

DISCERNING THE WORK OF GOD IN HEALING ON VANUATU: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE AKEY PEOPLE ON THE ISLAND OF ESPIRITU SANTO

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ABSTRACT

Christianity was introduced to the Akey People almost 100 years ago. Despite the presence of the gospel, many people are still living double lives. It is discouraging to see that people, who regularly attend church services on Sunday and participate in other church activities, are still involved in traditional healing. Because of their allegiance to the Christian community, those who practice traditional healing adopt the name of Jesus, with the result that they practice a Christo-pagan form of healing.

The Christo-pagan practice of healing is practised in the churches. Satan imitates the genuine "gift of healing" (1 Cor 12:9), including visions and dreams, and gives to his servants, the Christo-pagan healers, counterfeit gifts of the Holy Spirit. The situation has greatly disturbed God's people. Many have been led astray from their faith, and others are left with the erroneous conclusion that, because healing is being performed, the power must be of God.

The goal of this paper is to guide the Akey people, both ordinary Christians and church leaders on the island of Santo in Vanuatu, to discern the work of God in healing. As Merrill F. Unger urges:

In the age-end upsurge of deluding demonism and diabolic miracle, it is high time for all God's born-again children to claim the genuine spiritual gift of "discerning of spirits" (1 Cor 12:10) and to see through popular occult healing methods and movements of our day. Otherwise they too run

the risk of being taken in by every religiously-camouflaged act where the demonic masquerades as the divine.¹

This study unpacks and compares three different methods of healing, the traditional, biblical, and Christo-pagan. It makes a critical evaluation of the Christo-pagan methods of healing, and finishes with pastoral recommendations which conclude with a few practical guidelines on how to discern the work of God.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The issue to be addressed in this study is found all over Vanuatu. This study, however, will only focus on the island of Espiritu Santo, particularly among the Akey people, due to the author's familiarity with that people group. It is instructive to start by informing ourselves about those places.

Zone of the Study

The Republic of Vanuatu is made up of 90 islands, and is divided into six provinces (see Figure 1). Vanuatu is situated in the South Pacific Ocean, at a distance of "some 1,750 kilometres (1,090 miles) east of northern Australia, 500 kilometres (310 miles) northeast of New Caledonia, and is west of Fiji, and southeast of the Solomon Islands, near New Guinea".² The population of Vanuatu is around 243,304, according to the 2009 census.³

The predominant religion on Vanuatu is Christianity, which consists of several denominations. It was estimated that Christianity accounts for about 94.08 percent; with ethnoreligionist, 3.4 percent; Baha'i, 1.8 percent; non-religious, 0.5 percent; Buddhist, 0.17 percent; and Muslim, 0.05 percent.⁴ Vanuatu has at least 105 languages. In addition, "Vanuatu's constitution establishes Bislama (also spelt Bichlamar) as the national

¹ Merrill F. Unger, "Divine Healing", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July 1971), pp. 234-244.

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu>, accessed April 7, 2014.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7th edn, Colorado Springs CO: Biblica Publishing, 2010, p. 876.

language, and English and French as official languages”.⁵ The Republic of Vanuatu is a parliamentary democracy,⁶ with a Westminster-style constitution.⁷

Espiritu Santo

The focus of this study will be on the island, which was first visited by the Portuguese navigator, Fernandes de Queiros, in 1605, which he named Espiritu Santo, which means “the Land of the Holy Spirit”.⁸ Espiritu Santo is the largest island of the group. It covers a surface of approximately 4,010 square km,⁹ and has a population of 45,855,¹⁰ according to the 2009 census. It forms a province by itself called Sanma (see Figure 1).

⁵ Franco Zocca, “Case studies: Melanesia, Vanuatu”, in *Globalisation and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*, Manfred Ernst, ed., Suva Fiji: Pacific Theological College, 2006, p. 212.

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu>, accessed April 7, 2014.

⁷ Zocca, “Case studies”, p. 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ <http://vanuatu.travel/index.php/en/discover-the-islands/espirtu-santo>, accessed May 2, 2014.

¹⁰ *Census of Population and Housing: 2009 Basic Tables Report*, Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2009, p. 11.

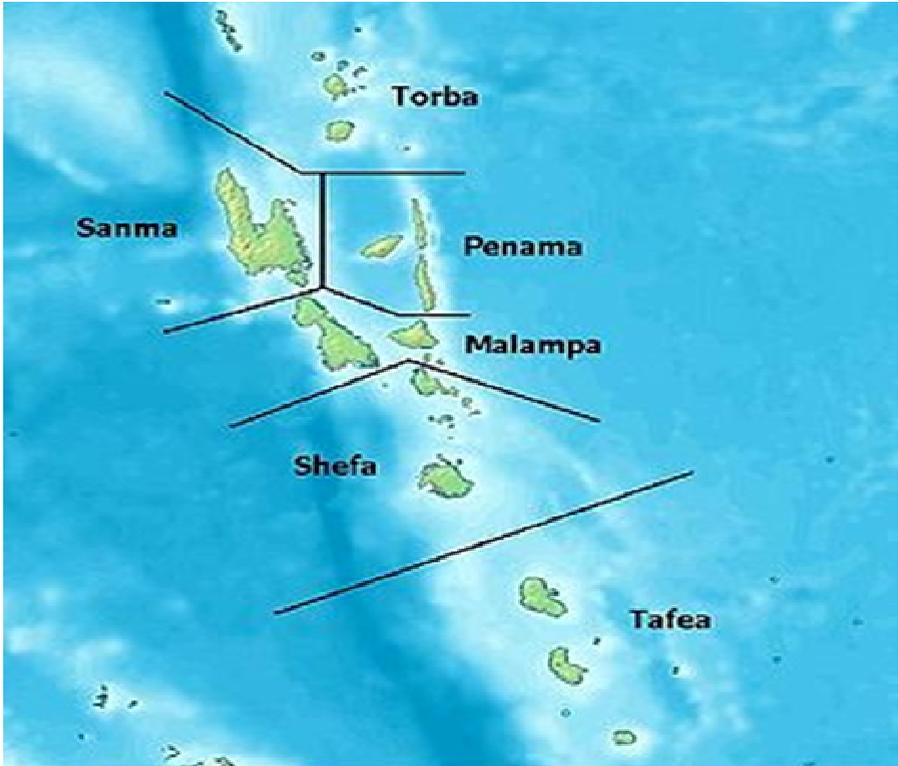


Figure 1: The map of Vanuatu¹¹

The Akey people, who occupy the southern and western part of the island, and into the interior of the island, are the people chosen for our study (see Figure 2). This group of people has rich cultural values, which are rarely studied by anthropologists and, therefore, are not widely known. As a product of those beautiful cultural values, it interested the author to study the practices of his own people, in order to distinguish areas which, in the light of God's word, contribute to the maintenance of the spiritual welfare of people, together with those who need to be transformed.

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu>, accessed April 7, 2014.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

In 1 Cor 12:4-11 Paul teaches that healing is one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians for building up the body of Christ, the church. Healing in the name of Jesus is common in the New Testament, but today it raises many questions in the Evangelical church of Vanuatu, particularly among the Akey people on the Island of Santo.



Figure 2: The map of Espiritu Santo¹²

¹² www.hemamaps.com.au, accessed April 7, 2014.

Since we (Melanesians) have an integrated worldview, believing in spirits has influenced our spiritual practices and beliefs. This worldview causes much confusion and many problems which need to be cleared up. God's precious gift of healing has been abused, because it is not exercised under the influence and authority of the Holy Spirit, but under the influence and authority of the spirits. There is a mixture of healing practices which combine some biblical and traditional practical aspects. Many Akey people believe them to be equal in power and, therefore, use both. In other cases, there is more focus on traditional healing, in the name of Christ, which makes it look Christian, but really it is Christo-pagan in practice. One of the most challenging issues among the leaders and members of the Evangelical church of Vanuatu is to differentiate between which healings are from God and which are not, because some people are performing traditional healings under the banner of Christianity. This reminds us of Paul's warning, "For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:14-15b). Furthermore, Jesus warns

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt 7:21-23).

In other words, Jesus warns there will be people performing healing in his name who are not Christians. Their works aim to counterfeit the good works of God. That is a problem that we can find all over Vanuatu, particularly among the Akey people.

Amid the deep confusion among Christians concerning healing, whether done purely in the name of Jesus or not, the proper place for seeking healing needs clarification. To settle the issue and the confusion at hand, the scriptures advise, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). In that regard, this paper is titled "Discerning the work of God on healing in Vanuatu". Since we have "the ability to distinguish between spirits" (1 Cor 12:10), the purpose of this

research is to help us to discern the work of God in so-called gifts of healing which people use and claim to be done in the name of Jesus. In other words, the aim of this paper is to “test the spirits” and “distinguish between the spirits” that sometimes counterfeit the gift of God, the gift of healing. The big question to be explored is, “On what basis can it be decided whether healing is done in the name of Jesus or not?” To accomplish this research, we will be exploring the customary concept of traditional healing and the biblical understanding of healing, and using them to evaluate the Christo-pagan methods of healing in order to find out their basis and make a recommendation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Some key questions need to be raised in order to guide the research to achieve its purpose. What is the customary concept of traditional healing among the Akey people? What is the Christian understanding of biblical healing? What is the understanding and practice of syncretistic Christo-paganism on healing? What are the differences and similarities found among the Christo-pagan, traditional, and biblical understandings of healing? What should be the recommendations on healing practices?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed in this research is mainly literature based: archival research on books, articles, and journals, which are available in the library, and relevant information from the internet. The resources used must be helpful in the following areas of my research: cultural, anthropological, and biblical study. Lastly, as one of the Akey people, my own experience and observations will be a valuable resource.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

A delimiting factor is that this study will be restricted to archival research, due to time and financial constraints for proper field research. Other delimiting factors are that this study will only focus on supernatural healing and the Akey people on the island of Santo. Another limiting factor is that there are limited written resources on Akey culture.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

There are several Akey terms, used in customary healing, that need to be defined:

1. *Vavauli/Tivetivesae* mean the same thing. They refer to a confession made to the healer by the sick person of what laws of nature or law of society they have transgressed.
2. *Avuavuti/Vurevure* mean the same thing. This is the first stage of the process of healing, and means “dust out something”, such as objects taken from the body, in the belief that the angry spirit had used them to inflict pain in the body.
3. *Liliji* is the second stage of the process of healing and means “tying and removing” the spirit who is causing the disease.
4. *Maomao* means “breath”. It is a practice of invoking the healing spirits to give breath and life to a sick person.
5. *Papalani/Lalaoni* mean the same thing. It is the first step of *maomao* and refers to a practice of putting the incanted leaves on the fire and then rubbing them on the body.
6. *Suvisuvi* is the second step of *maomao*. It is a practice of spitting over the whole body of the patient with incanted water.
7. *Kavokavo* is the last step of *maomao*. It means “squeezing something to drink” with an incantation spoken over it.
8. *Christo-pagan healing* is traditional healing practices done in the name of Jesus.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will be useful for church leaders and ordinary Christians in Vanuatu so that they might discern the genuine work of God amid the diverse approaches to healing, in particular the Christo-pagan practices of healing.

SUMMARY

This section has presented the background of the study. Although the issue to be addressed is found all over Vanuatu, this study will only focus on the Akey people on the island of Espiritu Santo. The purpose of the study was also highlighted. Due to the rise of counterfeit miracles experienced in the churches, this paper seeks to provide a tool for church leaders and ordinary Christians in Vanuatu to be able to discern between the devil’s imitation of supernatural gifts, particularly in healing, and the Holy Spirit’s gift of healing. To accomplish this goal, a few research questions were raised to guide the study. Furthermore, other parameters of the study were mentioned for consideration, such as the methodology to undertake the study, the limitations and delimitations of study, and the definition of terms. We now move on to the second section in which we will survey the customary concept of traditional healing.

CUSTOMARY CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL HEALING

This section aims to survey the traditional concept of healing among the Akey people. It will help us to understand how and why traditional healing is practised. Paul Hiebert sets out a common formula, which is found in most folk religious practices, when dealing with misfortune (see Table 1).

Adversity	à	Choose a belief system to explain it	à	Diagnose the cause, using this system	à	Select a remedy, and apply it
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Table 1: Formula for folk religious practices¹³

This is the same pattern found in the Akey context. In saying that, in this section we will be covering the following areas: the Akey worldview, the role of a diviner, and the role of a traditional healer.

AKEY ANIMISTIC WORLDVIEW

In order to have a good grasp of the concept of traditional healing of the Akey people, it is important to look first at their worldview. Kenneth McElhanon explains that a worldview is “a constellation of assumptions

¹³ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1999, p. 141.

and beliefs about what is real, how things fit together, and how things happen”.¹⁴ Hiebert adds that a worldview will “clothe these beliefs systems with an aura of certainty that this is, in fact, the way reality is. They are the fundamental givens with which people in a community think, not what they think about.”¹⁵ A worldview is a driving force for all belief systems and practices in life. In this section, we will discuss the holistic life, malevolent and benevolent spirits, and the causes of diseases.

The Holistic Life

In Akey cosmology, life is viewed holistically. “There is no dichotomy of secular and sacred, animate and inanimate, living and dead.”¹⁶ They have an integrated worldview. This is in line with how Marilyn Rowsome describes the Melanesian worldview: “There is a total view of life, rather than life seen as a number of separate compartments. The real world consists of the supernatural and natural, the physical and non-physical, the living and dead. Man is immersed in this integrated world, and lives in vital relationship with all its parts.”¹⁷ Therefore, for all events in life people have to trace different avenues to find the root causes, in order to fix them. For example, in the case of sickness, instead of asking “What caused the sickness?” Melanesian people always ask, “Who caused the sickness?” or “What did we do wrong which brought upon us this disaster?” because they view everything as an integrated whole. Mary Douglas supports this:

The cosmos is turned in, as it were, on man. Its transforming energy is threaded onto the lives of individuals, so that nothing happens in the way of storms, sickness, blights, or droughts, except in virtue of these personal links. So, the universe is man-centred, in the sense that it must be interpreted in reference to humans.¹⁸

¹⁴ Kenneth A. McElhanon, “Worldview”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, A. Scott Moreau, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2000, pp. 1032-1033.

¹⁵ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 40.

¹⁶ Marilyn Rowsome, “Melanesian Traditional Religion”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17.2 (2001), p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, p. 85, quoted in Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 80.

In the quest to find answers or solutions, different beliefs and practices emerge. This is the beginning of a religious order. People are devoted to that order in what they do, in their ways of thinking, and in their whole beings.¹⁹

Malevolent and Benevolent Spirits

As we have seen, in Akey cosmology the spiritual world and the material world belong together, so the vital relationship between them has to be maintained in order to have a good life. Two categories of spirits are experienced in Akey cosmology: the malevolent and the benevolent.

Malevolent spirits are the spirits of those whose lives were taken violently through undignified circumstances. “Malevolent spirits are dangerous to human beings. They are the ones responsible for sickness, death, barrenness among women, and other major misfortune.”²⁰ The second sort of malevolent spirits are territorial spirits. The Akey people refer to these as red/black spirits or red/black men. A person can be controlled by those spirits, and a person can use them to do sorcery and to poison other people. These spirits can also attack anyone who trespasses or misbehaves in their territory. Their aim is only to destroy human life.

Benevolent spirits can be divided into two categories, the spirits of the ancestors and the healing spirits. In the first category are the spirits of the ancestors “who seek to protect and prosper their progeny”.²¹ In the second category are the healing spirits which the Akey people always refer to as white spirits or white men. The traditional healers consult these spirits for advice on remedies for healing the particular diseases that they are dealing with. These spirits are considered more powerful than the malevolent spirits, for they are used to counter the activities of the malevolent spirits.

In light of this worldview, nothing happens by accident in the Akey world. There has to be a cause for every event. This agrees with what Hiebert says

¹⁹ Ellison Suri, “Religious Experience in Traditional Melanesian Cultures”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 2.1 (1986), p. 32.

²⁰ Lionel Tom, “A Biblical Response to Divination in the Churches Among the Akey People on the Island of Santo in Vanuatu”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 30.1 (2014), p. 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*

about folk religions: “Because most events of life are explained in relational terms, people spend much of their time trying to appease and coerce the gods, spirits, ancestors, and other people with offerings and bribes to gain their help and turn aside their anger”.²²

Causes of Disease

The Akey people interpret the events which happen in life based on their integrated worldview, in which the spiritual world and the material world belong together, and, where proper relationship is maintained and respected.

In order to find out the causes of any misfortune, for example, or any sickness, Akey people always raise questions beginning with “who” instead of “what.” For example, “Who caused this sickness?” or “Who offended the spirits which caused the sickness?”, or “Who broke the social taboos which resulted in this sickness?”, instead of “What caused the sickness?”

Those questions, which begin with “who”, imply that the sickness is the result of a breach of the relationship between people and their surroundings (other people, nature, and the supernatural). With that concept in mind, assumptions are made about what caused the sickness. First, they assume that the sickness was probably caused by a person, which means a sorcerer may have attacked the sick person, or a poisoner may have poisoned him. Second, they may assume the sickness was probably caused by spirits, as mentioned above, because people offended them, either by trespassing or by misbehaving in their territory.²³ Third, sickness is probably the result of a breach of social norms, such as stealing, quarrelling, sexual sins, and so on. It is believed that a breach of social norms disturbs the guardian spirit, such as the spirit of the ancestors, which then inflicts diseases. Fourth, sickness may be caused by the guardian spirit of the environment, as when

²² Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 141.

²³ Stephen N. Ezeanya, “God, Spirits, and the Spirit World”, in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Kwesi A. Dickson, Paul Ellingworth, eds, London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1969, p. 36. Stephen Ezeanya states, “The similar belief is found among the Igbo-speaking people of southern Nigeria. The spirits can topple the order of the world as a punishment for man’s offences, but man has ways and means of preventing this, or restoring the order when upset.”

people are not respecting nature, such as destroying forest and animals for no reason.

Unlike the “what” question, which scientists use to advance their research, to find out what parasites cause a particular sickness, and provide a scientific remedy, the Akey people investigate “who” caused the sickness. They want to determine who is not maintaining and respecting a relationship with his surroundings and to restore relationship. To avoid any misfortunes in life, a “man must be in right relationships with others, nature, and the supernatural”.²⁴ For the Akey people, sickness is viewed as a result of a broken relationship between others, nature, and the supernatural. In order to restore relationship with his surroundings, which include other people, nature, and the supernatural, a religious activity is required, because spiritual powers and beings have to be dealt with. So, in these cases, diviners or traditional healers are consulted.

DIVINERS

When dealing with an unusual incident, such as sickness, sudden death, and so on, the first person who the Akey people often consult for guidance is a diviner. He is a trusted figure in the society to guide them on what to do, and to whom to go for extra help. In this section we will consider the role of a diviner and the methods used by the diviner to obtain guidance.

The Diviner’s Role

In folk religion, a diviner is a religious specialist, spiritually powerful, and well trained to deal with the spirits. Through careful ritual performances, his purpose is to seek hidden knowledge.²⁵ The role of a diviner is to “seek hidden knowledge from gods, spirits, ancestors, and other beings, with the belief to know the unknown”.²⁶ To be more specific, the diviner does not consult the malevolent spirits, but he goes seeking the benevolent spirits.²⁷ A diviner is skilled to determine “the purposes, will, or attitudes of the

²⁴ Rowsome, “Melanesian Traditional Religion”, p. 37.

²⁵ Tom, “A Biblical Response to Divination”, p. 37.

²⁶ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 176.

²⁷ Tom, “A Biblical Response to Divination” 39.

gods” revealed through “signs which, if interpreted properly, divulge something of divine intentions”.²⁸

The diviner has the power and skill to seek hidden knowledge from the benevolent spirits for the people who consult him for various reasons. The common reasons are as follows: (1) to diagnose the cause of diseases, misfortune, and death; (2) to determine the future, for example, who will be in leadership, especially in a time of election, and to foresee whether a voyage to be taken is safe; (3) to locate the whereabouts of an object, animal, or a person that is lost; and (4) to identify guilt or innocence in a particular issue with which the family or community is wrestling.²⁹

When the diviner is consulted, upon his interpretations, information and guidance, people can now make plans and decisions as to how they will deal with their present issue and their future. In the case of sickness, sometimes the diviner will guide them to what to do and to whom to go for extra help. He will always refer his clients to his colleague, a traditional healer.³⁰

The Akey Diviner’s Methods

It is informative to mention some of the methods that Akey diviners use to seek guidance and hidden knowledge from the spirits. Hiebert, in his book *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, provides a list of the different means diviners use to get information in different parts of the world. The ones, which are commonly used by Akey diviners to diagnose diseases, are “necromancy”,³¹ “presentiments”,³² and “dreams, visions, and trances”.³³ All these methods

²⁸ O. Burke, “Divination in the Ancient Near East”, in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, Supplementary volume, Keith R. Crim, ed., Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1976, p. 241.

²⁹ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 188.

³⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Religious Specialists”, in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*, Pamela A. Moro, Arthur C. Lehmann, James E. Myers, compilers, New York NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008, p. 151.

³¹ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 176. Necromancy involves rites to gain information from the dead.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 177. Presentiments are the power to discern the unseen through feelings or sentiments.

involve rituals to avail the spirits, whether of the ancestors (necromancy) or other spirits, and to channel the information needed through presentiments, dreams, visions, and trances, in particular.

TRADITIONAL HEALER

Earlier, we discussed the diviner in Akey society. He is the first person consulted on any issues, to give guidance about what to do and to whom to go for extra help. In the case of sicknesses, he usually refers people to a particular traditional healer whom he knows well, someone with the remedy for that particular disease. This section discusses common steps which an Akey traditional healer usually follows when dealing with spiritually-caused diseases.

Rituals and Remedies for Spirits that Cause Disease

As we have seen, the Akey people view sickness as the result of a broken relationship with others, nature, and the supernatural which has spiritual influence in the Akey cosmos. In saying that, it cannot be denied that they are also conscious of sicknesses which are caused by natural means and are not related to spirits. For example, they have their own ways to treat a cold which is caused by cold weather. However, here we shall look at those sicknesses, which are viewed as caused by spirits. There are three stages when dealing with diseases caused by spirits. These are the binding and removing of the spirits, healing of the effects, and prevention and evaluation of the disease.

Binding and Removing of Spirits that Cause Diseases

This first stage aims to bind and remove the spirits believed to cause the disease. This stage includes three practical steps that are so important for healing. These are *avuavuti/vurevure*, *vavauli/tivetivesae*, and *liliji*.

The first practical step in binding and removing of spirits is *avuavuti/vurevure*. *Avuavuti/vurevure* means “dust out something”. This ritual does not aim to remove the spirits; but it relieves the patient from the pain inflicted by the spirit. While invoking the healing spirit, the healer

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 178. Dreams are when the person’s spirit or shadow is thought to leave the body, temporarily, to enter the spirit world, and to bring back a message. Visions and trances, induced by mind-transforming drugs, are widely seen as sources of privileged information.

uses the leaves of the “wild kava” shrub to rub or dust out such things as shell or pieces of glass or metal from the body of the patient, in the belief that the angry spirit had used them to inflict pain in the body.

The second step is *vavauli/tivetivesae*. *Vavauli* is made up of two morphemes: *vava* means “compartment”, and *uli* means “to untie”, or “to untie an evil compartment”. *Tivetivesae* is also made up of two words *tivetive* means “to clear”, and *sae* means “the shoot of a plant”, or “to clear thorns from the shoot of a plant”. The combined meaning is *confession*. This is a confession made to the healer by the sick person and his relatives of evil behaviour done against the law of nature, such as destruction of bushes and animals without any good reason, and done against the law of the society, such as stealing, killing, and sexual sins. Furthermore, they have to confess if they have seen anything unusual, like a rat without a tail, or a shadow without the person, because of the belief that the sick person or one of his relatives must have broken one of these laws. Therefore, those who want to be healed have to confess (*vavauli/tivetivesae*), otherwise there will be no progress in the restoration of their health, which can result in their own death.

The third step is *Liliji*. *Liliji* means “tie and remove”. The healer usually walks around the patient with a piece of stick about 40 cm long and talks to the spirits believed to be threatening the life of the person. He orders them to come out and to enter that piece of stick. As he continues to talk, he repeatedly ties around the stick with some *pandanus* leaves in the belief that he is binding the spirits. At the end of this ritual, the stick has to be submerged in a swamp far away from the community in order to keep the spirits from coming out again to attack the patient. The patient will not be allowed to go there ever again. It becomes a taboo area for him.

Maomao: *Healing of Spirits that Cause Disease*

The second stage aims to heal the effects of spiritually-caused disease. It is called *maomao*. Etymologically, *maomao* means “breath that gives life to a person”. When applied in this context, it means an invocation of spirits while asking healing for a sick person. In other words, it is the practice of invoking the healing spirits to give breath and life to a sick person. The invocation is done by whispering a secret rhyme or song and blowing and spitting (which symbolise breath and life) on the elements to be used by the

patient. *Maomao* is included in different rituals as *papalani/lalaoni*, *suvisuvi*, and *kavokavo*.

The first step of *maomao* in healing is *papalani/lalaoni*. These two words, *papalani* and *lalaoni*, mean “rubbing with hot leaves”. The healer takes some leaves of shrubs prescribed by the healing spirits and, after incantation (whispering a secret rhyme or song, and blowing and spitting), he gives them to the patient. The patient takes those leaves, puts them on the fire, and rubs his body with them.

The second step of *maomao* is *suvisuvi*. *Suvisuvi* means “spitting over”. The healer uses incanted water to spit over the whole body of the patient. *Papalani/lalaoni* and *suvisuvi* are believed to be the treatment of the outward effects of spirit-caused diseases.

The last step of *maomao* is *kavokavo*. *Kavokavo* means “squeezing something to drink”. The healer takes the bark of trees or herbs, squeezes them, and dilutes them with water in a cup and, after incantation, he gives it to the patient to drink. *Kavokavo* is believed to be the treatment of the internal effects of spirit-caused diseases.

Preventing Spirit-caused Diseases Through Taboos

This third stage is preventive. It is a practical step, that is, the sick person has to observe the taboos. The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines “taboo” as “the prohibition of an action, or the use of an object, based on ritualistic distinctions of them as being either sacred and consecrated, or as being dangerous, unclean, and accursed”.³⁴ This is a broad definition. Since, in this context, we are dealing with sickness, as the result of a broken relationship, and angered spirits, according to the Akey worldview, the taboos, to which we are referring, are symbols that reinforce a fear of spirits.³⁵ In other words, it refers to things seen as dangerous, and an open door for more trouble from the spirits. According to Mary Douglas, “to break [a taboo] would entail some automatic” consequences, such as lack

³⁴ “Taboo”, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edn, vol 11, Chicago IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1981, p. 483.

³⁵ Kenneth Nehrbass, *Christianity and Animism in Melanesia: Four Approaches to Gospel and Culture*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 2012, p. 68.

of success, sickness, or even death.³⁶ However, Kenneth Nehrbass adds that keeping taboos is a perpetual reminder of health and welfare.³⁷ So, if any of these troubles occur in a person's life, people infer that he or she has committed a breach of taboo.

When dealing with sickness, in the traditional Akey context, there are three common types of taboo which a sick person is obliged to observe. These are foods, food colours, and places. Sometimes, the patient would be asked to avoid certain foods and certain protein from a red cow or a white chicken. Furthermore, he might be asked not to go to certain places for some time. There are two benefits when the sick person observes all these taboos well. First, it will contribute to his well-being. Conversely, if the taboos are not observed, it is believed that these taboos are also a doorway of access by the spirits to inflict more sophisticated troubles which can lead to the person's death. Second, the taboos are to be observed so that the healer can be successful in his healing endeavour, because these taboos govern his healing exercise and are a medium for accessing supernatural power to deal with the sick. In the case of a breach of a taboo, it will automatically nullify the strength of the healing spirit and his remedies and one would expect an immediate consequence. The consequence may come in one of two ways. Either the sickness will not be healed, or another sickness will be added to the existing one, but this time it will be the spirit, whom the healer is consulting, who inflicts it for not respecting his taboo. In this context, the function of a taboo is complex. It can be identified as a door which opens/closes or closes/opens to allow certain spirits to be active, and it depends entirely on the subject (sick person).

Evaluating Spirit-caused Diseases

Having gone through all these required stages of traditional healing, this last step is simply to evaluate the progress of the medicine applied and taboos kept in the life of the person concerned. If there are signs of good health, then the sick person is freed from the taboos and is considered as being healthy. However, if there are no changes, the patient may be

³⁶ Mary Douglas, "Taboo", in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*, 7th edn, Pamela A. Moro, Arthur C. Lehmann, James E. Myers, compilers, New York NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008, p. 76.

³⁷ Nehrbass, *Christianity and Animism in Melanesia*, p. 8.

referred to other traditional healers known to have more power to cure the particular sickness.

It needs to be admitted that the system is complex, and the approaches sometimes vary between different traditional healers. But the pattern discussed above is the common one found among most Akey traditional healers today when they are dealing with spiritually-caused diseases.

SUMMARY

This section has provided an overview of the traditional concept of healing. Although it is a complex system, the common stages, and embedded steps, have been presented.

The first section surveyed the Akey worldview which covers several areas. First, the Akey people view life as holistic. For them, the real world consists of the supernatural and natural, the physical and non-physical, the living and dead. Humans are immersed in this integrated world and live in vital relationship with all its parts. The vital relationship between them has to be maintained in order to enjoy a good life. Second, the malevolent and the benevolent spirits were discussed. The malevolent spirits are the ones responsible for sickness, death, bareness among women, and other major misfortunes. Their aim is only to destroy human life. The benevolent spirits are regulatory spirits. These spirits are considered more powerful than the malevolent spirits. Lastly, the view on the causes of diseases was presented. For the Akey people, sickness is viewed as a result of a broken relationship between others, nature, and the supernatural.

The role of diviners was discussed in the second section. A diviner is a religious specialist, spiritually powerful, and well trained to deal with the spirits, through careful ritual performances using such means as dreams, visions, and trances to seek hidden knowledge. He is the first person to consult for guidance in any emergency because he is a trusted figure in the society, guiding people in what to do and to whom to go for extra help.

Lastly, the complex stages and the role of a traditional healer in dealing with spiritually-caused diseases were briefly covered. There are three stages when dealing with diseases caused by spirits. The first step is binding and removing of the spirits. This stage includes three practical

steps which are so important for healing. These are *avuavuti/vurevure*, *vavauli/tivetivesae*, and *liliji*. The second step is healing of the effects. This stage aims to heal the effects of spiritually-caused diseases. It is called *maomao*. It is included in different rituals, such as *papalani/lalaoni*, *suvisuvi*, and *kavokavo*. The last stage is preventive. It is a practical step, that is, the sick person has to observe the taboos in order for him to be healed. We now move on to the third section in which the Christian understanding of biblical healing will be explored.

CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL HEALING

The aim of this section is to assist in understanding biblical healing. In order to achieve that, the following areas will be covered: the purpose of biblical healing miracles, and biblical methods of healing.

THE PURPOSE OF BIBLICAL HEALING MIRACLES

We can see that throughout the Bible there are records of many healing miracles that took place. The question to be explored in this section is, What was the purpose of these healings? Since healings are miracles, a definition of miracle may be helpful, in order to provide a background for understanding the purpose of healing in the Bible. Vernon C. Grounds defines a miracle “as . . . an observable phenomenon, effected by the direct operation of God’s power, an arresting deviation from the ordinary sequences of nature, a deviation calculated to elicit faith-begetting awe, a divine in-breaking which authenticates a revelational agent”.³⁸ Furthermore, René Latourelle, in his article, “Originalité et Fonctions des Miracles de Jésus”, in which he highlighted four essentials functions of Jesus’ miracles, adds that a miracle’s function is to also communicate God’s goodness to his people and to testify the truth of God’s message.³⁹ Any miracles, either of healing or others, “stress the acts of power that reveal God in expressing the gospel, which are then usually explained in speech or vice versa (1 Thess 1:5; Heb 2:4)”.⁴⁰ For example, the writers of

³⁸ Vernon C. Grounds, “Miracle”, in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, ed., London UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1973, p. 356.

³⁹ René Latourelle, “Originalité et Fonctions des Miracles de Jésus”, in *Gregorianum* 66.4 (1985), pp. 648-652.

⁴⁰ Jon Ruthven, “Miracle”, in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, William A. Dyrness, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2008, p. 549.

the Gospels make it clear that Jesus commissioned his disciples “in his name, to combine healing and exorcism with the teaching and preaching of the gospel (Matt 10:1, 7, 8; Mark 3:14-16; 6:7; Luke 10:9)”.⁴¹ All the miraculous healings found in the Bible performed by Jesus, the apostles, or others were purposefully to show God’s power which is at work in his human agency, to produce faith in those who did not believe, and to validate the message of the kingdom of God, which they (God’s servants) are proclaiming. For instance, Luke reports that in Iconium “Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3 NIV). In other words, the very purpose of healing miracles or other miracles is to demonstrate the divine power of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 2:4-5; 4:20; cf. Matt 12:28). Furthermore, Ebbie C. Smith adds that “[T]he purpose of signs is that people apprehend the message the signs bring, rather than dwell on the signs themselves”.⁴² This also indicates that miracles are not the essential mark of a Christian life. Jon Ruthven supports this: “The ideal Christian life is not about miracle mongering, but living in the tension of power and suffering (2 Cor 12:12; Phil 3:10): in the ‘already’ of the promised miracle-working Spirit of the prophets, as well as in the ‘not yet’ of total victory over all suffering and evil”.⁴³ The purpose of healing miracles or other miracles is to validate the message of the kingdom of God and demonstrate the presence of his divine power, with the aim of producing faith in those who did not believe.

BIBLICAL METHODS OF HEALING

Having discussed the purpose of biblical healing miracles, we will now move on to look at the biblical methods of healing. There are numerous biblical references which show different methods that different people took to perform healing. In this section, the passage of James 5:14-16 has been chosen for our discussion, because it explicitly teaches a biblical pattern of steps for healing, which the church should adopt in dealing with illness, as opposed to stories, which illustrate but do not explicitly instruct. There are

⁴¹ T. H. Wright, “Miracles”, in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol 2, James Hastings, ed., Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1933, p. 190.

⁴² Ebbie C. Smith, “Miracles in Mission”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, A. Scott Moreau, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2000, p. 631.

⁴³ Ruthven, “Miracle”, p. 549.

certain steps, according to the passage, that both the sick person and the elders (healers) need to do, in order for health to be restored physically or spiritually.

Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:14-16).⁴⁴

Calling the Elders

James begins by saying that anyone who is sick must call for the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil. The word “sick” is the Greek verb ἀσθενέω (*astheneō*), which means “to be sick, weak, or in need”. The various meanings lead to some differences in interpreting the passage. Daniel R. Hayden argues that this passage “is not referring to physical sickness at all, but is rather giving instruction for dealing with persons, who are discouraged or depressed”⁴⁵ – the person who is spiritually weak. However, while it is true that ἀσθενεῖ (*asthenei*) can mean “to be weak for any reason” (2 Cor 12:10; Rom 4:9; 14:2; 1 Cor 8:11-12; 2 Clem 17.2), in this context Ralph P. Martin states that it is probably right to say that it refers to physical illness.⁴⁶ Because words such as σώσει (*sōsei*), “to make whole”, and κάμνοντα (*kamnonta*), “the sick person”, in James 5:15 are indications of physical illness.⁴⁷ The sick person should προσκαλεσάσθω (*proskalesasthō*), “call to oneself”,⁴⁸ the elders of the church. This suggests that the situation or sickness in his body is extreme and has caused him to be in bed and unable to walk.

⁴⁴ All English Bible quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁵ Daniel R. Hayden, “Calling the Elders to Pray”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138-551 (July-September 1981), p. 258.

⁴⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco TX: Word Books, 1988, p. 206.

⁴⁷ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982, p. 192.

⁴⁸ Martin, *James*, p. 206.

Πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας (*presbuterous tēs ekklēsiās*), “the elders of the church”, are to be called. These are the leaders in the Christian church.⁴⁹ Since they are “spiritual, mature men, who were given responsibility for the spiritual oversight of individual, local congregations”,⁵⁰ they are to be called to pray. This is unlike James 3:13 which urges individual persons to pray for themselves in time of distress.

Paul states that “healing” is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who gives to anyone as he determines (1 Cor 12:11). So, why call the elders and not an individually-gifted healer? Why should healing not be regarded as an individual responsibility? David P. Nystrom states that “James knows nothing of a particular person or charisma, known as a ‘faith healer/healing’, such as some claimed to have, and was recognised by Paul in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30)”.⁵¹ However, John Calvin gives other, preferable reasons for this. The first is related to Jesus’ principle: when he commissioned his disciples to heal, he did not send them individually, but he sent them two by two (Luke 10:1; cf. Matt 18:19). Second, James does not encourage each individual elder to act as a private healer, but rather the body of elders were assigned that task, because they were spiritually mature and “the power and grace of the Holy Spirit were most exerted” through them.⁵² Lastly, the elders were “representatives of the congregation, and not because of any healing function which was inherent in their office. Intercession for others was part of their pastoral care and duty, certainly, but it was a duty which was shared by every member of the congregation.”⁵³ So, healing is a group responsibility, not individual, and anyone with a gift of healing has to be used within that group.

⁴⁹ David P. Nystrom, *James*, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1997, p. 305.

⁵⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Leicester UK: IVP, 1985, p. 176.

⁵¹ Nystrom, *James*, p. 305.

⁵² John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Epistle of James*, Edinburgh UK: Saint Andrew Press, 1972, p. 315, quoted in Robert Dickinson, *God Does Heal Today: Pastoral Principles and Practice of Faith Healing*, Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 1995, p. 87.

⁵³ J. Wilkinson, *Health and Healing*, Edinburgh UK: Handsel Press, 1980, p. 150, quoted in Robert Dickinson, *God Does Heal Today: Pastoral Principles and Practice of Faith Healing*, Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 1995, p. 87.

The Responsibilities of the Elders

James states two specific responsibilities that the elders need to do when ministering to a sick person. First, they are to pray over him. Second, they are to anoint him with oil. All these things are to be done in the name of the Lord.

Prayer

In v. 14, James recommends that the elders are to pray over the sick person, and anoint him with oil. The main emphasis of this verse is on prayer, and not anointing, because “pray (προσευξάσθωσαν, *proseuxasthōsan*) is the main verb, while anointing (ἀλείψαντες, *aleipsantes*) is a participle”.⁵⁴ A sick person may be anointed with oil, but the emphasis is that healing is based on prayer.

Furthermore, in v. 15 James highlights the kind of prayer that is needed, that is, the prayer offered in faith. A prayer of faith is a “prayer which expresses trust in God and flows out of commitment to him, for only such prayers are effective”.⁵⁵ The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well and the Lord will raise him up. In this context, the faith demanded is the faith of those who pray, particularly of the elders (v. 14). According to Peter H. Davids, the condition of healing is determined by whether there is faith or not from the elders.⁵⁶ However, this statement can be problematic. If healing does not occur, can we blame the lack of faith on the part of the elders, since the faith of the sick is not mentioned? To answer that question, while people must have faith regarding what they ask (Mark 11:22-24), the answer is entirely dependent on his will, since prayer is done in the name of the Lord. Alec Motyer states that “prayer is a commitment to the will of God, and all true prayer excises its truest faith in patiently waiting to see what he has determined to do”.⁵⁷ Therefore, neither the elders, nor the sick person, should insist on their will to be done, rather

⁵⁴ Donald W. Burdick, “James”, in *Hebrews-Revelation*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1982, p. 203.

⁵⁵ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, p. 194.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of James: the Tests of Faith*, Bible Speaks Today, Leicester UK: IVP, 1985, p. 199.

they should let the will of God be done in their request (Luke 22:42; cf. Matt 6:10).

Still on prayer, James adds that the prayer of a δικαίου (*dikaiou*), “righteous man”, in other words, the prayer of a repentant sinner has πολλὴ ἰσχύει (*polu ischuei*), “great power” (James 5:16).⁵⁸ The righteous person is not Elijah, nor the elders or prophets whose prayers were powerful, but it is an ordinary community member in good standing, the person who confesses his sins and adheres to community standards (Matt 1:19; 1 John 3:7).⁵⁹ James continues to illustrate the truth that a righteous man’s prayer has great power and, in Elijah’s case, was working. He was “a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17). That means he was not a heavenly being, but he was just a normal person with limitations, like those reading James’ letter. Elijah was known for the power of his prayer. His prayer was powerful for two reasons: he was a “righteous person” (v. 16) and “he prayed fervently” (v. 17).⁶⁰ The fervency of prayer needs to be noted. Literally, James says that Elijah “prayed with prayer” or “prayed in prayer”.⁶¹ According to C. F. D Moule, such a construction is used “to express emphasis [intensity] or frequency”.⁶² Laws puts it as “he prayed and prayed”.⁶³ However, it is important to understand James’ intention in mentioning the prayer of Elijah. George M. Stulac comments that “James’ desire in the passage is not to erect a standard of fervency for his readers to attain; he seems more intent on pushing them into the active prayer life that is so readily available”.⁶⁴ Alec Motyer states, “The meaning is not his fervency, nor even his frequency of prayer, but that ‘he just prayed’ – that, and nothing more”.⁶⁵ James Adamson supports that “here the point is not

⁵⁸ George M. Stulac, *James*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 184.

⁵⁹ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, p. 196.

⁶⁰ James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1976, p. 201.

⁶¹ Stulac, *James*, p. 184.

⁶² C. F. D Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp. 177f, quoted in James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1976, p. 201.

⁶³ Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, London UK: A. & C. Black, 1980, p. 235, quoted in George M. Stulac, *James*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 186.

⁶⁴ Stulac, *James*, p. 186.

⁶⁵ Motyer, *The Message of James*, pp. 206-207.

that Elijah put up a particularly fervent prayer, but that praying was precisely what he did”.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Moo adds that “not the fervency or the frequency of the prayer that renders it effective – it is *faith*”.⁶⁷ It is a prayer of faith that rests on the sure promises of God. Like Elijah, “He knows, he believes, that God’s will is to send rain and, nevertheless, he must pray or the rain will not come (cf. James 4:2). . . . He, therefore, must persevere in prayer that he may show his God that his faith expects an answer and will not grow weary until it is obtained.”⁶⁸ Elijah prayed seven times in order for God to respond in sending the rain (2 Kings 13:18-19). Andrew Murray comments, “perseverance in prayer, a perseverance, which strengthens the faith of the believer against all which may seem opposed to the answer, is a real miracle; it is one of the impenetrable mysteries of the life of faith”.⁶⁹

A prayer of faith is a prayer offered by a righteous man (repentant sinner), who has an active prayer life, driven by faith and based on the sure promises of God. The prayer of faith is the kind of prayer needed, which James is recommending, when dealing with the sick.

Anointing with Oil

James goes on to say that when the elders pray over a sick person, they also need to “anoint him with oil”. Two possibilities have been suggested concerning the purpose of anointing the sick with oil. These are a medicinal purpose and a sacramental purpose. First, Donald W. Burdick argues that James is referring to application of oil as medicinal, rather than sacramental, because of the well-documented fact of such practice in Bible times (Isa 1:6; Luke 10:34). He suggests that James is recommending prayer and medicine.⁷⁰ The second is the sacramental purpose of anointing with oil. According to Douglas J. Moo, anointing of oil, administered by the elders, is used as an “outward, physical expression of concern, and as a means to stimulate the faith of the sick person”.⁷¹ As Ralph P. Martin adds,

⁶⁶ Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, 201.

⁶⁷ Moo, *James*, p. 181.

⁶⁸ Andrew Murray, *Divine Healing*, Fort Washington PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1934, p. 131.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁰ Burdick, “James”, p. 204.

⁷¹ Moo, *James*, pp. 177-178.

it “symbolised God’s concern for, and faithfulness to, his people in time of distress. This tangible evidence of his trustworthiness lets the afflicted one know that God’s plan will be carried out, whatever the outcome.”⁷² This idea follows Jesus’ example when dealing with the blind man in Mark 8:23-26, and the deaf man in Mark 7:33. Furthermore, Peter H. Davids adds that anointing with oil is either “the outward sign of the inward power of prayer or, more likely, a sacramental vehicle of divine power, as Mark shows: ‘And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them’ (Mark 6:13)”.⁷³

The symbolic understanding of the anointing with oil is the possible answer, according to the context. It cannot refer to a medicinal purpose because it is ministered by the elders, with prayer, rather than by physicians. Douglas J. Moo states the symbolic significance of anointing of oil, “as the elders prayed, they would anoint the sick person in order to symbolise that that person was being ‘set apart’ for God’s special attention and care”.⁷⁴ However, anointing with oil is not essential in healing, but the prayer of faith is (James 5:15), and anointing is just part of it. Although, James recommends that the elders anoint the sick, it is not something which must be done, because many healings in the Bible happened without anointing.

In the Name of the Lord

James adds that the elders of the church should pray over the sick and anoint him with oil “in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). Since oil was a curative element widely used in the ancient world, James is careful not to cause any misunderstanding of the practice in the church. To guard against pagan criticism of the attribution of mystical properties to the oils, he adds that the anointing with oil should be done in the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord gives a thoroughly Christian character to the practice. Furthermore, James Adamson suggests that “James includes oil in this

⁷² Martin, *James*, p. 208.

⁷³ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, p. 193.

⁷⁴ Moo, *James*, p. 179.

Christian ceremonial in order to reduce the temptation to use charms, incantations, and other such pagan devices”.⁷⁵

Samuel Waje Kunhiyop explains, “in the ancient world, it was believed that to know a person’s name, or a deity’s name, was to know something about him or her, and that to invoke the name of a person was to assert authority based on that name”.⁷⁶ The name “Jesus” means “Saviour” (Matt 1:21), and “Christ” means “Messiah”, or “anointed one” (John 1:41).⁷⁷ Because of who he is, as reflected by his name, Christians receive all the spiritual blessings, such as forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43), salvation (Acts 2:21), the Holy Spirit, who was sent in Jesus’ name (John 14:26), and baptism, which is administered in the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19-20).⁷⁸ Prayer in the name of Jesus was a requirement for the disciples to fulfil the mission given to them (John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23, 26). Since healing and exorcism were parts of the mission, the disciples were to perform them in the name of Jesus, because there is power associated with his name. Jesus affirms this to his disciples saying, “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name, they will cast out demons; . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17-18). In saying this, some of the disciples probably recalled their experience as having been part of the 72 on their mission. Upon returning, they reported with joy, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” (Luke 10:17). Having that in mind, James reminds the elders, as God’s representatives, to pray and anoint with oil in the name of Jesus, which means “appealing to the power released by that name”.⁷⁹ It is ὁ κύριος (*ho kurios*), “the Lord” (James 5:15), who will heal the sick person. In Acts 3:6-10, Luke describes how Peter and John healed a man, who had been lame from birth and who sat at the temple gate to ask for money from those who came to worship, expecting them to be generous to their fellow man.

⁷⁵ James H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St James*, International Critical Commentary, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1916, p. 305, quoted in Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, p. 197.

⁷⁶ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: HippoBooks, 2012, p. 130.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Martin, *James*, p. 208.

By the name of Jesus, which means by his authority (Matt 28:18),⁸⁰ Peter commanded this man to walk. People were all amazed at what had happened to him, but Peter affirms in Acts 3:16 that “faith in his name has made this man strong, whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all”. Prayer, in the name of Jesus, is not a “magical formula that can be used to manipulate supernatural forces . . . is not about forcing God to do something; rather, it is bending our human will to God’s will”.⁸¹ Invoking the name of Jesus expresses strong belief in his power, which flows out of a strong relationship with him.

The Two Outcomes

James states that, “the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up” (5:15). The elders are to offer prayer in faith, based on God’s promises, and the outcomes depend so much on the will of God for the person’s life. Questions have been raised regarding the two future verbs – the person “will be made well” (σώσει, *sōsei*), and the Lord “will raise him up” (ἐγερῆι, *egerei*) – asking whether James is referring to spiritual healing or to physical healing. The mention of sin and forgiveness in the following verses (vv. 15b-16a) give a sense of an eschatological (spiritual healing and resurrection) implication. But David P. Nystrom argues that “the weight of the grammatical and lexical evidence is on the side of a physical understanding of the passage”.⁸² James is speaking of physical healing of a sickness, using the statement “the Lord will raise him up”, as also found in Mark 1:31; 2:9-12; 9:27; Matt 9:5-7; and Acts 3:7.⁸³

According to the context, the words are referring to physical healing and not spiritual healing. However, spiritual healing is another important area in life that should not be overlooked when ministering to sick people. It is a state that everyone is expected to experience, without exception, in the end time and, therefore, everyone has to be prepared for it. Whatever, the

⁸⁰ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998, p. 139.

⁸¹ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, p. 132.

⁸² Nystrom, *James*, p. 307.

⁸³ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, p. 194.

will of God is for one's physical healing, that sick person will still have the hope to experience a better healing (spiritual healing) in the last day.

Confession and Forgiveness of Sin

“And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:15b-16a). James knows that sicknesses are not always the result of sin committed by the sufferer, as the word *κάν* (*kan*), “and if”, used in v. 15b suggests.⁸⁴ However, because of the dominant belief among the Jews that sickness is the consequence of sin, this prompts him to emphasise the importance of confession of sin. James implies that sin causes sickness and hinders healing. Therefore, the conjunction *οὖν* (*oun*), “therefore” (v.16), connects the discussion of the problem of sin in v. 15 and suggests a way to solve that problem, that is, *ἔξομολογεῖσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας* (*exomologeisthe oun allēlois tas hamartias*), to “confess your sins to each other”. *Ὅπως* (*hopōs*), “so that”, indicates what may be the result of confession, which is *ἰαθῆτε* (*iathēte*), that “you may be healed”. Andrew Murray points out, “in man, two natures are combined. He is both, at the same time, spirit and matter, heaven and earth, soul and body. For this reason, on one side, he is a son of God, and, on the other, he is doomed to destruction, because of the Fall; sin in his soul, and sickness in his body bears witness to the right, which death has over him.”⁸⁵ Because of this combination, people believe that when there is sin, there is sickness, but when there is forgiveness, there is health. The Psalmist's prayer is our great example: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases” (Ps 103:2-3). Furthermore, confession of sin will not only contribute to physical health, but it also contributes to spiritual health. Whatever may be the will of God concerning the present life of the sufferer, he has complete assurance that, when Christ returns, his “perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:53). That is the perfect healing, to which Christians are looking forward. Peter H. Davids states, “The person would do well to follow the rabbinic advice (b.Ber. 5a) and examine himself. Should sin be the cause, the healing for which the

⁸⁴ Moo, *James*, p. 181.

⁸⁵ Murray, *Divine Healing*, p. 1.

elders pray will not end with the body. It will be a total healing and include the soul, the forgiveness of sins.”⁸⁶

The healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:5 is a good example. Mark reports that when Jesus saw the faith of the men acted out in their determination,⁸⁷ “He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’”. The expectation of the crowd was to see Jesus bring physical healing. But, to the amazement of all, Jesus first pronounced spiritual healing. As mentioned above, to the Jews sickness and death were viewed as the consequences of the sin of a person (Ps 41:3-4; 103:2-3; James 5:13-18).⁸⁸ Therefore, for the Jews forgiveness was a prior condition for a person to be cured.⁸⁹

Confession and forgiveness of sin have two benefits. First, it contributes to both physical and spiritual health. Second, it makes the members of the community right with God and prepares them to pray with great power. As the rest of the James 5:16 states, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power, as it is working”. So, it is a crucial step to be considered, when ministering to the sick.

SUMMARY

In this section, we have discussed the Christian understanding of biblical healing. The first section covers the purpose of biblical healing miracles. Healings, performed by Jesus and the apostles, were done with the purpose of demonstrating the divine power of the kingdom of God, to validate the message of the kingdom that they were proclaiming (Acts 14:3; Matt 12:28), and had the aim of producing faith in those who did not believe.

The second section surveyed the biblical methods of healing as found in the principles set out in James 5:14-16. In order for health to be restored, the sick person has to call the elders to minister to him, because they are spiritually mature men who had been given responsibility for the spiritual oversight of individual, local congregations. The elders’ responsibilities

⁸⁶ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, p. 195.

⁸⁷ Bruce B. Barton, Mark Fackler, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary, Philip Comfort, ed., Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1994, p. 48.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, Daily Study Bible, 2nd edn, Edinburgh UK: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956, p. 40.

were, first, to pray over the sick person. The prayer of a righteous man offered in faith is the kind of prayer needed when ministering to sick people. It is a prayer, which expresses trust in God and flows out of commitment to him, for only such prayers are effective. Second, it is to anoint him or her with oil. Anointing with oil has symbolic significance. When the elders pray, they anoint the sick person in order to symbolise that that person was being “set apart” for God’s special attention and care. The prayer and anointing with oil are to be done in the name of the Lord, which means appealing to the power released by that name. Prayer in the name of Jesus is not a magic formula, which can be used to manipulate supernatural forces. Neither is it about forcing God to do something. Rather, it is bending our human will to God’s will. The sick person and those who pray have to confess, forgive one another’s sin, and pray for one another. This practice makes the members of the community right with God, and prepares them to pray with great power. The results are the Lord’s, according to his will. We now move on to our fourth section where we will explore the Christo-pagan worldview and methods of healing.

CHRISTO-PAGAN WORLDVIEW AND METHODS OF HEALING

This section aims to survey the Christo-pagan healers’ worldview and their methods of healing.

WORLDVIEW

Churches have been established among the Akey people for a century for some and half-a-century for others. Despite the presence of the churches, where the word of God is taught once or twice a week, it seems that the word of God has not taken root or made any major transformation in the lives of the people. Their lives and practices are still, as Hiebert describes, split-level Christians, “deeply committed Christians faithfully attend church services and pray to God in times of need, but feel compelled, during the week, to go to a local shaman for healing, a diviner for guidance, and an exorcist for deliverance from spirit oppression”.⁹⁰ Hiebert speaks about those claiming to be Christians who seek a shaman, diviner, or exorcist for help but, here, we shall focus on those performing healing, exorcism, and giving guidance who claim to be Christians and whose practices are done

⁹⁰ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiénou. *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 15.

under the name of Jesus. Although their rituals are Christian in form and covered with the name of Jesus, the content and understanding are doubtful. Are these due to a worldview which is not wholly Christian? This is the challenge discussed in the next section.

Akey Syncretistic Worldview

Akey people, who attend church, but are not born again Christians, and perform healing, divination, and exorcism under the name of Jesus, seem to have a syncretistic worldview. Their lives are like what Sidney Williamson describes as two levels.

Most Christians live on two unreconciled levels. They are members of a church and ascribe to a statement of faith. But, below the system of conscious beliefs are deeply-embedded traditions and customs, implying quite a different interpretation of the universe and the world of spirits from the Christian interpretation. In the crises of life and rites of passage the church is an alien thing.⁹¹

That is the challenge in the Akey churches which needs to be studied. There are a few factors contributing to this worldview.

The first is the belief system. As discussed in section two, in Akey cosmology life is viewed as holistic. They have an integrated worldview, as with many Melanesians, which means they view life as one compartment consisting of the supernatural and natural, the physical and non-physical, the living and dead, and man is immersed in this integrated world and lives in vital relationship with all its parts.⁹² They believe that those physical and non-physical spiritual forces shape happenings in life and, therefore, people are living in continual fear of these powers.⁹³ That worldview shapes their belief about interactions with spiritual beings. In their belief, spiritual “beings are personal spirits that include God, gods, ancestors, ghosts,

⁹¹ Sidney G. Williamson, *Akamba Religion and the Christian Faith*, Accra Ghana: Ghana Universities Press, 1965, p. 158, quoted in Hiebert, Shaw, Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 15.

⁹² Rowsome, “Melanesian Traditional Religion”, p. 35.

⁹³ Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1991, p. 20.

totemic spirits, nature spirits, angels, demons, and Satan”,⁹⁴ and their mode of interaction with them is through magic ritual. In times of crises, sometimes church men and women turn to God but, if he is silent and distant, to them it is acceptable to turn and seek to manipulate other spirits for a quick fix to their problems.⁹⁵ Others see church as irrelevant, when it comes to addressing immediate issues in everyday life.⁹⁶ Others see spirits as “being mediators between us and God, able to intercede on our behalf”.⁹⁷ Therefore, in order to assume the responsibility of mediators, homage first has to be given. Furthermore, those, who hold to this view also believe that impersonal spirit energy infuses special objects, words, and ritual, and gives them power to meet people’s needs. These are the reasons why some attend the church and also practise shaman healing.

It is hard for people to change that worldview. They do not see a need to do so, because that worldview is the point of departure in interpreting events in life. This worldview provides answers to their ultimate questions, gives them emotional security, “validates their deepest cultural norms”, and provides them with a sense of peace, of being at home in the world in which they live.⁹⁸ Because of that, as Hiebert states, “to question worldviews is to challenge the very foundations of life, and people resist such challenges with deep emotional reactions. There are few human fears greater than a loss of a sense of order and meaning. People are willing to die for their beliefs, if these beliefs make their death meaningful.”⁹⁹ We can assume that, for such people, Christianity is viewed as foreign. They just want to incorporate it into their own system, for anticipated benefits. Their involvement in the Christian community is not a result of a genuine commitment but, rather, is communally orientated.¹⁰⁰ Their involvement is only for keeping unity, relationship, and respect within society, which are

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁵ Dean C. Halverson, “Animism: the Religion of the Tribal World”, in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 15.2 (April-June 1998), p. 60.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2008, p. 31.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ Alan R. Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1987, p. 332.

the social norms in this context. They may be called sympathisers.¹⁰¹ They shelter themselves under the umbrella of a particular church denomination and keep their traditional beliefs. They gravitate socially towards a form of religion. They do not believe in the description the Bible gives as to how they should live and believe as Christians.¹⁰²

CHRISTO-PAGAN METHODS OF HEALING

In this section, the Christo-pagan methods of healing found in the Akey context will be discussed. However, since the context of the topic is not touched by academic literature, personal experience will be shared. The methods of the Christo-pagan healer are complex and vary between differ-

ent healers, but the common ones will be discussed. Figure 3 above shows a few details on the three common methods used by the so-called Christian healers. Within these three methods there are varieties which some extend by applying other practices, while others do not. The unbroken arrows (→) show the steps that are not really questioned by believers, whereas the steps where critical questions are raised in this study are shown by dashed arrows (⇨).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁰² Halverson, "Animism", p. 59.

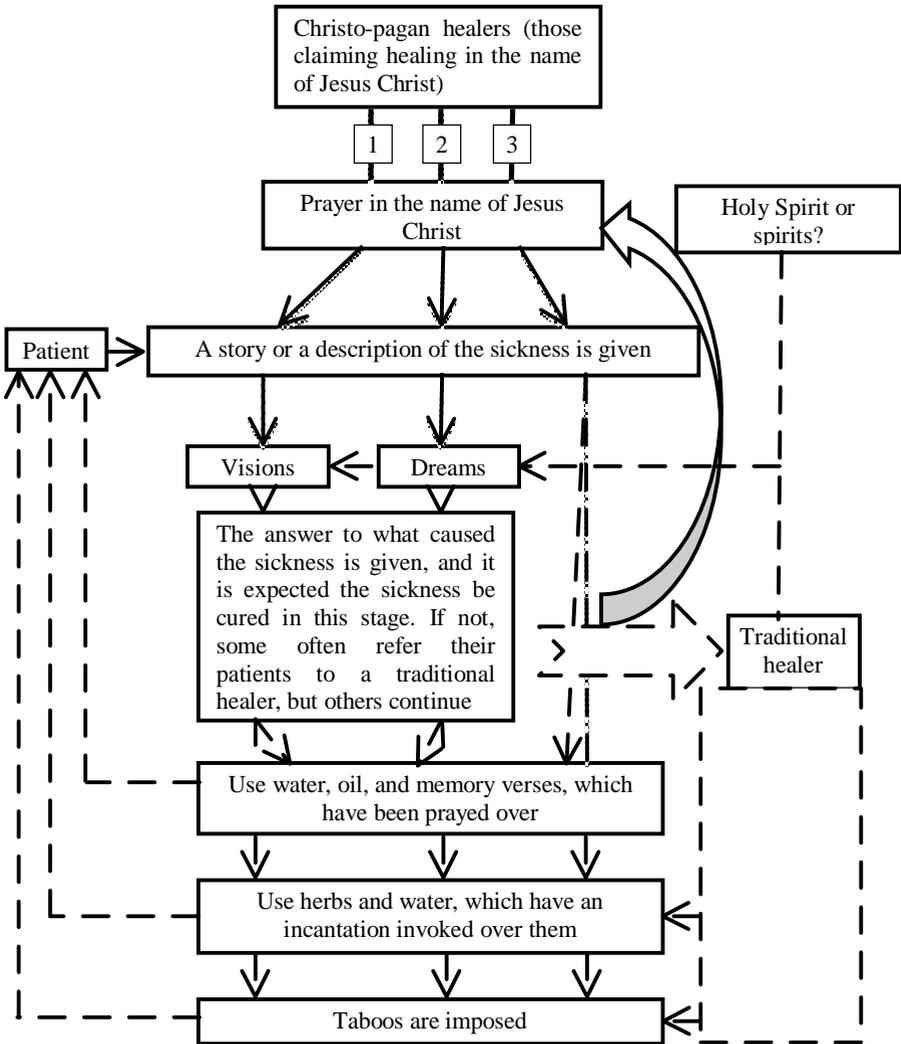


Figure 3: Christo-pagan methods of healing

Prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ

Figure 3 shows that before the healers can interact with the sick person, they always pray first in the name of Jesus to begin their session. They acknowledge the name of Jesus in prayer because they think that there is

some kind of power in his name which can inspire their traditional healing practices. They are using the name of Jesus as a magical means of trying to manipulate God to do what they are asking for. It is an influence from traditional belief in which healers use spells with manipulative power to manipulate spirits to do whatever they want, such as to remove a sickness.¹⁰³

Description of Sicknesses

After prayer, the healers give time for their clients to give a description of the cause of the sickness and of how and when the person got sick. Sometimes the healers will ask diagnostic questions, not scientifically based, but related to traditional belief. For example, if a person has a fever, instead of asking such questions as “Do you sleep under a mosquito net, or do you have any infection?” (knowing that fever can be a symptom of malaria or an infection in the body), they ask “What did you do yesterday or where did you go yesterday?”, and so on. Those kinds of questions are related to their worldview, because their assumption is that the sick person probably broke a taboo which governs their relationship with their surroundings, including physical and non-physical beings. For example, he may have offended a spirit somewhere by trespassing into that spirit’s territory, which then caused him to be sick.

Visions

Those who claim to have the gift of visions watch the sufferer and listen carefully while being given the description of the sickness. After describing the sickness, those who see through visions will immediately give him the response to the cause of the sickness that he has seen. It is been observed that most of the responses are linked with their traditional belief on causes of sickness, which is connected to their relationship with everything that surrounds them, including spirits. For example, their response might be expressed as “I saw that this dead person came and took the spirit or life of your son and put it under a rock. I went in and wrestled with the dead person for a while and managed to take the life of your son back. So now your son should feel well.”

¹⁰³ Garry W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 85.

Dreams

After the patient describes his sickness, those claiming to see secret things through dreams will always ask the sick person to come back the next day to get the response. It is believed, when sleeping in the night, he will see through dreams what causes the sickness. Most of their responses are similar to those who see visions, that is, they reflect traditional beliefs concerning the causes of sickness. In addition, sometimes remedies for sicknesses can also be revealed through dreams. Furthermore, some believe that, after revealing the cause of the sickness, the sick patient should get better. This is also true for those with visions.

Water or Oil and Memory Verses, Which Have Been Prayed Over

When the sickness persists, those who do not know what to do next will often decide to refer their clients to traditional healers instead of continuing to pray. Sometimes, others go even further in their approaches and pray over water or oil and memory verses. Some pray over water, so that the sick person can drink it or wash in it. Others pray over oil so that the sick person can use it to rub on his body. Others write memory verses, pray over them, and place them in small containers which are to be placed somewhere in the corners of the yard and the house. They view those elements that have been prayed over as having some magical power which may be able to provide healing and protection, if the sickness has been seen to have been caused by the evil spirits.

Water and Herbs, Which Have an Incantation Invoked Over Them

Other healers use incantations and charms for healing. For them, it is acceptable to invoke, at same time, Jesus and the spirits for healing, since they believe they are all spirits. They believe that the name of Jesus mentioned in their prayer will inspire and empower herbs and water which have had an incantation invoked over them, in order to bring healing in the life of the sick person. Others believe that if one spirit (as God) is not responding, then they will go to other spirits, as long as it works, to get a quick response and quick fix for their problems.

Taboos

After praying for healing in the name of Jesus and invoking the spirits for healing, these healers will always finish by setting taboos to be kept in

order to recover. They will prohibit the sick person from eating certain foods, or from going to certain places, and so on. The strength of the healer and his remedies lies in the taboos and, therefore, they must be observed. In the case of a breach of a taboo, it will automatically nullify the strength of remedies, and an immediate consequence would be expected. The consequence may come in two ways. Either the sickness will not be healed, or another sickness will be added to the existing one; but this time it will be inflicted by the spirit, which the healer consults, because his taboo was not observed. Finally, if they see that the sickness is getting worse, the healer will always refer the client to another healer who has the same gift or to a traditional healer.

SUMMARY

This section surveyed the Christo-pagan worldview and methods of healing. The first section observed that Akey Christo-pagan healers have a syncretistic worldview. The belief that physical and non-physical spiritual forces shape happenings in life always drives people to live in continual fear of these powers. Therefore, when God is silent and distant in times of crises for them, it is acceptable to turn around and seek to manipulate other spirits through magic for a quick fix to their problems. This is because they view God as one among other spirits. They view Christianity as a foreign culture and they just want to incorporate it into their own system of belief and give their own meaning to it. As a result, they come up with different practices that are ambiguous or are considered as Christo-pagan.

The second section covered the methods of healing used by Christo-pagan healers. Their methods are complex and vary between different healers, but the common ones have been discussed. Since their method of healing is a mixture of biblical and traditional healing, their first step is prayer. Prayer is addressed to Jesus, reasoning that he will empower their traditional healing practices. The second step is the patient's description of his sickness. While in the process of describing the sickness, those who see through visions will immediately diagnose and give a response of what is causing the sickness; whereas, for those who see through dreams, their responses are given the following day. For prevention and healing of the sickness, they use water, oil, and memory verses which have been prayed

over. Others use herbs or water, which have an incantation invoked over them, and set taboos to be kept.

COMPARISON, CRITICAL ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION OF HEALING METHODS

The aim of this section is twofold. First, a comparison of Christo-pagan methods of healing with the traditional and biblical methods of healing, based on the survey done in the previous sections, will be made.. Second, a critical analysis and evaluation will be made on some steps of Christo-pagan methods of healing which look biblical but are doubtful.

COMPARISON OF HEALING METHODS

This section aims to compare Christo-pagan methods of healing with traditional methods of healing and biblical methods of healing.

Christo-pagan Healing and Traditional Healing

The first comparison is between Christo-pagan methods of healing and traditional healing methods. Table 2 below shows brief details of a comparison between the two methods. The comparison in the table indicates that there are similarities and differences that stand out between these two methods. The similarities are indicated by “Yes” and differences by “No”. First, prayer for healing in the name Jesus is not used in traditional healing, because in tradition healing spirits are consulted instead of Jesus. In the second step, visions and dreams are used in both Christo-pagan and traditional healing. But a critical question is raised concerning their sources, “Do they originate from the Holy Spirit or the spirits?”

Christo-pagan healer	Traditional healer
Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ	No
Visions and dreams	Yes
Water, oil, and memory verses which have been prayed over	No
Herbs and water which have an incantation invoked over them	Yes
Taboos	Yes

Table 2: A comparison of the Christo-pagan methods of healing and traditional methods of healing

If visions and dreams used by Christo-pagan healers come from the Holy Spirit, then they are different from the visions and dreams used by diviners in traditional healing. However, if they come from the spirits, then they are similar to those used by diviners in traditional healing, as discussed in section two, “Customary Concept of Traditional Healing”. Third, the water, oil, and memory verses, which have been prayed over, are not used in traditional healing, because in traditional healing there is no concept of praying over things to ask God to bless them. The idea and practice are used in traditional healing, but the spirits are consulted to work through these elements. Moreover, these practices can be considered part of traditional healing, if clients believe those elements to have magical power. Finally, the last two steps (herbs and water which have had an incantation invoked over them) and taboos are clearly associated with traditional healing. This is beyond question because invocation of the spirits is included in the ritual.

Christo-pagan Healing and Biblical Healing

The second comparison is between Christo-pagan healing methods and biblical healing methods. Table 3 below shows brief details of a comparison between the two methods. The comparison in the table indicates that there are similarities and differences, which stand out, from these two methods. The similarities are indicated by “Yes” and differences by “No”.

Christo-pagan healer	Biblical healing
Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ	Yes
Visions and dreams	No
Water, oil, and memory verses which have been prayed over	Yes
Herbs and water which have an incantation invoked over them	No
Taboos	No

Table 3: A comparison of the Christo-pagan methods of healing and biblical methods of healing

First, praying in the name of Jesus Christ or claiming and performing healing through the name and authority of Jesus is a biblical approach to healing. As seen in the early church, the apostles performed many healing miracles in the name of Jesus which were discussed in section three, “Christian Understanding of Biblical Healing”. Second, it is undeniable that God can reveal secret things through visions and dreams. The Bible does refer to it. However, to use visions and dreams to identify the cause of a sickness and through which remedies are revealed is questionable. There is no passage in the Bible which involves Jesus and even his disciples using visions and dreams when dealing with sickness. Furthermore, James does not mention visions and dreams in his instructions to elders attending to the sick. Third, the use of water and oil and memory verses, which have been prayed over, may be acceptable as a biblical pattern of healing, so long as the sick person is not diverted to trust in these elements as having magical properties. Rather, they should believe that God can use them to bring healing. In the Bible we can find examples where God’s power flows out through elements and heals people. Similarly, Jesus used his spittle, mud, and the hem of his robe, to heal, and handkerchiefs and aprons which had touched Paul were used to heal. Lastly, mention of the use of herbs and water, which have an incantation invoked over them, and taboos is absent in the Bible. There is no Bible passage referring to Jesus or even his disciples using charms or imposing taboos for a sick person to keep, if he wanted to be healed.

Mixture of Methods

Having compared Christo-pagan methods of healing with the traditional method of healing and biblical method of healing, it is fair to say that there

is a mixture in Christo-pagan methods of healing. It includes some aspects of both traditional healing and biblical healing. Table 4 below recapitulates the details of the three methods.

Traditional healer	Christo-pagan healer	Biblical healing
No	Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ	Yes
Yes	Visions and dreams	No
No	Water, oil, and memory verses which have been prayed over	Yes
Yes	Herbs and water which have an incantation invoked over them	No
Yes	Taboos	No

Table 4: A comparison between the methods of traditional healing, Christo-pagan healing, and biblical healing

Table 4 shows that most Christo-pagan methods of healing have been adapted from traditional methods of healing. Prayer in the name of Jesus and prayer over oil are the only biblical elements and practices which, when blended with traditional methods of healing, give a Christian form to the method. Prayer is seen as a biblical cover for traditional practices of healing. Therefore, Christo-pagan healing cannot be considered as biblical healing.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF CHRISTO-PAGAN METHODS OF HEALING

Comparison of the methods of Christo-pagan healing with the methods of traditional healing and biblical healing has laid a foundation from which to make a fair and critical analysis and evaluation of Christo-pagan methods of healing. Since Christo-pagan healing in the name of Jesus may not be considered to be biblical, further questions arise about different steps which look biblical but which need critical analysis and evaluation. These are prayer, use of the name of Jesus, visions and dreams, and use of elements in Christo-pagan practices.

Faithless Prayer

The methods and practices of Christo-pagan healers were not biblical, nevertheless, a question may be asked, “What about prayer?” Prayer is a biblical method of communicating our needs to God. As we discussed above, when dealing with sickness the elders must offer a prayer of faith, which is prayer driven by faith in the sure promises of God. Such prayer also expresses trust in God and flows out of commitment to him. So, prayer offered by Christo-pagan healers can be considered as faithless prayer. The following reasons demonstrate that. First, the rest of their practices, such as the use of herbs and water, which have had an incantation invoked over them, and taboos indicate that faith is missing in their prayer. Their prayer is full of meaningless words because it is not stimulated and inspired by faith. Their faith is attached to the spirits whom they are invoking for healing and not to God. Second, instead of persevering in prayer, they tend to refer the patient to traditional healers. Lastly, there is the question of personal commitment. Their practices and the advice they give, when referring their clients to traditional healers, reveals their true belief system. Those actions definitely prove that they are not trusting God alone and have no personal commitment to him.

Misusing the Name of Jesus

The expression “in the name of Jesus” is a common expression used among Christians in churches in public prayers, and when praying for healing and deliverance. It is a biblical expression, and reflects important theological truths. The name of Jesus means “Saviour” (Matt 1:21), and “Christ” means “Messiah” or “anointed One” (John 1:41). In the power of his name, all of our physical and spiritual needs are met. Yet, many so-called Akey Christians are today praying in the name of Jesus, but they do not actually believe that this name has power to bring change in their lives and situations. Therefore, they have to resort elsewhere to spirits for guidance and for healing. They are claiming the name of Jesus just to make their traditional practices look Christian. They want to look Christian, to make a name for themselves, and to attract more followers from which they can accumulate wealth. This is a misuse of the name of Jesus. It is a trap that the devil uses to seduce Christians, and even unbelievers, into thinking they are being Christian by doing such good works. Jesus is speaking about those kinds of people when he says “On that day many will say to me,

‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’ ” (Matt 7:22-23). There are healers who pretend to be Christians, but in fact are using “black power”. They are using the name of Jesus with some hidden agendas attached to it, that is, to make themselves famous and to raise money from their clients. In such cases, Christians need to discern the source of power of those performing miraculous healing. Are they truly performing under the power of the name of Jesus or under the power of the spirits? This process will also involve a test of the spiritual life, and motivation behind their healing endeavours. As we have already mentioned, all of the healer’s practices will prove who he is. He is not relying on God, therefore, he is misusing the name of Jesus to cover his evil practices in order to look Christian.

Visions and Dreams Originating from the Spirits

On the one hand, we read that when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, he can see visions and dream dreams (Acts 2:17). Numerous passages in the Bible affirm that people have had an experience where God has spoken to them directly through visions and dreams. On the other hand, supernatural gifts, as such, do not guarantee that the user is spiritual or Christian. Because of that a critical question may be raised against the Christo-pagan healers, Do their visions and dreams derive from the Holy Spirit, or from the spirits? This is a crucial question because the Bible strongly commands Christians not to immediately accept everything done by so-called Christians as the work of the Holy Spirit of God. On the contrary, we need to distinguish between the spirits (1 Cor 12:10). As we continue our quest to determine the source of visions and dreams, the *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* raises two other important points which must be considered with respect to visions and dreams, quite apart from whether their origin is from spirits. It says that dreams can be the result of intellectual and ethical tension which has been experienced.¹⁰⁴ However, if we are to build our arguments on the practice itself, we can say that the visions and dreams of the Christo-pagan healers have not originated from

¹⁰⁴ “Dream”, in *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 4th edn, Merrill F. Unger, Ronald K. Harrison, eds, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1988, p. 318, quoting Franz. J. Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1966, pp. 324ff.

the Holy Spirit. The following points support that claim. First, visions and dreams were never used in the Bible, particularly in the ministry of Jesus and his apostles to determine the cause of a sickness and to reveal which remedies should be used. Furthermore, James did not mention visions and dreams in his instruction concerning what the elders should do when attending to the sick. Second, the answers given by those who see visions and dreams are always connected to their traditional beliefs in regard to the causes of sickness. In the case of dreams, Trompf calls them *common dreams*, meaning “the dreams that are common within a society”.¹⁰⁵ They never relate a sickness to a scientific or natural cause. Furthermore, responses are rarely heard to be biblically related.¹⁰⁶ Third, their practices of incantation and taboos reveal them to be traditional healers, with the source of their power coming from the spirits. This is also a driving force for them to always refer their patients to their colleagues, other traditional healers, when their remedies are not efficacious. The above reasons demonstrate that the visions and dreams of the Christo-pagan healers are not from the Holy Spirit. They are using methods of guidance that diviners are using and which were discussed in section two, “Customary Concept of Traditional Healing”. From this we see that the spirits are the origin for their visions and dreams.

Magical Use of Elements

When talking about using elements for healing, we are touching on a major and complicated area of discussion. The elements which are used, either with or without healing properties, can be misunderstood and, therefore, the place of faith may be questioned. Speaking from experience, many Christo-pagan healers who use elements in their healing endeavours have corrupted the faith of many of their clients. For example, when a client takes elements with healing properties, his trust is in the healing properties contained in those elements, even despite the fact that they have been prayed over. Another case is where elements without healing properties are used and prayed over. Instead of trusting God to use these elements to bring healing, he trusts these elements to have some magical power to bring

¹⁰⁵ Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁶ It is rarely heard of Christo-pagan healers connecting sickness with the sovereignty of God; that God is in control of everything, and that he sometimes allows sickness to strengthen our faith, or demonstrate his power and grace in our lives.

healing. Some believe that when elements are prayed over they are transformed and acquire some kind of mystical or magical power. Therefore, this leads to some kind of fear as regards those elements. They are considered to be sacred or taboo and are reserved only for special use. The use of memory verses also generates the same attitude and trust.

Having talked about the emphasis on elements, another big distortion of faith associated with that is that all the faith and trust of the clients is directed to the healer himself. The client believes him to have extraordinary power for healings and prophecies and that he is able to do miracles. Instead of trusting God, people trust the healer. Furthermore, since the Christo-pagan healers always do their ministry individually, pride also reveals itself in their lives. They want to take credit and adoration from their followers for the work they are doing. Therefore, as Hiebert warns, “We must see that leadership, healing, guidance, exorcisms, and other ministries in the church, belong to the congregation. Some members may have particular gifts, but they use these as members of the body.”¹⁰⁷

To recapitulate, the use of the elements in the Bible has a different understanding and purpose. James encourages the sick to call for the elders of the church, not individual elders. This may be to avoid individual pride on the part of the elders. The elders should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. James continues that the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up. The emphasis here is not on elements with healing properties, such as oil and spittle, but on prayer. The anointing with oil symbolises God’s concern for and faithfulness to his people in time of distress, so that he can carry out his will.

Furthermore, it is either the outward sign of the inward power of prayer or, more likely, a sacramental vehicle of divine power.¹⁰⁸ The use of elements without healing properties – as, for example, Jesus’ use of mud and the hem of his robe, as with Peter with his shadow, and as with Paul and the

¹⁰⁷ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, Tite Tiéno, “Responding to Split-level Christianity and Folk Religion”, in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 16.4 (Winter 1999/2000), pp. 178.

¹⁰⁸ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, p. 193.

handkerchief – is a major question for us today. The question is whether a believer can perform the same miracles that Jesus and his apostles did. God is, of course, free to work miracles today. But, at that particular time God gave the apostles extraordinary power to perform such miracles for particular purposes. These were to convey God’s grace, to validate the message of the kingdom of God, and to show its power and presence among his people (Acts 5:12; 8:4-8; 14:3; 19:11).

A Fake Gift

It is not always appropriate to assume that someone who is performing a miraculous healing in the name of Jesus Christ must have a spiritual gift. Remember Jesus’ warning that on “that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’ ” (Matt 7:22-23). Frederick Dale Bruner warns that although prophecy, exorcism, and miracles can be seen as gifts of God, even when they are done in the name of Christ, people need to be on their guard against heretics.¹⁰⁹ R. T. France also adds that, “prophecy, exorcism, and miracle can be counterfeited”.¹¹⁰ Christo-pagan healers may be categorised with these people because they are not performing healing through the power and authority of Christ. Their healing practices are generated and empowered by the devil in order to counterfeit God’s good work. Scott J. Hafemann states that, since Satan is designated as an “angel of light”, it is to “highlight his counterfeit nature as a messenger of God (2 Cor 11:14)”.¹¹¹ He also adds that “Satan pawns himself off as the real messenger of light – that is Christ”, and his servants as “apostles of Christ”.¹¹² As an imitator of Christ, Satan imitates supernatural gifts, such as healing, visions, and dreams and gives to his servants, the traditional healers, diviners, and even the Christo-pagan healers, the means to

¹⁰⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: a Commentary*, vol 1: The Christbook: Matthew 1-12, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 355.

¹¹⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Leicester UK: IVP, 1985, p. 148.

¹¹¹ Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998, p. 435.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to lead believers astray. This reminds us of Jesus' warning, "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible" (Matt 24:24). Therefore, Christians need discernment about those exercising spiritual gifts. John encourages believers saying, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Writing in the African context, Kunhiyop advises,

Spiritual gifts must always be used and interpreted in accordance with the word of God, in conjunction with which the Spirit always works. They are never meant to serve as substitutes for reading and understanding the word of God. On the contrary, when the Spirit is made to overshadow the word, it is an indication of an imbalance in understanding God's revelation.¹¹³

This is true in the case of the Akey Christo-pagan healers, who are claiming healing in Jesus' name. Their practices of healing overshadow the word of God and need to be cleared up.

SUMMARY

Having compared the method of healing used by the Christo-pagan healers with the traditional method of healing and the biblical method of healing, it has been demonstrated that there is mixture in the Christo-pagan method of healing. Most of their practices are traditional in origin, and only prayer in the name of Jesus is biblical. Prayer is being used as a Christian cover for the traditional practices of healing. It is a Christo-pagan practice of healing.

Critical analysis and evaluation has also been made of the Christo-pagan methods of healing, particularly of different steps which are biblically related but doubtful, such as prayer, use of the name of Jesus, visions and dreams, and the use of elements. First, it has been established that the prayer of the Christo-pagan healers is faithless, because it is not motivated by and inspired with faith. That their faith is not in God but in the spirits is proved by the rest of their practices. Second, Christo-pagan healers are

¹¹³ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, p. 179.

misusing the name of Jesus. They are praying in the name of Jesus, but they do not believe that this name has power to transform life and make a difference in the situations they encounter. Therefore, they consult the spirits for a quick fix of their problems. They are claiming the name of Jesus just to make their traditional practices look Christian. Third, their visions and dreams are not from the Holy Spirit, but have originated from the spirits. The responses obtained from their visions and dreams are related to traditional diviners. Furthermore, the rest of their practices, such as incantation, indicate spirits to be their sources. Lastly, the use of elements can be misunderstood and the place of faith in life may be questioned. The elements can divert the faith of the patient to trust those elements to have healing properties or to have magical power to bring healing, rather than to trust God to use those elements as vehicles of his divine grace and power to restore health.

A final critical comment is also made on the gift of healing. The gift of healing of the Christo-pagan healers is not a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift of the spirits (devil) given to his servants to counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, it is the same gift that the traditional healers use in their healing practices and the diviners use in their methods of seeking guidance, such as in visions and dreams.

PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Having analysed the Christo-pagan healers' methods of healing, as found in the Akey context, with traditional healing methods and biblical methods of healing, pastoral recommendations need to be provided. In this section on pastoral recommendations, the two following areas will be covered: transformation of worldview and discerning God's working in healing.

TRANSFORMATION OF WORLDVIEW

To avoid living a double life, a complete transformation of worldview is crucially important in life. Without going through a transformation process, a person will still retain their old worldview and the same old person (cultural belief) will remain inside the new skin (Christian belief). Therefore, the following areas will be discussed: spiritual transformation, God and spirits, and a biblical view of sickness, health, and healing, in order to lay a cognitive foundation towards a new Christian worldview.

Spiritual Transformation

A person cannot change his worldview unless he goes through a personal spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation, on the one hand, is the work of God in the life of a sinner to make him his child and a citizen of his kingdom. On the other hand, it is the individual's responsibility to respond in obedience to God's calling. It is a call "to leave their false gods, and their self-idolatry, with its obsession with wealth, power, pride, sex, and race and to return to God as their Creator and Lord".¹¹⁴ This move is called "conversion" or "repentance", when a person turns from his old gods and turns to God who forgives him and opens the door for reconciliation and a new relationship with him.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, conversion also involves these three cultural dimensions in a person's life: cognitive (belief), affective (feelings), and evaluative (norms).¹¹⁶ This is the first and important step through which a person needs to go in order for him to have a new worldview, a biblical worldview. As Hiebert states:

Conversion to Christ must encompass all three levels of culture: behaviour and rituals, beliefs, and worldview. Christians should live differently, because they are Christians. However, if their behaviour is based primarily on their culture, it becomes dead tradition. Conversion must involve a transformation in beliefs, but if it is only a change of beliefs, it is false faith (James 2). Although conversion must include a change in behaviour and beliefs, if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and becomes captive to the local culture. The result is syncretistic Christo-paganism which has the form but not the essence of Christianity. Christianity becomes a new magic and a new more-subtle form of idolatry.¹¹⁷

These are the kind of experiences, which can be identified in the life and practices of the Akey Christo-pagan healers. The gospel was introduced, but the people's lives were not grasped by it. Below the surface, their lives were deeply rooted in their cultural behaviour and beliefs. Christo-pagan

¹¹⁴ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p. 307.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

practices of healing are the result of an amalgamated worldview. Therefore, people need to surrender their lives to God and to let his word, with the help of his Holy Spirit, take complete control and bring transformation in their lives. Only through such a process can people have a new biblical worldview. Based on their new worldview, their interpretation of the cosmology and practices will be in accordance to the word of God.

God and Spirits

Since those claiming healing in the name of Jesus see the world through a set of eyes which results in a syncretistic Christo-pagan worldview and practices, it is important to discuss God and spirits within the framework of a biblical worldview.

God

The doctrine of general revelation implies that the Akey people may already have knowledge of the God of the Bible whose name *Tautai* means “the sky-god”.¹¹⁸ He is known in theory, but not in practice. He is not worshipped and honoured by any gifts because he is far removed from his people.¹¹⁹ He is “distant, abstract, and unknowable” in his attributes.¹²⁰ He is not a popular god, therefore, people turn to believe and worship other deities. This is analogous to the situation Paul spoke about in the Epistle to the Romans, where people instead of worshipping God the creator, whom they already knew, worshipped and served the creature (Rom 1:21-25). So, when the God of the Bible was introduced among the Akey people, he was seen as one (spirit) among other spirits and they added him to those spirits they were already worshipping. They saw no difference between God and the spirits. This is a contributing factor to the Akey syncretistic Christo-pagan beliefs and practices. In saying that, their practices prove that they do not have a full knowledge about the God of the Bible who has revealed himself through the person of Jesus Christ. The traditional preconception

¹¹⁸ A. Capell, “The Stratification of Afterworld Beliefs in the New Hebrides”, in *Folklore* 49.1 (March 1938), p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Eugene A. Nida, William A. Smalley, *Introducing Animism*, New York NY: Friendship Press, 1959, p. 15.

¹²⁰ Halverson, “Animism”, p. 59.

about him and the spirits will only change when people have a personal encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ.

Our cosmological understanding must begin with God the Creator and the fact that everything else is creation. God is eternal and in him alone all creation, such as angels, spirits, humans, animals, plants, matter, and energy, exists and depends.¹²¹ God is not one like the created spirits who are numerous and live in different places, such as trees, hills, rivers, plants, animals, and so on.¹²² God is transcendent and immanent. Since God is the creator, all his creation receives their existence and total being from him. Therefore, he must be other than his creation because he is transcendent. He is immanent, that is, he is “present to all things at their deepest core, existence itself”.¹²³ As the scriptures say, “In him, we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He is not like the “sky-god”, as in Akey traditional belief, who is somewhere far above and impossible to relate to. He is not like the territorial spirits whom the Akey revere and whose power and presence are limited geographically. God is always near to us through his Holy Spirit in our lives (John 16:7), and his holy scriptures still speak to us today. God’s presence protects believers and gives them a sense of security. God’s power, through his Holy Spirit, in the life of a believer is stronger than evil forces (1 John 4:4).¹²⁴ God is omniscient and omnipotent, which means “there can be no real barriers to God’s knowing or acting”.¹²⁵ He created everything and sustains everything. It also means that he knows everything and has power over everything. In fact, there “is no rival or competitor, no spirit or thing that can undermine his sovereign and loving provision for his creation”.¹²⁶ He is sovereign over Satan and his demonic spirits which people worship and serve. God is holy, which means he is set apart from his creation, unique, and the standard of all morality.¹²⁷ Therefore, he is worthy to be worshipped, so we should not

¹²¹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p. 269.

¹²² Harold W. Turner, *Living Tribal Religions*, London UK: Ward Lock Educational, 1971, p. 11.

¹²³ Peter Kreeft, Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1994, p. 94.

¹²⁴ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, p. 61.

¹²⁵ Kreeft, Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 96.

¹²⁶ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, p. 50.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

worship unclean evil spirits. God is just. He deals fairly with his creation and his judgment is fair. At the end of the age, he will judge Satan and his demonic spirits and their worshippers and condemn them to eternal condemnation. God is love. God's justice condemns sinners, but because he is a loving God he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of humans.¹²⁸ Because of who God is, as shown through his attributes, we can simply acknowledge that he is everything we need. We only need to completely surrender ourselves under his lordship and we will experience in our lives all the benefits promised for his sons and daughters.

The Spirits

Belief in spirits among the Akey people has paralysed their spiritual lives. They fear the spirits because of their malevolent deeds in their lives. This has resulted in the formation of unbiblical doctrines and practices, just to bridge that gap of relationship. We cannot ignore the reality and influence of the spirits, for the Bible also acknowledges that there are different categories of spirits. But, as Kunhiyop states, "Christians need to base their thinking about the spirit world on the Bible, rather than on tradition".¹²⁹ In saying that, it is important to know that in the beginning the evil spirits were created holy. But they were rejected, because of rebellion against God, and became unclean and violent (Gen 1:31; 2 Pet 2:4; Matt 8:28). However, they still have power to perform miracles (Rev 13:12-15). The evil spirits oppose Christians in their lives and ministries (Eph 6:12), encourage idol worship (1 Cor 10:20), confuse and lead people away from the truth (1 Tim 4:1), and cause physical and mental disease (2 Cor 12:7).¹³⁰ Although evil spirits seem cunning and powerful, God is more powerful than them. He has complete authority over them and one day he will send them to eternal condemnation.¹³¹

A Biblical View of Sickness, Health, and Healing

The concepts of the "good life" and "suffering" (such as, sickness) need to be understood in the light of the word of God. If we are not careful, they can be a means of turning people towards syncretism. This is the case

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

¹³¹ Ibid.

among the Akey people. Some are not able to handle the tension of the problems in their lives and are looking for easy solutions to their problems, to obtain a good life, and they end up seeking guidance and help in wrong places and from wrong people. Therefore, a biblical view of sickness, health, and healing are crucially important.

Sickness

The Old Testament and the New Testament use different words to describe “sickness”, such as *חֲלוּל* (*chōli*), and *ἀσθένεια* (*astheneia*).¹³² Human sickness began when our first ancestors rebelled against God and sinned. Based on that concept, the common understanding in the ancient world is that any sickness which is experienced is the consequence of sin. Leland Ryken states that in the Old Testament, “[g]ood health and healing are seen as marks of the blessing of God, and illness as an indication of his disfavour (Deut 7:15; 1 Sam 5:9; Ps 38:3; 41:1-4)”.¹³³ But it is also important to note that not all sickness which individuals experience is the result of their sins, because the experience of Job and the blind man in John 9:2-3 oppose that. The Bible also affirms that there are sicknesses caused by evil spirits (Matt 4:24). This is the common belief among the Akey people, including their traditional healers and the Christo-pagan healers. They always attribute diseases to evil spirits. It is true, in some cases, that spirits caused diseases and affected mental states (Luke 13:32). But it is also important to note that it is not true in every case. However, those kinds of sicknesses should be viewed in the light of the sovereignty of God, which means God is greater than the evil spirits and he only allows them to act under his sovereignty, as in the case of Job (Job 1). Furthermore, there are other sicknesses which have natural causes. For such diseases, we need to seek doctors for help. God has given them wisdom and ability to provide treatments for such diseases and such treatments should be taken with thanksgiving.

Understanding the Bible’s teaching on the causes of diseases should affect our attitude when we experience sickness and suffering. We need to

¹³² J. Wilkinson, “Healing”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, eds, Leicester UK: IVP, 1988, p. 287.

¹³³ “Disease and Healing”, in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1998, p. 209.

remember that, as a result of the fallen world (Rom 8:18-25), God allows sickness and suffering in our lives to remind us of the presence of sin and our vulnerability to infection and decay.¹³⁴ While still living in this fallen world and striving for a good life, we need discernment as to what causes sickness and to seek remedies in the right places. For example, if the sickness comes from God because of sin, ask for forgiveness and repent, or if it is because God wants to strengthen our faith, thank and seek him more and more. If sickness is caused by evil spirits, seek help in prayer for deliverance by the elders. If sickness has a natural cause, such as malaria, seek anti-malarial treatment by doctors and receive it with thanksgiving. God allows sickness and suffering to display his glory and grace in our lives. The experience of Job and Paul prove that (Job 42:1-6; 2 Cor 12:1-10).¹³⁵

Health

Health, in general, can be defined as “a condition in which the components of the body-mind complex are free from disease and function together to promote the person’s well-being”.¹³⁶ The Bible uses different words to describe health. The Old Testament uses the word שָׁלוֹם (shālōm), which is always translated as “peace”. In fact, this word means “soundness” or “well-being”.¹³⁷ In the Old Testament, health was connected with an ethical life, and spiritual obedience (Ex 15:26; Deut 28:58-61). As Wilkinson points out, “health in the Old Testament consists of wholeness and holiness”.¹³⁸ Likewise, the New Testament accepts the Old Testament concept of health. Jesus uses such words as “blessedness” (Matt 5:3-11), “life” (John 10:10), and “being whole” (John 5:6) to describe health. Furthermore, when the New Testament speaks about healing, it uses the word σώζω (sōzō), “save”, to refer to “healing of the body and the saving of the soul (Luke 7:50; 9:24)”.¹³⁹ This implies that “health is the complete well-being of a person, who is in a right relationship to God, to himself, to

¹³⁴ Wilkinson, “Healing”, p. 287.

¹³⁵ “Disease and Healing”, p. 209.

¹³⁶ Ronald K. Harrison, “Heal”, in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol 2, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982, p. 640.

¹³⁷ Wilkinson, “Healing”, p. 287.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

his fellows, and to his environment”.¹⁴⁰ In the Bible, the concept of health is closely related to the animistic view of health in which spiritual and physical relationships with other people and the environment are to be kept. But the difference is that the Bible emphasises the person’s relationship with God, whereas in animism the person’s relationship with the spirit world is emphasised. However, true perfect health consists of the spiritual and physical health which will be received in eternal glory. This is in contrast to animistic belief, which only insists on the necessity for physical health and neglects spiritual health. The health offered is temporary and does not prepare a person for eternal glory, but for an otherwise eternal condemnation.

Healing

From an Old Testament perspective, the biological cause of disease is rarely considered. The predominant conviction is that Yahweh allows and prevents sickness. Therefore, only God can restore the sick to health, and prayer is the chief means for seeking healing. We can find examples of the pattern of answered prayers for healing (Ps 6; 16:10; 30:2).¹⁴¹ In addition, since illness may be viewed as the consequence of sin, the psalmist (Ps 103:3), the account of healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:2-12), and James (James 5:14) reveal that sin needs forgiveness in order for illness to be healed.¹⁴² But it would be a mistake to assume that all sicknesses are always connected to sin, because of the experiences of Job, Paul, and the blind man in John 9:2-3 refute this.

In the New Testament, healing played just as much of a vital part in Jesus’ ministry as preaching and teaching. Peter testified “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Jesus regarded sickness as an evil influence, which was introduced in a person’s life to disrupt his personality (Luke 8:26-39). Therefore, Jesus’ healing was to reunify body and mind so that the person might have the abundant life that God wanted him to experience (John

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ronald K. Cottle, “Healing, Gifts of”, in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol 2, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982, p. 647.

¹⁴² “Disease and Healing”, p. 209.

10:10). In some cases, both physical and spiritual healing is experienced as a result of submission, in obedience and faith in God's restorative power (Matt 9:27-31; Mark 5:25-35). In other cases, Jesus healed without human response (Matt 8:14-17). Harrison adds, "He intended to heal the sin-damaged personality, knowing that once the imbalance was corrected and the turmoil of the subconscious mind calmed, the person would enjoy a new relationship with God characterised by health".¹⁴³ Furthermore, in the early church, disciples performed similar healings to those of Jesus in his ministry, and all their healings were attributed to Christ's power.

However, someone may ask, "Does God heal today?" At a deeper level, this question may also arise from another question, "Does God answer prayer for healing?" To answer these questions, we first need to believe that God always answers our prayers according to his promises (Matt 7:7; John 14:14). Second, whatever his answer may be, it is completely dependent on his will. "God is completely free to heal or not to heal, according to his will (cf. John 5:13-16). His purpose may include physical infirmity and sickness for the testing, strengthening, refining, or chastening of his own (1 Cor 11:30-31; 2 Cor 12:7-10)."¹⁴⁴ In other words, God can use sickness and suffering purposefully to "draw people to himself, and to teach them patience and maturity (Job 42:5-6; James 1:2-4)".¹⁴⁵

It needs to be remembered that sickness and suffering are part of this fallen world of which we too are part. Therefore, from the time of conception, a human being is in the processes of aging and death, and the side effects of these processes are sickness and suffering.¹⁴⁶ For Christians, sickness and suffering are reminders that their lives are temporary and destined to decay, due to original sin. Therefore, for Christians, whatever may be God's will concerning their health, they will always have joy and peace that after their death they will experience a full deliverance, when they receive their new bodies (1 Cor 15:50-56). This is perfect healing.

¹⁴³ Harrison, "Heal", p. 646.

¹⁴⁴ Merrill F. Unger, "Divine Healing", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971), p. 239.

¹⁴⁵ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiéno, "Responding to Split-level Christianity and Folk Religion", p. 176.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

DISCERNING GOD'S WORKING IN HEALING

Christ predicted that false Christs and false prophets would arise and would deceive many through demonic signs and wonders (Mark 13:22; Matt 24:24). In addition, Paul also reminds us that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light, so Satan's servants can also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor 11:13-15). Satanic imitation of spiritual gifts is a big challenge. Because of that, John warns that Christians need to "test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Merrill Unger emphasises the urgency of discernment, saying:

In the age-end upsurge of deluding demonism and diabolic miracle, it is high time for all God's born-again children to claim the genuine spiritual gift of "discerning of spirits" (1 Cor 12:10), and to see through popular occult healing methods and movements of our day. Otherwise, they too run the risk of being taken in by every religiously-camouflaged act, where the demonic masquerades as the divine.¹⁴⁷

Discernment begins when we raise different questions as a practice concerned to "prove all things" (1 Thess 5:21). K. Neill Foster, in his book *The Discerning Christian*, emphasises the importance of questioning. "We Christians hesitate to question anything, lest we grieve the Spirit of God, lest we contribute to dissension and division. . . . The failure to question will short-circuit the process of discernment."¹⁴⁸ Everything that happens in the church and everything done in the name of Jesus needs to be questioned. These questions will help determine whether they have originated from the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ is the author, or from Satan the deceiver. Therefore, questions are crucially important in the process of discernment.

¹⁴⁷ Unger, "Divine Healing", p. 235.

¹⁴⁸ K. Neill Foster, *The Discerning Christian: How the Believer Detects Truth from Error in the Midst of Today's Religious Confusion*, Harrisburg PA: Christian Publications, 1975, p. 53.

Several biblical tests will be discussed to enable Christians to discern the work of God and differentiate it from the work of Satan. In the tests, there are four areas that need to be questioned and carefully observed.

The first test is to analyse the practice from the scriptures. Does this practice conform to scriptural teaching?¹⁴⁹ The scriptures should be the measuring rod for all that we do (2 Tim 3:16-17). A practice, guided by the Holy Spirit, will never contradict the scriptures. For the scriptures themselves assure us that “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor 14:33). So, any practice which raises doubt or is in conflict with the scriptures will need further investigation.

The second test is to investigate the spirituality of the healer. Is he (the healer) a born-again person? Does he recognise Christ as Lord and Saviour? (1 John 2: 3-5). This test is not to find out whether he is a member of the church, but to find out his personal relationship with the Lord. If he is a committed Christian or a spirit-filled Christian, fruits of the Holy Spirit should be manifested in his life (Gal 5:22-25). In what he does, is there love or self-centredness, gentleness or arrogance, and so on?

The third test is to identify who gets the glory from the work done. If the power manifested is from God’s Holy Spirit, the glory will always be attributed to God (John 7:18; 8:50; 17:4). On the contrary, if it is manifested through the power of flesh or spirits, glory will always be given to the person concerned.

The last test is to assess the maturity and unity in the body of Christ (the church). Jesus said, “I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). It needs to be established whether the practice draws the attention of the people to Christ, and the members of his body. In particular, does this practice contribute to the spiritual growth of the people, or it is something that leads to spiritual immaturity (1 Cor 12-14)? Moreover, it needs to be seen whether the healer is accountable to the church or not. Furthermore, “does it [the practice] lead Christians to seek the unity of the body of Christ, or is it divisive (John 17:11; 1 John 2:9-11;

¹⁴⁹ Hiebert, Shaw, Tiénou, “Responding to Split-level Christianity and Folk Religion”, p. 179.

5:1-2)?”¹⁵⁰ If the healer is an influential figure drawing people to himself rather than to Christ, acting independently from the body of Christ (the church), and his works are not contributing to the spiritual growth of the people, this kind of healer must be avoided.

SUMMARY

In this section of pastoral recommendations, transformation of worldview is crucial. Unless a person goes through spiritual conversion and repentance, he cannot have a new worldview (a biblical worldview). Therefore, he has to turn from his old gods and turn to God, who will forgive him and open the door for reconciliation and a new relationship with him. This can only be achieved through the preaching and teaching of the gospel. Furthermore, our cosmological understanding must begin with God the Creator, and recognise that everything else is creation, including the spirits. Therefore, “there is no rival or competitor, no spirit or thing that can undermine his sovereign and loving provision for his creation”.¹⁵¹ This is our complete assurance.

Next, Christians must hold to a biblical view of sickness, health, and healing. First, people need to be taught that God allows sickness and suffering in order to display his glory and grace in our lives. Second, they need to be reminded that health is not only confined to physical health, but it is the complete well-being of a person who is in a right relationship to God, to himself, to his fellows, and to his environment. Lastly, it is worth knowing that God is completely free to heal or not to heal, according to his will (cf. John 5:13-16).

Finally, because of the satanic imitation of the spiritual gift of healing, several biblical tests are offered to enable Christians to discern the work of God on healing and differentiate it from the work of Satan. The first test is to analyse the practice from the scriptures. The second test is to investigate the spirituality of the healer. The third test is to identify who gets the glory from the work done. The last test is to assess whether the practice promotes maturity and unity in the body of Christ (the church).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, p. 50.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to discern the work of God in healing in Vanuatu, with special reference to the Akey people on the island of Espiritu Santo. This section brings together the summaries and draws conclusions.

SUMMARY

The introduction in section one presented the background and the purpose of the study. Section two surveyed the customary concept of traditional healing among the Akey people. Section three gave the Christian understanding of biblical healing. Section four looked at the syncretistic Christo-pagan worldview and methods of healing. Section five made a comparison, critical analysis, and evaluation of the healing methods. Section six offered pastoral recommendations.

Introduction Summary

In the introduction the background and the purpose of the study were presented, which was to provide a tool for church leaders and ordinary Christians in Vanuatu to be able to discern the work of God in healing. A few research questions were raised to guide the study and other parameters of study were stated, such as the methodology, the limitations and delimitations, and the definition of terms.

Customary Concept of Traditional Healing Summary

This section provided an overview of the traditional concept of healing. First, the Akey worldview was explored – including their view of life as holistic, malevolent and the benevolent spirits, and their view on the causes of diseases – which drives them to form their own belief system and practices in life.

Second, the role of diviners, as the first person to consult for guidance in any emergency, was discussed. He is a trusted figure in the society, guiding them as to what to do and who to go to for extra help.

Lastly, we briefly covered the complex steps and role of a traditional healer when dealing with spiritually-caused diseases. There are three stages when dealing with diseases caused by spirits. These are binding and removing of the spirits, healing of the effects, prevention and evaluation of the disease.

Christian Understanding of Biblical Healing Summary

In this section we discussed the Christian understanding of biblical healing. The first section covered the purpose of biblical healing miracles. Healings, performed by Jesus and the apostles, were with the purpose of demonstrating the divine power of the kingdom of God, to validate the message of the kingdom which they were proclaiming, and had the aim of producing faith in those who did not believe.

The second section discussed biblical methods of healing by following the principles set in James 5:14-16. In order for health to be restored, the sick person has to call the elders to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. They have to confess, forgive one another's sin, and pray for one another. This practice makes the members of the community right with God and prepares them to pray with great power. The results are the Lord's, according to his will.

Christo-pagan Worldview and Methods of Healing Summary

This section surveyed the Christo-pagan worldview and methods of healing. The first section discussed the fact that Akey Christo-pagan healers have a syncretistic worldview. When God is silent and distant, in times of crises for them, it is acceptable to turn around and seek to manipulate other spirits through magic for a quick fix to their problems. This is because they view God as one among other spirits.

The second section covered the methods of healing used by Christo-pagan healers. Their methods of healing are complex and vary between different healers. Furthermore, their method of healing is a mixture of biblical and traditional healing. The first step is prayer for the empowering their traditional healing practices. The second is the patient's description of his sickness. The third is using means, such as dreams and visions, to diagnose the causes of sickness. Lastly, for prevention and healing of the sickness, they use water, oil, and memory verses which have all been prayed over. Others use herbs or water, which have an incantation invoked over them, and set taboos to be kept.

Comparison, Critical Analysis, and Evaluation of Healing Methods Summary

In this section, a comparison, critical analysis, and evaluation of healing methods was established.

In the first section, the Christo-pagan method of healing was compared with traditional and biblical methods of healing. As a result, it was demonstrated that there is mixture in this Christo-pagan method of healing.

The second section covered critical analysis and evaluation of different steps of the Christo-pagan methods of healing that are biblically related but doubtful, such as prayer, use of the name of Jesus, visions and dreams, and the use of elements. Due to blurry practices, it was concluded that healing performed by Akey Christo-pagan healers is not a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift of the spirits (the devil) given to his servants to counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1). Similarly, it is the same gift that the traditional healers use in their healing practices and the diviners use in their methods of seeking guidance, such as visions and dreams.

Pastoral Recommendation Summary

The section on pastoral recommendations covered these two following areas: transformation of worldview, and discerning God's working in healing.

A few important points in the first section on transformation of worldview have been highlighted. First, the importance of spiritual transformation was emphasised. Unless a person goes through a spiritual conversion or repentance, he cannot have a new worldview (a biblical worldview). Second, information was provided on who God is in comparison with the spirits, and instruction was given that our cosmological understanding must begin with God the Creator and everything else as creation, including the spirits. Third, a biblical view of sickness, health, and healing was discussed. God allows sickness and suffering to display his glory and grace in our lives. He is completely free to heal or not to heal, according to his will.

The last section was on discerning God's working in healing. Due to the satanic imitation of the spiritual gift of healing, several biblical tests were

offered to enable Christians to discern the work God in healing and differentiate it from the work of Satan.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There are several concluding thoughts that need to be shared as an urgent call to church leaders for consideration. These are the practical steps to enforce ideas from the pastoral recommendations to address the challenges identified in the analysis and critical evaluation.

The first is to preach the gospel. Let the word of God challenge and transform the lives of the people. People need to repent from their old ways of life and from their gods, and to turn to God the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who will give them new lives. Only through genuine repentance can people begin to assimilate a new worldview, a biblical worldview.

The second is to spend more time in teaching the word of God to the people. It will help them to have a solid biblical understanding, to view life and evaluate situations biblically. Furthermore, it will help people to build strong relationships with God. That is, to be able to trust him as their creator and the sustainer of the universe, in whom we have our being in whatever situation in life. For everything which happens in life works for the good of those who love God.

The third, the power encounter, is a problem in Vanuatu, where we see people running around searching for power to solve their immediate problems. When God is silent, he is assumed to have no power and, as a result, people seek help from other deities (spirits), believing them to have more power and to be able to meet their needs. Therefore, to address that challenge, people need to be taught the doctrine of God in relation to Satan and his spirits.

Finally, due to the devil's imitation of supernatural gifts in counterfeiting the work of God and leading his people away from the truth, there is an urgent need to instruct people in practical steps on how to discern or test the activities of the Holy Spirit from the spirits' activities. This is to guide ordinary Christians to seek help in the right place and from the right people.

Suggestion for Further Study

This study unpacks Christo-pagan methods of healing, and identifies the root of their beliefs and practices. It is a tool for church leaders and ordinary Christians to be able to discern the work of God in healing. It is hoped that this study will contribute to further study in the ecclesiological and missiological field that will lead to the making of strategic plans on how to let the word of God address the issues which this paper was not able to cover due to time and word restrictions.

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