



Exploring the Ethical Intricacies of Christian Faith Healing Testimonies

Prof. Abraham Mbachirin

e-mail

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Msugh Theophilus, PhD

msughtheo@gmail.com

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Amos Basia Ossan

Amosobasia2@gmail.com

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Jacob Kauna Danboyi

talktokauna@gmail.com

Department of Christian Religious Studies, College of Education Akwanga, Nasarawa State

Abstract

This study is an exploration of ethical intricacies elicited by Christian Faith healing testimonies. These ethical intricacies concern questions of truth and validity, potential harm and the influence of healing testimonies on healthcare decisions. Christian faith healing is an act of getting wellness from illness mostly via prayer therapy. This act often leads to testimonies which are significant in improving the numeric strength of the Christian community, affirming believer's convictions, enforcing and validating religious authority and inspiration of believers. Using analytical and comparative methods, the study revealed that, the contemporary experiences in Christian healing space demonstrates a widespread staging and dissemination of false testimonies, fabricated, exaggerated, or strategically constructed narratives aimed at improving the image of religious leaders, attracting converts, and generating finances for the healing minister. This phenomenon is responsible for falsehood and unethical healthcare decisions by participants of Christian faith healing. The study accentuates the impossibility of using verification principle to ascertain the validity and truthfulness of Christian faith healing testimonies. It argued to the conclusion that the inability of using verification principle, subjective healing experiences and lack of medical history of testifiers are responsible for the potential misuse and promotion of unethical behavior such as falsehood within Christian faith healing spaces. The study recommends a need for reevaluation of causes of sickness in taking health care decision and a theocratic faith healing approach by participants of Christian faith healing and healing ministers.

Key words: Ethics, Verification Principle, Christian, Faith Healing and Testimonies

Introduction



Public Christian faith healing spaces are dominated by intriguing testimonies of various healing rituals. Literarily, these testimonies glorified God, the healing minister, healing spaces (ground) and healing ointments. In some cases, the testimonies glorify the work of the devil and his agents.

These have theological implications. However, our concern is on ethical intricacies such as the validity and truthfulness of these testimonies, as well as their influence on healthcare decisions. How can one truthfully verify these testimonies?

Historically, Christian faith healing is frequently connected with the work of biblical figures such as Elijah, Jesus, and Paul among others. Jesus treated bodily illnesses that were incurable. His healing deeds were regarded as extraordinary and amazing. One of the most intruding examples is the healing of a woman who had the flow of blood for 12 years (Mark 5:26–34). Suffice to mention that faith healing is not a prerogative of Christianity. Faith healing is also practice by other religious traditions. The Greeks were known for healing touches in the Asklepan temples as a remedy to sickness. Aristophanes talks of the use of hands in the Athenian city as a therapy for blindness (Laurien 37). However, Christian faith healing can be distinguished from other forms of religious healing in its appeal to Christ as the transcendent source of healing and prime symbol of personal and social integration (Amanda 9).

In contemporary society, many believe that Christian faith healing techniques are extremely helpful for treating, controlling, avoiding illnesses as well as a defensive mechanism against witches and forces of the enemy. There are testimonies of those who claimed to have been successfully healed of their medical issues, including infectious and non-infectious illnesses using Christian faith healing techniques. The validity and truthfulness of these claims demands attention due to its impact on health decisions.

Conceptual Clarification

Ethics

Etymologically, the English word “ethics” is derived from the ancient Greek word “*ethikos*” (relating to one’s character or behavior). Philosophers have provided different working definitions of ethics. However, there is no generally acceptable definition of ethics. Ethics has to do with the fundamental standards of human conduct and science of moral behaviour. It is the justification of moral values, attitude, and actions. It is a branch of moral philosophy that relates to the rightness and wrongness of human conduct and behaviour (Ali and Michael 18).

Ethics is an attempt to find the highest-order and most general reason which justifies all human actions and which explains completely and finally what makes an action right or wrong, good or bad (Aja 15). The word ethics affects how people live their lives, for life is an unbroken stream of decision-making and ethics are concerned with what is right or wrong for individuals and for the society.

Christian Faith Healing

Christian Faith healing is an act of getting wellness from illness mostly via prayer therapy. It involves laying of hands in prayer which is believed to evoke heavenly involvement in the affairs



of man. It can be described as a religious ritual that is aimed at bringing about wellness (Kinoti 666). This comprises economic, social, spiritual, political, psychological and mental well-being of physical and non-physical entities. It is a treatment route wherein God intervenes in ordinary and miraculous means to cure all forms of illness. Christian faith healing is a virtue that comes with embracing Christ's atonement upon the crucifixion (Cherry 4). This triangulates within spaces in the society as it is inclusive of animals, road, houses, farmlands, businesses, electronics, and cars among others. Christians pray eventually for everything that is capable of deviation from the normal seeking wellness.

Many religions of the world including Christianity claim that adequate and appropriate utilization of prayers and other sacred rituals can bring about wellness. This clearly demonstrates the presence of divine being and the power of faith (Levin 78). In Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church, faith healing involve prayers, pilgrimage, penance, laying on of hands, participating in sacraments, and venerating saints, relics, and icons. Through faith healing Christianity make people feel stronger and find relief and comfort is the personal relationship that believers experience with Christ (Amanda 10).

In Pentecostal and charismatic churches, Olugbade and Ayantayo (8) note that healing ministries primarily address physical ailments and emotional, social, and spiritual needs of participants offering congregants hope, faith reinforcement, and communal belonging. These faith healing ministries serve as theological anchor and a practical expression of pastoral care, attracting large followers to revival meetings, prayer camps, and anointed ministers. They understand faith healing as a continuation of biblical miracles and affirmation of the belief that every illness has spiritual connotation.

Christian Faith Healing Testimonies

The word testimony or *testimonio* entails a narration, a spoken or written text by a person about a recounted event. In contemporary philosophical discourse, the term testimony is used as a label for the spoken or written word with the purpose of passing the speaker's or writer's knowledge or experience to the listener. Sremac (65) notes that testimony is understood as the expression of one's own narrative identity. In the context of this study, the narration has to do with the condition of the testifiers before and after the healing process. It is the expression or account of his/her well-being.

Testimonies in Christian faith healing follows a pattern from negative or deteriorating state of wellness to a positive or improved health condition. For instance, the testimony of Bartimaeus, the blind man from Mark 10:46-52. In the Bible, testimonies seem to glorify the mysterious and miraculous work of God through health intervention. It is debatable whether Christian testimonies in contemporary society glorifies God or healing ministers.

Klaver (282) asserts that "testimony is a desire to attract a different formation of the self, a means of seduction, through a statement of the need for empathy, exoneration from the secret that hurts, and a desire to transform." Klaver's assertion stresses conversion testimonies by religious converts which are the telling and re-telling of stories through speech and behaviors that express a religious role.



In legal discourse, testimony is the principal conveyor of truth or the lack thereof. That is to say the absence of testimony is capable of conveying the truth, just as the availability of testimony. Epistemologically, testimony is used within narrow limits, suggesting a formal or legal setting (Sremac 66). Suffice to mention that testimony is not always evidence and is certainly not always given in courtrooms. It can be given and utilised beyond the legal framework. Ricoeur argues that “Testimony should be a philosophical problem and not limited to legal or historical context where it refers to the account of a witness who reports what he has seen,” (119).

Testimony involves dual relationship: the testifier (one who has seen) and the hearer (one who has not seen and must rely on what is heard). As a narrative story, it involves a statement made by a person and a belief assumed by another. The witness or testifier is the author with the responsibility of narrating personal experiences and shifting the discourse from the level of things seen to the level of things said (Ricoeur 123).

Ella and Uffe (213) understand healing testimonies as “written stories by or about a person who has experienced healing in connection with a religious event or practice.” Ella and Uffe position emphasis writing documentation and failed to aptly capture oral testimonies. While this omission maybe due to the scope of their study. It is important to note that Christian faith healing testimonies include written and oral stories about getting wellness through faith. However, connecting healing experiences with religious event or practices is germane in understanding or in the conceptual clarification of healing testimony.

Ella and Uffe discovered problems associated with testimonies in faith healing as they are selected, edited, and published (214-217). Consequently, the collection of testimonies and the editorial process most likely introduced biases in the published testimonies. Faith healing testimonies are important because they express the testifiers’ desire to support and promote charismatic beliefs. Extraordinary cases of faith healing testimonies have traditionally played a central role in the beatification and canonization of saints by the Roman Catholic Church.

Many written healing testimonies are thought to be filtered out in the process of documentation by a scientific commission who finally identifies a few individual cases that survive extensive scrutiny (Ella and Uffe 226). Shekinah et al (7) asserts that testimonies are commodified products within a broader system of religious performance and consumption. They serve as instrument in shaping belief and reinforcing the authority of religious leaders

Understanding Christian Faith Healing

Faith healing has been a reoccurring theme and practice throughout the history of Christianity. It can be traced to the miraculous healings by Jesus Christ and his disciples to the influential role of contemporary faith healing ministers. The theological and ethical understanding and practice of Christian faith healing varies across different denominations. The names of some Christian denominations and church ministries are directly linked to faith healing. However, our focus is on reviewing Christian faith healing from the Old and New Testament perspectives. This will lay foundation for understanding of ethical intricacies particularly of the validity and truthfulness of Christian faith healing testimonies.



In the Old Testament, Amanda (5) asserts that healing is about repentance and forgiveness of sin. Old Testament connect blessings of health, fertility, respect, and prosperity to repentance and forgiveness of sin by God of Israel. God chastised Israel for her sins and turned her toward repentance with punishments of sickness, barrenness, disgrace, and misery. The connection between sickness and sin is foundational to Christian faith healing. Christians understand forces of evil and sin as agents of disease.

Adamo (1-3) notes that, throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh is recognize as the healer of his Israel (Ex 15:26; Ezk 34:4; Jr 8:15). As a healer, Yahweh heals by means of materials or non-material techniques. The healing in the Old Testament by Yahweh was either direct or indirect (i.e through prophets). For instance, Yahweh directly healed Sarah of her barrenness in Genesis 18:11–14; 21:1–2. Indirect healing by prophets of the Old Testament was either by giving advice or by carrying out healing procedures themselves. For instance, Elisha advised Naaman, the Syrian army commander, to wash in the Jordan River and that led to the cure of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:1–14).

In the New Testament, Amanda (3) notes that Christian healing refers to cures accomplished in the name of Jesus Christ and through the agency of His Spirit and saints. Many Christians have testified to dramatic, and miraculous cures. Missionaries and theologians have often pointed to healings as evidence of the power of Christian faith and the truth of Christian doctrine. The gospel writers understood the healings performed by Jesus as caused by forces of evil and sin as agent of sickness, describing them as acts that defeated evil spirits.

Grundmann (242) notes that Jesus brought about healing in the New Testament: sometimes by physically touching the sick (Lk. 14; 1) or the sick touching Jesus (Mt.9:20-22; Mk. 5:25-34), while in other instances He applied some mud or saliva to the affected parts (John 9: 1-12). Jesus also exorcised unclean spirits by the power of His words (Mk. 1: 39; Mt. 4:23). He further explained that Jesus was not always demanding faith by those seeking wellness but sometimes, Jesus healed because of compassion for the sick (Mt. 9:35-36).

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus sent out His disciples with the charge “... to heal, giving them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases” (Luke 9: 1-2). He reiterated this charged during the great commissioning “...those who believe, by using his name will cast out demons ... and ... will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk. 16:15-18). The apostles adhered to these instructions as part of apostolic ministry.

Adetunji (50) observes that many Nigerian churches are known for faith healing. He gives an instance of Christ Apostolic Church which is renowned for the belief in miracles and healing through prayers and the use of water. Methodist Church in Nigeria has maintain a historic belief in holistic healing. Adetunji (51) notes that Ereko Methodist Church has a clinic where members go for check-up after Church service. i.e even after healing prayers would have been offered to verify that the body has received complete healing. This portrayed dualistic approach to holistic healing.



Generally, one of the major attraction to Pentecostal churches is the claim to faith healing, which serves to reaffirm the power of Jesus Christ. Healing of various spiritual and physical ailments is believed to be possible through a process of faith-based activities dictated by church leaders. These activities vary and range from prayers, exorcism, the laying of hands; to the use of water, oil and other religious symbols.

Verification Principle

One of the scientific methods of ascertaining truth and validity of a statement is by the use of verification principle. The Verification Principle, as advocated by Logical Positivists states that, a “statement is meaningful only if it is verifiable through sensory experience or true by definition” (Michael 1). Verification principle was propounded by logical positivist or logical empiricist better known in philosophy of science as Vienna Circle Philosophers. Prominent among these philosophers was Alfred Jules Ayer. Many contemporary philosophical discourse of logical positivism are link to A.J Ayer. A.J. Ayer argues that only empirically verifiable or analytically statements are true (meaningful). Thus differentiating truthful statements from false or meaningless statements. Meaningless statements are statements that are not empirically verifiable or analytical (Anetoh 132).

Contextually, the principle would deem many Christian faith healing testimonies’ claims meaningless because there are often no empirical evidence and not true by definition. This principle of differentiating between meaningless and meaningful statements clearly demarcate scientific method of verifying truth from non-science methods (Anetoh 132). The study argues that the inability to subject non-scientific disciplines to verification principle has contributed to the promotion of falsehood especially within Christian faith healing. If Christian faith healing testimonies are subjected to verification principle scrutiny, it will drastically reduce the fake testimonies, commodification of testimonies and glorification of healing ministers

If subjected to verification principle, the criterion of testing the genuineness of Christian faith healing testimonies would be the criterion of verifiability. That is, Christian faith healing testimonies will be factually significant to any given person, if and only if, he or she knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express. Ogar et’al (72) assert that the ability to attain truth and cognitive meaningfulness, through verification principle must be designed and coded in observation and experimentation”. It may be argued that religious language attempts to capture something of religious experience and observation. However, such experiences cannot be empirically demonstrated (Michael 2).

Critics argued that A.J Ayer’s verification principle distort and delimits the task of science which is to depict reality holistically and explain the cosmos in its totality. This view holds that, the universe and reality as a whole is composed of physical and non-physical, observable and non-observable categories (Ogar et al 74). This understanding can be applied to Christian faith healing testimonies as well. This will reduce ethical intricacies entangled in Christian faith healing testimonies. Christian healing ministers should subject Christian faith healing testifiers to verification principle by encouraging them to get a medical report before testifying in public. This is not lack of faith but ‘faith seeking understanding’.



Ethical Intricacies of Christian Healing Testimonies

One of the most reoccurring ethical issues in the discourse of Christian faith healing testimonies concern the validity and truthfulness of such claims. Truthfulness and validity of healing testimonies are complex ethical issues because such claims are subjective personal accounts and not always scientifically verifiable facts. Validating Christian faith healing testimonies involves assessing credibility through verifiable details, examining the testimony's alignment with Christian scripture and teachings, considering spiritual discernment, and recognizing the subjective and anecdotal nature of personal healing accounts.

Julie (284) connects the discussion of Validity of Christian healing testimonies as an ethical issue to emergence and growth of Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements. Globally, there has been an explosive growth of Pentecostalism and Charismatic movement in Africa, Asia, and Latin America thereby encouraging the proliferation of different Christian faith healing ministries. This phenomenon led to increasing demand and supply of genuine and fake healing within the Christendom. Julie (285) argues that many places like China, Korea, and India, Christian faith healing has been accompanied by the rapid growth of Christianity across denominations.

In Nigeria, Shekinah et al (17) asserts that the ethical intricacies of Christian faith healing testimonies is related to the trend of “widespread staging and dissemination of false testimonies fabricated, exaggerated, or strategically constructed narratives aimed at enhancing the image of religious leaders, attracting converts, and generating financial support”. This phenomenon has continued to gain public acceptance due to lack of verifiability of such claims. Religious leaders involved in such unethical practices are good at connecting everything faith to the spiritual aspect of life, totally neglecting the physical manifestation of faith healing or the need for scientific and empirical verification. This fake healing ministers will continue the exploitation of people seeking faith-based healthcare as long as verification principle is neglected. Uncritical acceptance of testimonies in religious programming often results in misinformation, spiritual manipulation, and exploitation, especially of vulnerable populations (Shekinah et al 22).

Aside the ethical issue of the validity and truthfulness of Christian faith healing testimonies, it is germane to understand how such claims affect healthcare decisions of Christians. Akpenpuun (39-40) found that Christian testifiers of faith healing often associate the cause of their illnesses to sin or evil spiritual forces thereby making the sick patient feel that the medical illness is a punishment from God or the enemy. This is substantiated by the claim that devout religious faith is a pathway to good health and protection from all diseases.

Consequently, lack of devout religious faith is harmful to the sick person because the patient believes that the illness has come upon him/her as a result of lack of devotion and thereby affect how the patient views the sickness, treatment modalities and gaining good health. Adebayo (11), asserts that “over 80% of Nigerians incorporate religious practices into their health management routines, regardless of their socio-economic status or educational background”. This statistic highlights the significant impact that religious beliefs such as faith healing testimonies have on healthcare choices, encompassing everything from preventive measures to treatment options.



Oyebanji (103) notes that many Nigerians believe that illnesses have spiritual causes, such as ancestral curses, personal sins, or spiritual attacks. These beliefs are not innate but are learned and reinforced through religious teachings, communal narratives, and family traditions, key elements of social construction. The learning and enforcement of such claims are fueled by faith healing testimonies. The explain why patients may prefer faith healing over hospital treatment or delay seeking professional care in favour of prayer sessions or deliverance ministries (104).

Conclusion

Christian faith healing techniques are extremely helpful for treating, controlling, avoiding illnesses as well as a defensive mechanism against witches and forces of the enemy. There are testimonies of those who claimed to have been successfully healed of their medical issues, including infectious and non-infectious illnesses using Christian faith healing techniques. However, staging and dissemination of false testimonies fabricated, exaggerated, or strategically constructed narratives aimed at enhancing the image of religious leaders, attracting converts, and generating financial support is unethical and should be discourage. Christian faith healing testimonies should not be used as commodities but as a means of glorifying God.

Recommendations

Sequel to the above discussion, the study recommends that;

- i. There is a need for reevaluation of causes of sickness by Christians. This is because sickness is not always caused by enemies or a repercussion of sinful life. This will help in healthcare decisions.
- ii. Christian faith healing testimonies should be subjected to verification principle as this will help in reducing fake, fabricated and exaggerated testimonies.
- iii. Christian faith healers should recognize the place of God in faith healing testimonies and disabuse their mind of self-glorification.

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