

LET THEM CALL FOR THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH: DIVINE HEALING AND THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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I. Introduction: Divine healing and the African context

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to a multiplicity of Christian churches. While theologically diverse denominations are represented, Steve Weibe-Johnson, a Mennonite missionary, described the Christian religious landscape as characterized by a "generic Pentecostalism."¹ Visiting charismatic evangelists like German Reinhard Bonnke fill stadiums with seekers looking for a God who cares about both the spiritual and physical aspects of their existence.²

This paper will investigate what role divine healing plays in some African quadrants of the Church of the Nazarene, a non-charismatic denomination operating in a charismatic milieu. To this end, the paper will investigate the meaning of James 5:13-18 and its importance as a New Testament example of how divine healing may function within the life of a local congregation. Next, it will study the origin and evolution of Nazarene Article of Faith XIV, "Divine Healing." Finally, it will present comments from some Nazarene pastors in South Africa who have incorporated divine healing into the ecclesiology of the local church.

II. James 5:13-18: Divine healing in the congregation

Healing is a theme in the Old and New Testaments.³ James 5:13-18 is the *locus classicus* on divine healing and is significant for its setting in a local community of faith. James wrote:

(13) If any of you are suffering, they should pray. If any of you are happy, they should sing. (14) If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. (15) Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. (16) For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve. (17) Elijah was a person just like us. When he earnestly prayed that it wouldn't rain, no rain fell for three and a half years. (18) He prayed again, God sent rain, and the earth produced its fruit. – *Common English Bible*

¹ From a conversation with Greg Crofford, September 1999, in Cotonou, Benin (West Africa)

² Bonnke held a crusade in Nairobi, Kenya, in August 2011 and has visited West African nations multiple times.

³ An examination of healing in Scripture is Frederick J. Gaiser, *Healing in the Bible: Theological Insight for Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010).

Peter Davids noted that epistles commonly ended with wishes for health.⁴ He believed v. 14 was an allusion to something "outside the human sphere" where "either God or evil powers must be involved."⁵ Less speculatively, Luke Timothy Johnson spoke of an illness of limb or organ.⁶

The term "elders" (*presbyteros*) appears here and in Acts 20:17, where Paul called for the elders of the church in Ephesus. Rabbinic texts affirmed that elders traditionally visited the sick.⁷ James encouraged the individual who was ill to call for the elders to pray over him (or her) and anoint with oil, likely simultaneous with the prayer. This echoes the ministry of the Twelve in Mark 6:13.⁸ The type of oil used is not indicated, nor is there consensus whether the meaning of the anointing is medicinal, sacramental, or merely symbolic.⁹ John Thomas argued, however, that oil came was associated with God's ability to heal and that eschatological healing was an "implication of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God."¹⁰

The "prayer that comes from faith" (v. 15a) should not distract from the one who is the source of healing, "the Lord," who "will restore them to health" (15b). The phrase "and if they have sinned, they will be forgiven" underscores that some (not all) illnesses are the result of sin (Mark 2:1-12).¹¹ The confession of sin may have included confession in community meetings or private confession to another person.¹²

Frederick Gaiser summarized the connection between the proclamation of the gospel and the ministry of healing:

Healing is not a commodity to be dispensed by the church or achieved or purchased by the individual (2 Kings 5:15-16); healing comes not apart from us, but along with, forgiveness and salvation (Mark 2:9-12). Like forgiveness and salvation, God's healing is free, given without condition (Acts 3:6). Thus, both biblically and in the practice of the church,

⁴ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 191.

⁵ Davids, 191.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 37 a in the Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 330.

⁷ Johnson, 330.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Leicester, England: Wm. B. Eerdmans and Apollos, 2000), 238.

⁹ Moo, 238-40.

¹⁰ John Christopher Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 16.

¹¹ Thomas, 243.

¹² Davids, 196.

healing will be found in the context of the gospel, as part of the ministry of word and sacraments. Prayers for and services of healing should be a normal part of that ministry, complementing the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.¹³

James 5 is notable for the context in which healing occurred, a local church where presumably believers knew each other. Unlike the current practice of "faith healing" that emphasizes itinerate evangelists performing to large crowds in stadiums with its limited accountability, James encouraged divine healing within a local community of faith, with prayers and anointing offered by trusted members known for their integrity. This understanding of divine healing informs Nazarene Article of Faith XIV. It is to this Article that we turn.

III. Article of Faith XIV: Origin, development, and meaning

The first three Nazarene *Manuals*, published in 1898, 1903, and 1905 under Phineas Bresee, contained no mention of divine healing. However, the 1907 *Manual*, published following the union meeting in Chicago, included a paragraph under the section "doctrinal statement":

The harmony and unity of the holiness people is absolutely essential, and while we recognize that God heals with and without means, we hold that no one has the right to take such an extreme position as may result in the death of any person without medical attention.¹⁴

The reference to "harmony and unity" is important, bringing into focus the differing emphases of the regional groups that eventually would compose the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene.¹⁵ Stan Ingersol clarified that the Holiness Church of Christ (known as the "South group") desired more clarity on both the second coming of Christ and divine healing, viewing the latter as the "practice of the New Testament" and as one of the "primitive spiritual gifts" one should expect to manifest itself in Holiness churches.¹⁶

Subsequent editions of the *Manual* demonstrated ambivalence about divine healing. In the next four quadrennial editions of the *Manual* (1911-1923), no longer was divine healing

¹³ Gaiser, 249.

¹⁴ *Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, Published By Authority of the General Assembly Held at Chicago, Illinois* (Los Angeles, CA: Nazarene Publishing Company, 1907), 26-27.

¹⁵ This was the denomination's name from 1908 through 1919, when the General Assembly dropped the word "Pentecostal", reverting to the shorter original name of the denomination.

¹⁶ Stan Ingersol, in Floyd Cunningham, ed., *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 154.

treated in the doctrinal statement but under the secondary heading of "special advices," where other topics were addressed, including the support of ministers, temperance and Prohibition, marriage, divorce, and the election of church officers. The revised statement read:

We believe in the Bible doctrine of physical healing, and urge our people to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. Providential means and agencies, when necessary, are not to be refused.¹⁷

The 1915 *Manual* changed "physical healing" to "Divine Healing."¹⁸ While this might seem a small change, the word "Divine" emphasized Christ as the Great Physician, the healer. Otherwise, the one offering the prayer for healing might mistakenly be considered the "healer." Further, in 1928, the "Special Advices" were removed from the *Manual* and "Divine Healing" was promoted back to its place with other doctrines, becoming paragraph 30, Article of Faith XV.¹⁹ The phrase "Divine Healing" (uppercase) became "divine healing" (lowercase).²⁰

Two further changes occurred in the *Manual* for 1989 and 1997-2001 *Manual*. In the former edition, an Article of Faith on the Church was added, resulting in a re-ordering of existing Articles, making "Divine Healing" thereafter Article XIV. More importantly, an updating of language and clarification occurred in the 1997-2001 *Manual*:

We believe in the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. We also believe that God heals through the means of medical science.²¹

From a non-Western perspective, this change may be seen as unfortunate. The older wording of "providential means" was broad enough to encompass Western medicine or traditional remedies that are commonly gathered in nature – such as herbs or teas – particularly in rural areas of Africa where there is no doctor. As the article currently reads, there appears to

¹⁷ E.F. Walker and E.A. Girvin, eds. *Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene*. Published by the Authority of the General Assembly, Held at Nashville, Tenn. (Kansas City, Missouri: Publishing House of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, 1911), 28-29.

¹⁸ E.F. Walker, ed. *Manual of the History, Doctrine, Government, and Ritual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene*. Published by the Authority of the General Assembly Held at Kansas City, Missouri (KC, MO: Pentecostal Nazarene Publishing House, 1915), 28.

¹⁹ E.J. Flemming, C.A. Kinder, J.B. Chapman, et al., eds. 3rd ed., *Manual of the History, Doctrine, Government and Ritual of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1923), 33.

²⁰ The switch to small letters may only indicate changing conventions regarding capitalization.

²¹ John Bowling et al., eds. *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 1997-2001: History, Constitution, Government, and Ritual* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1997), 33.

be no allowance for medicine that – while not scientific in the strictest sense – has no link with the occult and has proven beneficial.

Nevertheless, Article of Faith XIV serves an important theological purpose. Timothy Crutcher noted that it guards against the Gnostic notion that our bodies are evil. Rather, they are the objects of God's loving concern.²² He cautioned that Article XIV should not be taken as a guarantee that God will heal, but rather as an "exhortation to prayer."²³

Having examined the meaning of James 5:13-18 and the origin, development, and meaning of the Nazarene Article of Faith on divine healing, the stage is set to consider how the doctrine functions in the denomination's ecclesiology. While a broad study examining this question in multiple nations would be illuminating, this paper will only consider how representative Nazarene pastors in the Republic of South Africa have incorporated divine healing into their worldview and church practice.

IV. Divine healing as related to the worldview of many Africans

The study of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John is informative. This includes how Jesus rolled out his ministry (Luke 4:18-19), his instructions to the disciples when he sent them to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:1, 7-8; Mark 6:7, 12-13; Luke 9:1-2), his instructions to the seventy-two sent to the cities ahead of Jesus (Luke 10:1, 17), and his final orders to the eleven disciples before ascension (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:16-20). In light of this study – in addition to the ministry of the early church as contained in the book of Acts – it may be concluded that the mission of the church is to provide divine solutions to human problems for the destruction of the kingdom of Satan, the benefit of humanity, and to the glory of God.

What these Scriptures underscore may be termed P.H.D. (preaching, healing, and deliverance). These are the marks of a healthy church. If the church is called to be the bridge between the divine and the human, then there is a need for the church to fully understand God and the divine mission and to fully understand the worldview of the people to whom she ministers. My observation of the Church of the Nazarene in South Africa and beyond is that the application of Article of Faith XIV on divine healing in the Nazarene *Manual* is informed by an

²² Timothy J. Crutcher, in Gay Leonard, ed., *Articles of Faith: What Nazarenes Believe and Why* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 83.

²³ *Articles of Faith*, 84.

individual's worldview. Moses' calling at the burning bush was God's empowerment through the use of a staff turned snake and that should be understood in-line with Pharaoh and his people's belief in the power of the rod and magic snakes (Exodus 4:2-9; 7:9-12).

The God who called Moses also empowered him in-line with the expectations of the Egyptian's worldview. He knew that an African Pharaoh would never believe in a God who had never proved His power to him and his officials. Rinaldo Ronzani best expressed this African perspective:

In a world that is regarded as 'religious' – like the traditional African world – where there is a complex interaction between God, mysterious powers, the spirits and the ancestors, when someone gets sick, the two most frequent questions are, 'who did it?' and 'why'? This is due to the fact that sickness is not something purely biological or physiological. Sickness is looked at as the 'enemy of life' and it represents a lack of harmony and balance, a disorder introduced into the social and cosmic fabric.²⁴

The African traditional healers, African Independent churches like the Zion Christian Church in South Africa, and the success of Pentecostals in attracting African crowds is owed to their ability to understand and accommodate that worldview. Meanwhile, the old missionaries missed the boat. Philemona Mwaura explained: "The problem here, as Pobe points out, is that the early missionaries tended to deny the reality of malevolent powers at work in the community and to dismiss belief in witchcraft as superstition and heathenism."²⁵ It is that very mistake that – according to Cephas Omenyo – has become the unpaid bill by mainline churches of Ghana that proved to be fertile ground for the birth and fast growth of the African Independent churches:

Africans both accepted the gospel and appropriated it within the African context, thus leading to the emergence of African Independent Churches, or they remained within the Western-founded churches and later sought to renew those churches along the lines of pneumatic and African traditional spirituality.²⁶

²⁴ Rinaldo Ronzani, *Christian Healing: The Anointing of the Sick* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 2007), 15.

²⁵ Mwaura Njeri Philemona, "Healing as a Pastoral Concern," in *Pastoral Care in African Christianity: Challenging Essays in Pastoral Theology*, D.W. Waruta and H.W. Kinoti, eds. (Nairobi, Kenya: Action Publishers, 1994), 34.

²⁶ Cephas N. Omenyo, "New Wine in and Old Wine Bottle? Charismatic Healing in the Mainline Churches in Ghana," in Candy Gunther Brown, ed., *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 232.

The bottom-line is that the only way that the Church of the Nazarene can successfully incorporate and implement Article XIV in a way that will impact the African church is by heeding this suggestion from Turake Yusufu:

Christianity has to address the African holistic/organic view of the world, which is governed by the law of harmony. Here, Christianity faces not a specific religious belief, but a philosophical worldview that is expansive and covers the totality of life, both in the human world and in the spirit world.²⁷

V. Interviews with select South African Nazarene pastors regarding divine healing and the practice of ministry

Interviews conducted with select Nazarene pastors in South Africa – inquiring how their practice of ministry reflects Article XIV – demonstrated that each response was informed by underlying beliefs regarding the source of sickness and how sickness is defined. Those who believe sickness to be caused by bacteria and germs are more inclined to the medical solution and hospital ministries, while those who believe the source of sickness to be both physiological and spiritual are more inclined to seek a holistic approach including medical science. Cephas Omenya referred to this very group when he observed: "In Africa, there is no un-consecrated medicine. Every medicine or healing system needs to be consecrated in order to be potent enough to deal with both the physiological and the spiritual dimensions of the sickness."²⁸

The Church of the Nazarene in South Africa is faced with the challenge of carrying out the mission of Christ in a way that will speak to the worldview of most Africans without accepting the pagan aspects of it, and to allow the Holy Spirit to use her to provide divine solutions to human problems without being seen to be Pentecostal. She also has to face the reality of the impact that the African Independent churches are making because of their holistic approach. A wrong response to this reality can cost the church dearly:

Initially, the mainline churches adopted a rather negative and contemptuous disposition toward the AICs and later Pentecostal churches that followed in the trail of renewal movements. This attitude cost the mainline churches dearly, as it led to a mass exodus of

²⁷ Turake Yusufu, "Africa Traditional Religious System As Basis Of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare," in *The Lausanne Movement: The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World* (Nairobi 2000), consulted May 27, 2013, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/all/nairobi-2000/194-west-african-case-study.html>.

²⁸ Omenya, 245.

their members to the various AICs due to a perceived lack of sensitivity of the churches to the spiritual needs of their members.²⁹

One of the serious over-sights of the Church of the Nazarene in South Africa was the omission of a module on African spiritualism, divine healing, and spiritual warfare in our ministerial training curriculum. This resulted in our pastors graduating unequipped in the area. Doing church in Africa needs to begin with an acknowledgement that the worldview of most Africans is among other things holistic, communal, pragmatic, and power oriented. Accordingly, Cephas Omenya quoted Steyne as having said: "Since man's needs cannot be met without it (power), a powerless religion is valueless."³⁰

The views of this present investigation are informed by my personal experience.³¹ This includes fifteen years as a member of the Zion Christian Church (the largest and fastest growing African independent church in Southern Africa), thirty-five years of pastoral ministry in the church, evangelistic and revival preaching across South Africa and beyond, study at the B.Th. level of African spirituality and divine healing plus information gathered from interviewing Nazarene pastors from the black, white, and colored communities in South Africa.

The first discovery was that most queried – this writer included – approach ministry from a warfare perspective as informed by both our understanding of the Bible (Matt. 16:18-19, Luke 4:18-19, Eph. 6:10-20) and the context of our reality. Mr. Shonisani Mundzedzi is an elder in our church and one of his responsibilities is to coordinate the Sunday 6 a.m. intercession for the morning worship. The following is an SMS message that he sent to the members:

6:30 – Divine hope prayer time. Pray for Rev. Maluleka – revelations & anointing, worship team – glory abound, and under the total control of the Holy Spirit, Main service – salvation, healing deliverance & blessings. Sunday School – knowledge and growth. Pray against contrary spirits. Come with an expectant and obedient heart.³²

This message reveals the expectation of most when they come to church. Ministry is treated as engaging in a war against evil powers. Prayer is at the center of things. Christ made it His lifestyle to go to a solitary place for prayer. His ministry on earth and its extension through

²⁹ Omenyo, 233.

³⁰ Yusufu, 25.

³¹ Mashangu Maluleka

³² From an SMS sent to Divine Hope Church of the Nazarene (Pretoria), from Shonisani Mundzedzi in May 2013.

His church are seen and treated as direct blows against the kingdom of Satan. Bible scholars view healings and deliverance as the manifestation of the invasion of the power of God into the enemy's territory. O.C. Edwards confirmed that when he said: "By also expelling unclean spirits and curing diseases, Jesus proves that the kingdom is being inaugurated by his proclamation of it. Thus Jesus proclaims the nearness of the kingdom by deed as well as by word."³³

The information uncovered during interviews was enriching, including evidence that the Church of the Nazarene in South Africa has been trying for a while to respond to the reality under discussion. One of our Shangaan pioneers wrote a booklet in the 1960s entitled "Kriste kumbe Vuloyi" (Christ or Witchcraft?) teaching Christians about the power of God over witchcraft and demonic forces. Retired Afrikaner pastor, Rev. Louis Kriel, showed me a booklet entitled "Jehovah Rapha" (God our healer). Likewise, Rev. Dawie De Koker is the pastor of one of the fastest growing churches on the Gauteng district. His grandfather early on wrote a booklet attempting to introduce Christians to the God who is able to heal our disease.

Below are the responses of some of the people interviewed on the subject of divine healing. Each response contributes toward a better understanding of the Church of the Nazarene in South Africa as related to the topic:

We believe in divine healing and lay hands and anoint with oil on the sick in our church. It's not done every service but only when there is a need. We anointed a lady in our church that was diagnosed with cancer and the Lord removed cancer from her body.³⁴

We just had an evangelistic campaign at Sebopje, a young girl came to be prayed for. She was sick, said she was dreaming being attacked by snakes every night. She was possessed and was stronger than eight men. I prayed for her; she was healed and delivered from demons. She testified that when I laid hands on her, she felt like something fell from her shoulders. That night when she got home, a snake fell from the roof into her bedroom and was killed and she is completely delivered and healed.³⁵

A Hindu woman had a shrine in their house; she could not sleep in the night and could not conceive. The family had visited every temple for help but it was all in vain. We were called in. We prayed and laid hands and anointed with oil. She was delivered, could sleep and conceived and gave birth to a baby boy.³⁶

We had a healing service in our church. I preached from the book of James and we laid hands on the sick. Two members were there on wheelchairs. They both came to be

³³ O.C. Edwards, *Luke's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 37.

³⁴ From an interview with Rev. David Mahon, Vendevijlpark, May 2013.

³⁵ From an interview with Rev. Frank Mahlaba, Limpopo Province, May 2013.

³⁶ From an interview with Rev. Rodney Pfeiffer, Durban, May 2013.

prayed for and one of them was healed. She is walking on her own, and many others testified to God's healing experience.³⁷

Recently, I was sick; no food could stay in my tummy. Our cell group prayed for me and the Lord healed me.³⁸

The practice of divine healing in the Church of the Nazarene in South Africa is influenced by worldview. Most black pastors avoid anointing with oil or external substances. Also, most growing churches have a healing ministry. Pastors from both African and Indian backgrounds spoke interchangeably about sickness and demon possession. There is a special emphasis on prayer in those churches. This is in conformity with Charles Nyamiti's hypothesis: "...God's kingdom which was brought by Christ through his healing ministry affects being holistically, by curing their physical, moral-spiritual, psycho-emotional, societal and ecological dimensions."³⁹

VI. Conclusion: Divine healing an integral part of holistic Gospel proclamation

The topic of divine healing continues to fascinate the Church of Jesus Christ generally, and specifically Nazarenes in Africa. James 5:13-18 provides an important part of the biblical rationale for praying for and anointing the sick, and particularly for tying the practice to the local congregation. Likewise, Nazarene Article of Faith XIV as it has developed across the years has preserved for the Church of the Nazarene a recognition that God still acts in power for bodily healing. For at least some Nazarene congregations in South Africa, this message and practice remains a part of our ecclesiastical heritage, and where it is being practiced, positive results have ensued. As a denomination in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, divine healing should remain part of our holistic proclamation that God addresses both spiritual *and* physical needs.

³⁷ From an interview with Rev. Elvis Mvulane, Eldorado Park, May 2013.

³⁸ From an interview with Rev. Dawie De Koker, Rustenburg, May 2013.

³⁹ Charles Nyamiti, *Studies in African Theology, Vol. 2* (Nairobi, Kenya: CUEA Publications, 2006), 149.

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