

Divine Healing Experience among Black Apostolic Women

Valeria A. Russ¹

Abstract

This article focused on the healing experiences related to Apostolic faith, practices and attachment theory. Qualitative data were collected from personal communications of Apostolic Black women and their experiences with divine healing. The article discusses the distinction between the Pentecostal beliefs compared to Apostolic beliefs. The article points to the unwavering belief in healing as outlined in the Bible and the result of that belief and the relationship between religion and healing.

Keywords: Apostolic, Pentecostalism, divine healing, tenets, attachment

1. Introduction

This research was developed from a personal interest and commitment as an Apostolic Black woman. Aware of the struggles and conflicts experienced by Black women's devotion to faith, the teaching set the foundation for many Black women in the Apostolic faith. Building on the teaching of Apostolic and the relationship with God, the resilience of Apostolic Black women when faced with life threatening diagnoses give insight to the attachment and strong relationship with God. This research setting is real life stories of faith, relationship and belief in God as a Father, Friend, and Savior from the perspective of Apostolic Black women. Apostolic originated from Pentecostalism a form of Christianity, which will be discussed later in the research.

The topic of religion, health, and healing has received a lot of attention over the years. Cartledge (2013) examined the perceived relationship of God's love and healing; Hinderaker (2018) examined prayer of faith and healing; Azia, et, al., (2023) examined the role of religious beliefs among Pentecostal Christians living with HIV. These studies indicate a more positive than negative relationship between religious beliefs and health. Although there is a dearth of research that supports faith and healing among Pentecostals and other religions, there is little research on the insistent beliefs of faith, healing and attachment relationship among Apostolic, particularly Black women. The aim of this paper is to focus on influence of faith, divine healing and relationship attachment by exploring the faith stories provided by four Apostolic Black women.

Studies have explored how individual differences in attachment influence lives (Hart, 2010; Joung, 2006). Researchers have also explored the relationship between attachment and faith (McDonald, et, al., 2005; TenElshof & Furrow, 2000), suggesting the secure attachment infants develop toward caregivers resemble the same type of secure attachment believer develop toward God.

2. Attachment

Developed by Bowlby (1973) attachment theory emphasizes the infant – caregiver attachment relationship. Attachment theory suggests the quality of care given by the caregiver can influence the child's behavior. Expanding on this idea Ainsworth 1973; Ainsworth et al., 1978) developed the Strange Situation, a model that identified three patterns of attachment, secure (infants are distressed when caregivers depart but comforted upon their return); anxious-ambivalent (infants show stress when caregivers depart and return) and anxious-avoidant (infants are undisturbed by the caregiver departure and shows no interest upon their return). Attachment theory gives the notion that children develop belief and expectations about the caregiver's availability and responsiveness to their needs and this sets the guide for future behavior, emotional and psychological responses (Joung, 2006). The same concept is used regarding faith as an attachment relationship. The Black Apostolic women in this study speak of their faith as a personal relationship with God. God gives comfort,

¹Valeria A. Russ, Fayetteville State University, 1200 Murchinson Rd., Fayetteville, NC 28311, United States.
vruss@uncfsu.edu

support and provides security; therefore, their attachment to God provides them with comfort, peace and confidence.

3. Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is a Christian movement that began in the early part of the 20th century (Robbins, 2021). Pentecostals make up one fourth of the Christians in the world (Gunther Brown, 2011). The core doctrine that distinguishes Pentecostals from other Christian denominations is the belief in the restoration of baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues (Dein, 2020). Pentecostalism emphasizes the Holy Spirit's power to heal physically and psychologically (Dein, 2020). Gunther Brown (2011) suggests Pentecostalism is more than a religious movement that emphasizes healing, but healing is key to the movement of Pentecostals. Even though there are key components among all Pentecostals, there are however, some divisions among doctrine. From the beginning many Pentecostal denominations were fragmented and divided on matters of doctrine and practice, such as, speaking in tongues, gifts of the Spirit and trinitarian versus oneness of God. Due to doctrinal disputes, the Apostolic movement began [African American Pentecostal and Holiness Collection, 1998]. The term Apostolic refers to teaching the same doctrine that Jesus and His Apostles taught (Robbins, 2021).

4. Apostolici

Apostolici are sometimes referred to as Apostolic Pentecostals; however, there are a few key differences in the belief system of Pentecostals and Apostolici (Robbins, 2021). First, people who are Apostolic believe that baptism is only valid if it is performed "in the name of Jesus" (King James Bible, 1416/2004, Acts 2:38), opposed to "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (King James Bible, 598/2004, Matthew 28:19). Second, Pentecostals believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, in which there is one God who is eternally existent in three forms, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. While Pentecostals acknowledge this to be a mystery, they maintain that God is one in essence, manifested in three forms. Whereas people who are Apostolic believe, God is one in every sense of the word. There is no difference between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, believing that each is simply a manifestation of Jesus. Lastly, Pentecostals believe in baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues; however, most Pentecostals believe this experience to be separate from salvation. Pentecostals believe that salvation occurs when you accept Jesus Christ as savior, basing this belief on John 3:16 and similar passages of Scripture. Apostolici teach that to be saved, you must repent of your sins, be baptized by immersion in water in Jesus' name, and be baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues (King James Bible, 1416/2004, Acts 2:38).

5. Healing

Apostolici believe that all the spiritual gifts, including healing continue to operate in the Church in the present age. Healing is a vital component of all religious systems, and the aim is to restore health and wholeness and to alleviate suffering (Dein, 2020). Healing is one of the most important aspects of the gospel, Apostolici consider Jesus among other things, a Healer. Reasons given are that healing is written in the Bible and healing is part of salvation (Onyiah, 2013). As one follows the teachings of the Apostles, based on Biblical application healing does not only result in spiritual healing but also socio-emotional and physical healing (Poloma, 1998).

Apostolici believe and hold fast to the concept of divine healing through obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, faith in His name and His blood for sickness, diseases, and infirmities. It is believed that healing takes place in various ways:

- (1) The laying on of hands, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (King James Bible, 721/2004, James 5:14-15).
- (2) By serving and obeying God "And you shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread, thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee" (King James Bible, 66/2004, Exodus 23:25).
- (3) By confession and living a righteous life "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (King James Bible, 720/2004, James 5:6).
- (4) Simply asking and believing it will be given "Therefore I say unto you, what things so ever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (King James Bible, 586/2004, Mark 11:24).

(5) Miraculous supernatural intervention “The Lord supports me on my sickbed; He completely heals me from my illness” (King James Bible, 330/2004, Psalm 41:3).

6. Tenet of Divine Healing

A tenet is a principle or belief which a person holds or maintains as true. The following case studies are a collection of tenets reported by Black women who identify as Apostolic who have experience divine healing.

At the age of 33 Carolyn had her annual mammogram. The results showed abnormal spots on her right breast. Her physician recommended that she follow-up in 10 days for a repeat x-ray and biopsy. Carolyn stated, when she received the information, she immediately went into prayer. While in prayer, God told her to pray and anoint her breasts with oil for 7 days. She followed the divine instructions and returned to the doctor after 10 days. She was given another x-ray and prepared for the biopsy; however, the second x-ray was absent of any abnormalities. Her physician compared the initial x-ray and the most recent to confirm abnormalities were present in the initial x-ray. He expressed to Carolyn his astonishment and was unclear what happened; he informed her, given the results of the second x-ray, there was no need for a biopsy. Carolyn is now 68 years old and believes that divine healing took place because from the age of 33 to 68 her mammograms have been normal. She said because of her relationship with God she was confident He would take care of her needs. She said, “He is my Father, my relationship with him is just as real as a biological father.” (Carolyn, personal communication, March 2, 2022).

Ann reported that one day she was suddenly stricken with stomach pain; she thought it was due to food poisoning; but after examination by doctors in the emergency room it was found that she had a 5-pound mass was found in her abdomen. The physicians informed Ann she would need immediate surgery. Ann contacted believers from her church community to pray on her behalf and began to pray for herself. Her prayer was to give the doctor’s guidance in the surgery, and total healing afterwards. The surgery took approximately 6 hours and was successful. The pathology report showed the mass contained cancer cells; however, none of the cancer cells were released from the mass. The surgical team expressed their amazement that the mass had not ruptured and ultimately caused cancer to spread. One physician hypothesized the mass had been growing an extensive amount of time to be that size. Additionally, the physicians were in awe that Ann had not experienced any symptoms from the growth. The physician stated, in previous cases, patients experienced excruciating pain, in ability to use the restroom, or at least some discomfort; however, Ann did not experience any of the symptoms. Ann believes that miraculous healing occurred because the mass was there for a long time, it did not rupture, and she never once had a symptom. She said, although she had to have surgery, she believes God gave the surgical team the ability and skills needed to perform the surgery successfully. She said she has fully recovered and does not have any complications from the surgery (Ann., personal communication, October 16, 2023).

While in a rehabilitation facility Jackie suddenly began to feel sick, she was in an exuberant amount of pain. She was sent to the hospital and diagnosed with pancreatitis. Jackie said she was in so much pain it seemed like the medications did not help so she began to pray. Jackie said, “for me pray is a way of life; it’s all I know how to do.” She said as she lay in the hospital bed, riddled with pain, she began to reflect over her life. Jackie said, “In that moment I realized that nothing mattered, there was nothing in the world that mattered more than seeing Jesus.” She said she reflected on her academic accomplishments, her certification in water treatment, her Associate of Arts degree in environmental engineering, her Bachelor of Science in math and none of it mattered to her. She said suddenly, she went into a place of peace, mentally, spiritually and psychologically she felt an overwhelming peace. She said light was all around her; not as most think of the white light that people walk toward, but a brightness and the more she felt at peace the less pain she felt. Jackie said she told herself that when she woke up the next morning she would be in heaven and the thought of that made her so very happy. She said the next morning her brother Jessie called her and when she answered the phone, he asked her “what are you trying to do?” She asked him “what do you mean?” Jessie told her that God spoke to him and told him, “Jackie is asking to die, and if you don’t pray for her right now, I will take her.” Jessie began to pray that his sister lives and the Lord granted his request. She said she realized that even though she was ready to go; God still has work for her to complete here. Now, she is doing well, she is now walking better, has no pain, and she is still experiencing the same level of peace. She is not afraid to die when the time comes and knows that God healed her from her affliction because she has an assignment. When her assignment is complete, she is excited to go to that place of peace (personal communication, December 30, 2023).

February 1986, my spouse and I took our baby girl, 4-year-old Charity, to the doctor because we found blood and pieces of flesh on her pillow when she woke up. She was prescribed antibiotics; however, every morning there would be blood and pieces of flesh on the pillow. She complained constantly of her throat hurting. Finally, the doctors said she would need surgery to remove her tonsils and adenoids, this was on a Friday. We were scheduled to take Charity in for surgery on Monday. While riding home, Charity began to say, “I’m not going to

have surgery, God is going to heal me.” Our family believes in prayer, we have always taught our children to pray and believe God. My husband and I agreed, if Charity believed she would be healed, then so would we. During the weekend we watched Charity’s pillow and there was no blood and no flesh. We returned to the doctor on Monday, and they found no reason for her to have surgery. Today, Charity is 42 years old, she still has her tonsils and adenoids. We choose to believe in every word of God, He is our Father, and we will always follow Him (personal communication, February 9, 2024).

7. Conclusion

The divine healing experienced by an Apostolic believer is remarkable. It comes with the same excitement as a child taking their first steps. For an Apostolic believer, relationship with God is a lifestyle with no end, it lasts forever. Faith is a tool that leads to a deep sincere fellowship with God. An Apostolic believer with a divine healing experience is equipped and ready to help others open and experience God because it is understood that God is always ready to help. In addition, the relationship the believer has with God is very much the same relationship most people have with their friends, parents, and lovers. Apostolics see God as their care-giver, which allows this research to be examined from the attachment theory.

From the literature, there are clear implications for relationship and attachments between religion and healing across many denominations, including Pentecostals. There is limited or no discussion for divine healing among Black women who identify as Apostolic. The study advances research in religion, attachment and healing by taking the spirituality of Apostolic Black women and their experiences of divine healing. In addition, it shows the seriousness of the Apostolic faith, relationship with God and its role in the healing process.

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