few faith healers, Kathryn Kuhlman and Charles Farah, for example, stress the sovereign freedom of God. Kuhlman is of the view that the sick (or believers) ought to trust in God, rather than trust in the Faith Formula to effect healing. The Faith Formula is necessary, but it does not guarantee healing. Such faith is an event rather than being a possession.¹²⁷ For Farah, healing is based on God's sovereign love and decision. It is generally God's will to heal, but there is not necessarily a compulsion on him.¹²⁸ Still, there are other Charismatic writers who attempt to integrate the faithfulness and freedom of God. N. Wright reports that Francis MacNutt believes healing to be part of the gospel and stems from God's compassion because God works in the climate of love, not power. Moreover, John Wimber and Ken Blue unanimously believe that it is God's desire to heal because of His compassion and love. However, God has his freedom to heal possibly in a mysterious way.¹²⁹

Studying the Charismatic concept of 'positive confession', one may think that the emphasis is placed on the Word of God as the priority. On the contrary, the driving forces are spiritual experience and creative power of words activated by faith. Hagin cited Proverb 6:2; Proverb 18:21; Proverb 4:20-22; Proverb 13:3 and Mark 11:23-24 to support his view that healing or ill-health can result from what one speaks out. In his view, 'You can have what you say.'¹³⁰ In his thought, believing always coincides with receiving. In the situation where positive confession does not work, it is concluded that God has already healed, except that the physical manifestation is not yet evident; or owing to a lack of faith in the sick; or a defect in the faith of the healer.¹³¹ Still, in their perception of the superhuman nature of human words in regard to 'positive confession' made, they thought that they could coerce, manipulate and control God to act as He promised.¹³² Humanity is no longer subjected to God's decision, but rather God is being subjected to humanity's direction. This is a dangerous theology which

¹²⁶ Marx Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), p.343.

¹²⁷ See Kydd, *Healing through the Centuries*, pp.181-197.

¹²⁸ See Knight III, 'God's Faithfulness and God's Freedom', pp.74-77.

¹²⁹ See N. Wright, 'The Theology and Methodology of "Signs and Wonders"' in T. Smail, A. Walker and N. Wright, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp.71-82 (79-82).

¹³⁰ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Foundations for Faith* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1998), p.18, 63; Kenneth E. Hagin, *Mountain Moving Faith* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1993), pp.107-115; Kenneth Copeland, 'Words at Work', *Believer's Voice of Victory*, Vol. 24, No.1 (January 1996), p.10.

¹³¹ Hagin, *Foundations for Faith*, pp.6-9; Hagin, *Mountain Moving Faith*, p.156; Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1983), p.24; Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1984), p.51.

¹³² MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.265.

faith-based healers use to mislead gullible believers. The faith healers pluck verses from the margins of the Bible, string them together and interpret them literally and out of context.

The third aspect that Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries upholds is that divine healing is the only means of restoration and salvation. The ministry places divine healing in opposition to other means of medication. The ministry leaders have this to say about the two systems:

Herbalists usually invoke spirits, carry out incantations and the medicines are often hereditary from cultic spirits through the forebears to posterity. Herbalists employ the services of the devil or demons to guide them in the mixture of medicine for treatment. Herbalists always give glory to cultic spirits rather than God the Creator of nature. This leads them to demand animals to sacrifice to cultic deities that are believed to have taught them the profession. Herbalists often introduce what can change the faith of the sick. Herbal treatments hardly oust the spiritual cause of the sickness. On the other hand, biomedicine is developed from the same nature which herbalists use. However, it does not employ evil spirits. It is modified and refined with proper dosage based on the symptoms and specimens received from laboratory tests. Nevertheless, both biomedical and herbal systems are limited and temporal and have nothing to do with the salvation of the sick. In contrast, divine healing deals with the problem from its root cause; removes both natural and demonic causes and gives salvation - Jn. 8:36.¹³³

The fourth issue is an assertion that God promised to heal *all* sicknesses (1 Jn. 5:4-5; cf., Jas. 5:15).¹³⁴ This is reading too much meaning into God's mind. There is no record of God promising to heal *all* that come to Him.¹³⁵ Those so-called passages are actually talking of Jesus healing all those present at a particular place, and on a specific occasion. There is a world of difference between 'promising' healing and 'doing' the healing. Some passages speak of Jesus (and His apostles) healing all of the sick at their disposal (Mt. 4:23; Mt. 8:16; Acts 10:38; Acts 5:12,16), while other passages do not show that all were healed.¹³⁶ For example, in John 5:3, 5, 13, Jesus healed only the invalid man out of the multitude at the pool of Bethesda.

¹³³ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012; Gani, a non-adherent, also shares this perception. Gani, Interview, 17 November 2010.

¹³⁴ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

¹³⁵ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Divine Healing of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp.116, 269.

¹³⁶ For example, Isaac's eye problem was not healed (Gen. 27:1), Jacob's hip dislocation was not healed (Gen. 32:25), Elijah's eye problem was not healed (1 Kgs.14:4), Elisha's illness was not healed (2 Kgs.13:14), Paul was not healed of the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor.12:7-10; Gal. 4:13-15), Timothy was not healed of his stomach ailment (1Tim. 5:23), Trophimus was not healed of his illness (2 Tim. 4:20).

Therefore, the assertion that God will heal *all* who make requests ‘offered in faith’ is a cruel hoax perpetrated by faith healers. Indeed, God is able to heal, but He does not heal all. Those who claim that God will heal every case and that Christians need not be sick because there is healing in the atonement of Jesus Christ lose sight of the fact that healing is not only based on the faith of the sick person, but also on the faith of bystanders and those who are praying for them (Mk. 2:5).

8.7 Evaluation and Conclusion

Divine healing, as understood by faith healers, dwells more on the Word and the faith of the sick. Scriptural passages (verses and clauses) are subjectively selected or lifted and strung together, and then interpreted as a contractual document with a set of promises, rules, laws and conditions. Faith then becomes the means by which the promises in the Scriptures are activated for effective healing.¹³⁷ Thus, faith is made in principle an infallible means of getting spiritual results based on defined conditions. Hence, healing does not come from God who answers the prayers, but from the sick’s keeping of the Golden Rule by faith. The status of faith is raised above grace and is seen as an end in itself.¹³⁸ The words of Scripture are no longer regarded as an informative body of truth.

Beyond ranking God second in terms of healing, every localised or individual incident is recognised as a universal rule and deployed as a promise to every believer.¹³⁹ Scripture distinguishes between what is addressed to a particular person and what is meant for generations; what is contingent and what is normative; what has passed away and what belongs in the future. It is not mandatory for God that what He did in the past to individuals or a people must be repeated today. The problem with faith-based healers is that their interpretation is generally literal, ignoring the genre, literary style, rhetorical purpose and historical setting.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, they pluck passages and universalise them as applying to all generations. For example, Andrew Perriman cites Kenneth Copeland, who once advised someone facing a personal difficulty that he should first search the Word for the promise of God that covers the situation, and then focus attention on it without wavering: ‘Keep it in the

¹³⁷ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, pp.82-86, 195.

¹³⁸ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, pp.196-197.

¹³⁹ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.90.

¹⁴⁰ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.92.

forefront of your thinking. Don't spend your time looking at the problem and listening to the negative words of those around you. Instead, fix your mind on God's Word'.¹⁴¹

Faith healers rely more on spiritual experience. They claim that the 'Spirit of God' always speaks and interprets the Word to them. Bitrus, the leader of the Voice of Prayer-Healing Ministries asserts that whenever he reads a biblical passage, the 'voice of God' interprets the passage to him. He upholds such interpretation as authoritative because of the 'inspiration' of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, he encourages the members to listen to the voice of God, believe in the Word and affirm that the Word is meant for each and every one who believes. In so doing, they will not go back with their problems unanswered. Such an approach shows that spiritual experience and faith that affirm the voice of God are the yardsticks in addressing the members' need. The intuitive and spontaneous grace of God in healing is exchanged for faith in the voice of God. The problem with the role of 'Spirit inspiration' in their interpretation is that there is no need to question the interpretations. In most cases, their proof-texts for immunity are Psalm 105:15 and 1 Chronicles 16:22: 'Touch not my anointed one'. This is 'spiritual intimidation' that faith healers always employ to claim immunity from criticism. Indeed, the aforementioned passages talk about the descendants of Jacob to whom God provided security against oppression. God rebuked kings on their account, saying, '*Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm*' (Ps.105:13-15; 1 Chron.16:20-22).¹⁴² This statement is an assurance of divine protection over the people in a specific period. However, faith healers who want a similar immunity from criticism, apply this to themselves as a means of 'spiritual intimidation'.

Faith healers use Hebrews 11:1 as a proof-text for faith, declaring that it 'is the substance of things hoped for'. To them, faith is the source in which every hope of healing is fulfilled. Yet Hebrews 11 reveals that the Hebrews were passing through heinous persecution. The writer was emphasising that if they remained confident in their God and persevered without shrinking back, they would attain the 'things hoped for' (Heb.10:35-39). Through faith, things hoped for become real – substantial – just as faith also provides an assurance of 'things not seen'. The faith healers also push the priority of faith because they rely so much on spiritual laws, and denigrate the authority of God. In principle, it is God who answers the prayer in His grace or compassion, but in practice, the prayer lies in the operation of the law

¹⁴¹ Kenneth Copeland, 'Surviving the Counterattack' *Believer's Voice of Victory*, Vol. 25, No. 9 (October 1997), pp.4-7 (6-7); Kenneth Copeland, *Our Covenant with God* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland, 1976), p.64.

¹⁴² L.C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (Waco: Word Publishing, 1983), p.38.

of faith. Consequently, God is not glorified, but rather the spiritual laws that guarantee the action and produce certain effects.¹⁴³

Another issue is the interface between salvation and healing, consequent to the atoning work of Christ. The atoning work of Christ was meant for the cancellation of guilt caused by sin.¹⁴⁴ This is just a one-dimensional interpretation. Healing can be a sign of the kingdom – the reign of God. Hence, healing of sickness is one *effect* of the atoning death of Christ. Not all faith healers share the notion of healing all sicknesses as part of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. For example, Ken Blue argues that it is God's will to heal all believers. Yet because of ignorance or doubt and the continuing opposition of Satan to the rule of Christ, God's will to heal will not always be accomplished.¹⁴⁵ This ministry's citation of Isaiah 53:4-5 (cf. Matt. 8:17) as a proof-text for the inseparability of salvation and healing within the framework of atonement is not tenable. The issue was that the sickness borne by the 'suffering servant' was a direct consequence of judgment on a sinful and lawless people. It was the physical sign of God's anger against a people who had gone astray. However, this ministry tends to universalise it as applying to all ages and generations.

Still, another frequently quoted passage in support of universalised healing is Ps.103. This passage talks about God's faithfulness and compassion towards David by forgiving and healing him (Ps.103:3). God blessed David on account of his obedience, but later punished him when he disobeyed Him (Ps.103:17-18).¹⁴⁶

Besides, this ministry universalises healing at all ages. It teaches about imagining healing in the heart and affirms that it is done even if the actualisation still belongs in the future. It cites passages in Proverbs that seem to suggest that words have creative power to change circumstances (Prov. 6:2; Prov. 4:20-22; Prov. 13:3; Prov. 18:21). The root of this assertion can be traced back to the claim that humankind has the ability to commune directly with the spiritual realm. This is the main issue that John MacArthur responded to in his book, *Charismatic Chaos*. MacArthur argues that such spiritual experience needs to be examined in the light of the inspired Word of God.¹⁴⁷ The problem with MacArthur's response is the impression it gives that 'spiritual experience' is different from the 'Word of God'. Biblical

¹⁴³ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.137-138.

¹⁴⁴ Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp.175-176.

¹⁴⁵ Ken Blue, *Authority to Heal* (Downers' Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), pp.37-38.

¹⁴⁶ Perriman (ed.), *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, p.130.

¹⁴⁷ John Fullerton MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Oasis International, 1992).

characters had different spiritual experiences with God. Again, the tenable tool that can measure ‘experience’ is the outward expression or fruits of the ‘spiritual experience’. The fact that Charismatics at a point in time diverted from the tenets of faith cannot be a yardstick to condemn spiritual experience outright.

Some Evangelicals have identified with Charismatics and have embraced their notion of spiritual experience. For example, Harold Lindsell says that ‘Evangelicals are suggesting that theology must travel from Spirit to Word, not from Word to Spirit, ... evangelicals ... are more and more challenging their fellow believers [Evangelicals] to rethink the Gospel from the standpoint of their experiences with it...’ and that ‘traditional evangelical theology is largely irrelevant or inadequate.’¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Robert Johnson warns that ‘if the church is ever again to set forth a relevant and adequate theology, it must begin not with reflection on the person of Christ but with reflection on our *experience* with him through the Holy Spirit.’¹⁴⁹ In Michael Harper’s view, ‘the world awaits a fresh manifestation of Christ within His body, the church. It is tired of ... the airy-fairy doctrines of theologians.’¹⁵⁰ J. Rodman Williams argues that ‘we should adapt our theology to experience, rather than insisting that experience be evaluated by theology’.¹⁵¹ Hence, evangelicals are now contending that relevant theology must begin with spiritual experience with God.

In conclusion, Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries encourages her members to believe in the promises of healing recorded in the Word of God as a key to receiving healing.¹⁵² Faith is seen as an immutable, impersonal law that rules the universe. Faith is not submissive trust in God, but a means of communing with, and tapping fortunes and healing from, God.¹⁵³ The ministry attracts the traditional leaders and on occasion invited them for prayers. This is done because of the shared perception of experience and ability to commune with the transcendent.¹⁵⁴ Politicians searching for elective positions patronise the ministry asking for prayers for their victory. People who perceived an economic downturn also patronise the

¹⁴⁸ See MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.44.

¹⁴⁹ See MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.44.

¹⁵⁰ See MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.45.

¹⁵¹ See MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.45.

¹⁵² I deduced this from the several participant-observation sessions I witnessed on the Ministries’ meeting days, as well as counselling and discipleship sessions over time.

¹⁵³ Voice of Healing-Prayer Ministries, Group Interview, 2 March 2012.

¹⁵⁴ Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011; Joseph Mai-Riga Vyonku & Samaila, Interview, 8 February 2011.

ministry. Health-seekers are zealous and committed to the work of God.¹⁵⁵ On the contrary, over-emphasis on spiritual experiences often intensifies fears in the members. In the Jukun society today, if anyone – Christian or non-Christian – hears, sees or feels an unusual thing, it is quickly attributed to mystical causality. The members spiritualise almost all life's experiences such as dreams, nightmares and omens. Like in traditional African religiosity, the ministry believes that we work and have our being amidst powers that mostly haunt us.

This ministry draws from forebears – Charismatics and indigenous believers – who generally appreciated spiritual experiences. Indeed, experiences are not without errors, as could be deduced from their resultant fruits. The criteria are as follows: Do the expressions always confirm what is said to have been experienced? In what ways do spiritual experiences contradict the outward expressions? Does all that was said to manifest shortly come true? Do all the life challenges that were experienced and claimed to be over, really over? False assertions of spiritual experiences distort the genuineness and reality of having experienced God.

¹⁵⁵ Bitrus Dan-Maigona, Interview, 7 October 2009, GSSS Wukari; Philemon G.A. Garjila, Interview, 7 October 2009, Wukari; Moses Y. Fisseh & Ezekiel B. Sallah, Interview, 4 March 2010, CRCN Gindin Dorowa, Wukari.