



## Original Research

# Diagnostic and Prescriptive Prophecy in African Independent Churches: A Distinct Ritual Healing Process

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**Abstract:** African Independent Churches express Christianity in the African context through divine healing. Hence, divine healing is popular among these churches. This article uses the ritual healing process as a theoretical framework to assess the role of prophecy in African Independent Churches. The argument is that both diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies are used in these churches as part of the divine healing process differently than mainstream Christianity, traditional healing, and modern medicine. Therefore, the African Independent Churches, unlike mainstream Christianity, do not confine divine healing only to conventional methods such as laying on of hands, but also include other rituals through diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies. The research objectives were achieved by providing background to the ritual healing process as a theoretical framework for the study. The diagnostic prophecy was discussed as part of the healing process in the African Independent Churches. Similarly, the prescriptive prophecy concerning the healing process was discussed. The aim is to demonstrate that both diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies are part of the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches, which makes the latter have a distinctive healing process when compared to mainstream Christianity, traditional healing, and, to a certain extent, modern medicine. Data was collected by reviewing the literature on ritual healing and prophecies in the African Independent Churches. A case study evaluated ritual healing in churches such as Zion Christian Church, Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, and the International Pentecost Holiness Church. The findings are that African Independent Churches do rely on diagnostic prophecy to trace the root cause of the problem but that such a prophecy and prescriptions should be differentiated from divination and other traditional healing methods.

**Keywords:** *Prophecy, Diagnosis, Prescription, African Independent Churches, Ritual Healing*

## Introduction

This article discusses the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecy in African Independent Churches. The ritual healing process is used as a theoretical framework to study the role of prophecy in divine healing within the African Independent Churches. The argument here is that both diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies are distinctively used in these churches as part of the divine healing process. Therefore, the African Independent Churches, unlike mainline Christianity, do not confine divine healing only to conventional methods such as laying on of hands but also include other rituals through diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies. The main sections of the article include a background to the African Independent Churches and an introduction of the ritual healing process as a theoretical framework for the

study. The diagnostic prophecy will be discussed as part of the healing process in the African Independent Churches. Similarly, the prescriptive prophecy will be discussed concerning the healing process. The aim here is to demonstrate that both diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies are part of the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches, making the latter a distinctive healing process when compared to mainline Christianity, traditional healing, and modern medicine. This aim will be achieved by evaluating the ritual healing process in three cases of African Independent Churches, the Zion Christian Church, the Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission,<sup>1</sup> and the International Pentecost Holiness Church.<sup>2</sup> First, however, the article introduces the African Independent Churches as a contextual framework for the current study.

### **African Independent Churches: A Short Introduction**

African Independent Churches, also known as African Instituted Churches, African Initiated Churches, African Indigenous churches, or simply AICS, are known for expressing the Christian faith in the African context (Anderson 2001; Adamo 2001; Chitando 2015). Anderson (2001) and Chitando (2015) have used “African Initiated Christianity” to refer to similar groups. These churches have helped to understand Christianity in light of the realities of the African people on the continent (Sanneh and Carpenter 2005). The main characteristic of these churches is their ability to find a balance between African traditional religion and Christianity. Thus, African Independent Churches, unlike mainline Christianity, have found a way to recognize the positive aspects of both African culture and African pre-Christian heritage in their expression of Christianity. The latter, according to Bediako (2000a, 2000b), have become useful in these churches in making the revelation of the work of Christ understandable to the African people. African Independent Churches also use indigenous languages and knowledge systems to understand such revelation. The same, according to Adamo (2001), has been used in the reading and the understanding of scriptures in the African Independent Churches. The ability to express Christianity in an African context is also demonstrated in the way the African Independent Churches are founded and led by African leaders. Many of these leaders found creativity in expressing Christianity to the African people to deal with the oppression in the Western forms of Christianity. Hence, there was an exodus of many African believers from mainline Christianity to African Independent Churches at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Another way in which Christianity is expressed in an African context is through divine healing. Oosthuizen (1992) explains that the African Independent Churches rose with the

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<sup>1</sup> Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission is an African Independent Church that was started by Ma Nku after she was expelled from the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa for the use of objects such as water in divine healing.

<sup>2</sup> The International Pentecost Holiness Church was founded by Frederick Samuel Modise (March 14, 1914–September 21, 1998), who was also known for the practice of divine healing.

need to fill the gap of divine healing that existed in Western Christianity. Divine healing has become very popular in these churches and among many adherents of the same (Daneel 2019). This happens as many Africans seek solutions to the many challenges that they face concerning sickness and diseases associated with misfortune, witchcraft, sorcery, and so forth. In this way, divine healing is defined beyond the provision of healing but refers also to the confrontation of the evil spirits that exist in the spirit realm as part of the causative factors to sickness and diseases. Hence, healing goes with the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecy in tracing the root causes of sickness and diseases to bring healing to the believers and followers of these churches. The concept of divine healing and its juxtaposition with prophecy is the reason these churches have grown over the years and become a dominating factor in the religious landscape in the African context. To date, there are thousands of African Independent Churches spread across the continent in different types such as Zionist, Aladura, Ethiopian, and messianic (Anderson 2001, 2015; Jenkins 2011). Some scholars such as Moyo (2001) and Jenkins et al. (2018) suggest that about 30% of the African population belongs to the African Independent Churches. African Independent Churches such as Zion Christian Church,<sup>3</sup> in South Africa, have about six million members (Anderson 2001). The point made here is that divine healing is one of the factors that draw millions of people to these churches. The next section discusses the ritual healing process in the context of prophecy.

### **Framing Ritual Healing Process in the Context of Prophecy**

The ritual healing process, as a theory, is associated with disciplines such as anthropology, religious studies, performance arts, cultural studies, and therapy (Csordas 1999; McClenon 2014; Stephenson 2015). In this article, this theory is used from an anthropological and theological perspective. The hypotheses in these disciplines are testable also within the medicinal and health studies, particularly in tracing the origin of sickness and diseases (McClenon 2014). Therefore, as much as this framework is used in the ritual healing process, its main contribution is the tracing of the origin of sickness in the human body, thus making it more useful in anthropological studies. In doing so, various objects and symbols are used to apply them to human bodies for their healing (Stephenson 2015). The use of objects in healing makes the ritual healing process part of the customs, culture, and tradition, particularly in the African context. According to Stephenson (2015), this makes ritual healing a part of human life, as at least one human being would have encountered this kind of process at some point in their life in ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, parades, liturgies, exchange of gifts, and unveiling of tombstones. Thus, the ritual healing process is part of human beings even if they are not

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<sup>3</sup> The Zion Christian Church is an African Independent Church that was started by Engenas Lekganyane in 1924, in Zion City, Moriah, Polokwane Limpopo province, South Africa. After the death of Engenas Lekganyane, Edward Lekganyane took over as the leader of the church, followed by his son and the current leader, Barnabas Lekganyane. The church has about six million members across the continent of Africa.

religious per se. Hence, the ritual healing process has been part of African life for both the religious and the non-religious. Therefore, ritual healing differs from other types of medicine because it includes culture and customs in the healing process.

In the African traditional worldview, ritual healing is more pronounced in performing certain rituals and ceremonies (Mbiti 1991; Schoffeleers 1991; Olupona 2014). Hence, it is common in Africa for traditional healers to use various rituals in tracing the origin of the sickness to provide healing to the patient. The same rituals can be performed for the specific family for the well-being of the family members. Hence, in African cosmology, it is very common to perform various ceremonies and festivals as part of the ritual healing process. To a certain extent, these ceremonies and festivals can be performed for the whole community to bring harmony among the members of the same. It is for the same reasons that the African Independent Churches, unlike mainline Christianity, also engage in ritual healing processes for the healing of their members. In these churches, according to Schoffeleers (1991), ritual healing is practiced complementarily to modern medicine, as some perceive that the latter is notably lacking in tracing the spiritual causes of sickness and diseases. Hence, some of the African Independent Churches would even discourage their members from engaging in modern medicine, as the latter is perceived as interfering with the ritual healing process. The African Independent Churches would be very dependent on the ritual healing process because of its link to the spiritual causes of sickness and diseases. Hence, African Independent Churches such as the Zion Christian Church, Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, and the International Pentecost Holiness Church are known as churches of healing. Again, we see the difference between modern medicine and ritual healing in performing different ceremonies. However, we also see the distinctions in tracing spiritual causes of sicknesses and diseases, which do not normally happen in modern medicine.

This is the main role of prophecy in the ritual healing process—that is, to identify and communicate the cause of the diseases and sickness in the life of the patient (McGuire and Kantor 1988; Oosthuizen 1992; Friedson 1996). It is the prophetic word in the form of a diagnosis that can reveal the real cause of the sickness and disease. It is also the prophetic word in the form of a prescription that will be able to prescribe the specific medicine in the life of the patient for their healing. Therefore, the role of the prophet in the ritual healing process is to diagnose the cause of diseases and to offer a prescription of relevant remedies for the patient. This makes prophecy part of the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches as both the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies have the potential to bring about the healing of the patient (Oosthuizen 1992). Both the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecy are part of an African religious worldview. In this worldview, there is a link between evil spirits as causes of sickness and diseases in the spiritual realm. In this worldview, spiritual causes of sickness and diseases cannot be resolved by modern medicine or merely by laying on of hands in ordinary faith healing. This makes prophecy within the context of the ritual healing process have anthropological, African spiritual, and theological implications in

African Independent Churches. Therefore, the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecy become the crucial elements of the ritual healing process in dealing with the root cause and the remedy to the life of the patient (Friedson 1996). Therefore, the link to the evil spirits in the spiritual realm as spiritual causes of diseases is another distinct factor of ritual healing. This time around, ritual healing is different not only from modern medicine but also from faith healing in other Christian traditions. These two roles of the prophecy in the ritual healing process are discussed in detail in what follows.

### **Diagnostic Prophecy in the Ritual Healing Process**

By diagnostic prophecy, one refers to the prophetic word uttered about the diagnosis of the sickness or disease. Diagnostic prophecy becomes part of the ritual healing process when the prophet or even a traditional healer engages in a process of detecting the root cause of the patient's problem. In modern medicine, diagnosis takes place using modern technology; in the African Independent churches, however, it is done through the prophetic word and is called diagnostic prophecy. Most African Independent Churches would follow the same process of diagnosing the problem before they could offer the solution. Daneel (2019, 12) explains:

In these circles, a diagnosis that is based on the widely accepted African belief in the personal causation of all ailments and misfortunes—such personal forces being the neglected family spirits, malignant alien spirits, witches, or sorcerers—is both understandable and acceptable.

African Independent Churches like the Zion Christian Church also follow the same process of first diagnosing the problem to provide the relevant solution to the patient in their church. Hence, this kind of prophecy is very common in the African Independent Churches (Daneel 2019). The role of the prophet is to communicate the identified problem as per the diagnostic prophecy on the life of the patient. In the African worldview, any prophecy that is communicated without paying attention to the root causes of the problem would not be taken seriously. Similarly, in churches like the Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, prophecy remains diagnostic to help quell the doubts about the prophets in the church. The normal practice in these churches is that the prophet should be able to reveal the causes of diseases and offer the appropriate remedy on the same.

The prophet in the African Independent Churches functions as more than a seer or even a communicator; they are also a diagnostician who can diagnose the causes of sickness in the same way that a medical doctor does (Anderson 2003; Wouters 2014). The prophet, as a diagnostician, is someone who can keep matters confidential similarly to the way a medical doctor is expected to conceal secrets during the diagnosis. This is the rationale for the dependence of many Africans on prophets in African Independent Churches, as they can know the deep secrets concerning the causative factors around their sicknesses and diseases

while keeping confidentiality. Even when they know their problems, many Africans would not disclose them to the prophet but rather leave it to the prophet to reveal them. The latter is a demonstration of the giftedness of the prophet in revealing things without any prior knowledge whatsoever. It is a demonstration of the accuracy of the prophecy by many prophets in African Independent Churches like the Zion Christian Church, Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, and the International Pentecost Holiness Church. Anderson (2003, 109) explains that “[f]inding the cause of the suffering is very important in this context, and this type of prophetic diagnosis may not always be wrong. The diagnosis may produce a psychological catharsis that benefits the afflicted who have a real fear of witchcraft.” Therefore, the patients have the propensity to always depend on the prophet to reveal the causative factors of sickness. Wouters (2014, 159) explains that “[w]hen a person is summoned by a prophet, patients do not inform the prophet of their particular affliction but wait for the prophet’s inspired state to tell them what the problem is, indicate the problem’s causation and the necessary treatment thereof.” When this happens, it would be difficult to doubt the authenticity of the prophecy given by the prophet. It further demonstrates that the prophet did not rely on information given by the patient but rather on the Holy Spirit to reveal these causative factors of sickness and diseases.

It is the diagnostic prophecy that makes the African Independent Churches attractive to the believers in the continent (Anderson 1999; Gumede 1990). It is for the same reason, according to Anderson (1999), that diagnostic prophecy attracts many people to churches such as the Zion Christian Church. In these churches, the believers are interested not only in the ritual healing process but also in finding out about the root cause of their problems. Prophecy exists in other Christian traditions but its diagnostic function and form make it very unique in the African Independent Churches. Africans would flock to these churches not only because they can practice Christian ways of healing and balance them with African spirituality in the diagnosis of the causes of various diseases and sicknesses but also because a prophet can reveal the causes of the problems let alone the remedy for the same. Many patients who have not yet had their problem solved would still take comfort in just knowing the root causes of their problems. In terms of faith, this works to motivate the believer to become very optimistic about their healing as they have already seen it work in the diagnostic part. Many believers in Africa are already aware of the diagnostic prophecy as they have already seen it when visiting the traditional healer, who revealed the root causes of the problems during divination (Gumede 1990). Hence, one can note some similarities between the diagnostic prophecy in the African Independent Churches and divination in traditional healing. The common factor in these categories is the diagnosis of the problem.

However, as much as we can see the similarities between diagnostic prophecy and divination, we should also be able to point to the differences. The distinctions are explained by Daneel (2019, 40):

The difference is to be found in the medium through whom the extraordinary knowledge is obtained. The [traditional healer] relies on divinatory slabs, and bones for his [or her] extra-perception, whereas the prophet invokes the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the prophet tends to label all spirits as malignant, while the [traditional healer] makes a more careful distinction between ancestral spirits.

In churches such as Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission and the Zion Christian Church, the Holy Spirit is acknowledged as the main source who can reveal the causative factors of diseases during a diagnostic prophecy. However, as outlined by Daneel (2019), the traditional healer acknowledges the ancestral spirits as the main sources to trace the causes of sickness and disease. Moreover, the point made by Daneel (2019) is that the prophet seems to be in confrontation with these evil spirits, but the traditional healer entertains them to get to know the causes of sickness and diseases. The prophet is expected to be filled with the Holy Spirit to diagnose the problems faced by the patient. Therefore, as much as great prophets such as the leaders of the Zion Christian Church like Engenas Lekganyane, later Edward Lekganyane, or even the incumbent Barnabas Lekganyane have been known as prophets, equally, the more ordinary members of the church can also become prophets, the requisite being the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

The differences are seen not only in the sources that revealed the causes of the problem in both diagnostic prophecy and divination but also in the sources on the remedy or the solution to the diagnosed problem. Daneel (2019, 43) explains:

Upon diagnosis of the illness, the remarkable similarity between the [traditional healer] and prophet activities cease. Both of them find the origin of the disease in the disturbed communal society. Both recognise the bedeviling effect of the powers unleashed in the inter-human relationships and the threatening support of the spirits. But they stave off these powers differently. While the [the traditional healer] seeks a solution that accedes to the conditions of the spirits, the prophetic therapy bases itself on a belief in the power of the Christian God, which surpasses all other powers.

Divination would do its best to find a remedy by consultation with other deities from an African spiritual point of view. However, although combined with the use of certain rituals, the African Independent Churches, such as the Zion Christian Church, would still depend on the power of the Christian God to bring solutions. Hence, in traditional healing, there is also a consultation of the ancestors in bringing the solution to the patient. Therefore, we should point not only to the similarities of diagnostic prophecy and divination but also to their differences. The next section discusses the prescriptive prophecy in the ritual healing process.

## Prescriptive Prophecy in the Ritual Healing Process

By prescriptive prophecy in this article, one refers to the communication of certain prescriptions and instructions to the patient by way of offering a remedy for the root cause of the disease and sickness. Prescriptive prophecy is also part of the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches. In churches such as the Zion Christian Church, prescriptive prophecy involves prophetic instructions, which are known in northern Sotho as *ditaelo*. Wouters (2014, vi) explains:

Within the Zion Christian Church context, the word [*ditaelo*] refers to the prescriptions a person receives from a prophet during a prophesying session. The prophet receives prescriptions from the Holy Spirit and sometimes from ancestor spirits. Most members use the terms ‘prescriptions’ and sometimes ‘instructions’ as a direct translation of *ditaelo*.

In the Zion Christian Church, the instructions would consist of Blessed tea, holy water, pricking using a needle, salted water as a laxative measure, the enema for the cleansing and purification of children’s bodies, stones for steaming, purchasing specific uniforms, the photographs of the Bishop, strings and strips to wear around their waist, a strip of blue cloth, the brown paper to protect them against nonmembers, the sticks, and whip among male members of the church. However, it is important to point out that not all prescriptions would be given to a specific patient at the same time. In addition, specific instruction is not always given to different patients, but each patient would receive them as per the root cause of their problem. However, it is common for the members of the church to receive instructions to purchase the photographs of the bishop and to purchase the church uniform as protective measures for households or even for individuals. *Ditaelo* plays an important role in the ritual healing process as both the healing and protective rituals for the patients and ordinary members of the church. Different ceremonies can be prescribed for a household as part of the ritual healing process. The popular ceremony is known as *mpobo* in northern Sotho, which refers to a night vigil whereby fellow church members are called upon to pray with the patient for the whole night, normally on Saturdays.

The process of prescriptive prophecy is followed by the process of diagnostic prophecy, whereby once the prophet is aware of the patient’s problem, they can prescribe the specific instruction (Anderson 2003; Wouters 2014). Most of the time, the patients would trust the prophets for the prescriptions since the prophets have been able to identify the root cause of the problem in the first place (Wouters 2014). In the fieldwork conducted by Anderson (2003, 113), it was found that “[a]lmost every church member interviewed stressed the importance of observing the *ditaelo* (‘instructions’) given to be safe. These *ditaelo* are individualized secret and personal rules that the member may not divulge to anyone else.” This makes *ditaelo* very



much sacred, so much so that those used by a specific patient cannot be transferred to the next one. In the use of the prescriptive prophecy, the African Independent Churches are consistent with the African spiritual worldview, whereby Africans are used to receive similar instructions from the traditional healers. It is also important to note that once a member has received specific instructions, they are supposed to take them to the pastor of the church such as Zion Christian Church to have them blessed before they can be used. Here, there is a collaboration between the pastor and the prophet within the framework of the ritual healing in the African Independent Churches.

The patient is required to obey the instructions to receive their healing. In churches such as the Zion Christian Church, the patients would take the instructions of the prophets very seriously even if they entail financial expenditure (Anderson 1999, 2003). Failure to obey certain instructions given by the prophet might result in not receiving healing (Anderson 2003). Therefore, prophetic instructions such as *ditaelo* are paramount in the ritual healing process within the African Independent Churches. It is for this reason that followers and members of churches like the Zion Christian Church, Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, and the International Pentecost Holiness Church would follow all that the prophet says unquestioningly. At times, obedience to the instructions such as *ditaelo* is accompanied by the payment of large amounts of money, but the members would pay it all the same in order to receive a remedy. To put things into perspective, a prophet might ask for the patient or any other member to purchase an expensive item, including the church uniform, as part of the ritual healing process. Because such a follower or member would be desperate for a healing, they would oblige. Generally, it is very rare for followers of these churches to go against the word of the prophet as it is part of the ritual healing process. In some instances, according to Anderson (1999), disobedience of an instruction might lead to dangerous consequences like bareness, especially if the prophet warned the patient against the same. People would therefore go out of their way to ensure that they follow the prophet's instructions. Thus, as much as diagnostic prophecy is important in the African Independent Churches, a prescriptive prophecy is equally important. It would be of no use to the patient to know the root cause of the problem if they cannot find ways to deal with it through a prescriptive prophecy, and, hence, the prescriptive prophecy would happen at the same time as the diagnostic prophecy.

However, it is important to point out that the diagnosis is made in such a way that the prescription would be mandatory or compulsory for the patient to follow (Anderson 1999; Wouters 2014). In some instances, the diagnosis is given in such a way that it incites fear in the patient for them to follow the instructions of the prophet. Anderson (1999, 308) explains that “[t]he Zion Christian Church prophet attempts to give a Christian response to the built-in fears and threats of African traditional cosmology, particularly in the healing sessions, when the nature and the cause of the disease are given at the same time.” When such a fear has been established during the diagnostic prophecy, the patient would look forward to

obeying the instructions to ease their fears. Therefore, it must be reiterated that the patient should be able to understand the diagnosis if they can understand the prescription and follow it. Wouters (2014, 105) explains:

The prophet's healing repertoire includes a variety of impressive ritual actions and techniques, which are conducted in familiar surroundings and perceived as more acceptable than those of biomedical practitioners who practice medicine in a clinical environment alien to the patient's usual circumstances. Because the patient can understand the diagnosis and therefore the reasons for a particular treatment, even if treatment is not successful, it will at least have satisfied the patient's need for appropriate treatment.

Hence, the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecy is one process that informs the ritual healing.

However, there are some challenges concerning the prescriptive prophecy, especially when some prophets ask the patients to practice ritual healing by forsaking their medical prescriptions and treatment (Wouters 2014; Anderson 2018; Daneel 2019). Anderson (2018, 162) explains that "All Pentecostals, Apostolics, and Zionists in the early years of the twentieth century were opposed to medical doctors and their medicine, as were some of the early missionaries connected to these churches. This position has significantly changed today so that people are free to consult medical practitioners when necessary, especially when obvious physical disorders are encountered." Wouters (2014) concurs that as some were expecting the immanent second coming of Jesus, they encouraged prohibitions of medical treatments in addition to other social restrictions. Some have recently changed their position on medical treatment, but others are still very skeptical. We must note that as much as there are spiritual problems that medical treatment cannot solve in the life of patients, there are also medical problems that ritual healing cannot solve. For example, if the patient has a fractured leg, surely, they would require medical treatment in modern medicine. According to Anderson (2018), there is a need, therefore, to distinguish between a treatment that requires the expertise of a medical doctor and a treatment that requires that of the prophet in African Independent Churches. Patients such as those suffering from cancer, HIV and AIDS, diabetes, high blood pressure, and other dangerous diseases can be placed at huge risk when told to stop their medical treatment. Therefore, ritual healing must necessarily co-exist with modern medicine rather than be very dismissive of it.

### **A Distinct Ritual Healing Process in African Independent Churches**

The ritual healing process is linked to the practice of prophecy in the sense that prophecy is not only the word given to an individual but rather the measure used to trace the root cause of sickness and diseases among the members of the Church. It is also important to point out that while modern medicine would use modern technology to trace the root cause of the

sickness and disease, the African Independent Churches would use diagnostic prophecy. It is of utmost importance to point out that African Independent Churches are different from mainstream Christianity when it comes to the healing process. While mainline Christianity would pray for the sick using conventional ways such as laying on of hands, the African Independent Churches go further by diagnosing the root cause of the problem. This is an important aspect of the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches as both modern medicine and mainstream Christianity can sometimes fail to identify the spiritual causes of sickness. Therefore, the diagnostic prophecy is unique in the identification of the root causes of the sickness and diseases suffered by the patient. Another point is that while there are some similarities concerning diagnostic prophecy and divination, the two differ when it comes to the sources of the root causes and the sources of the remedy brought to the patient. As discussed in the preceding sections, while the diviner relies on ancestral spirits for tracing the causes of sickness and disease, the prophet relies on the power of the Christian God to reveal the root cause and to bring the solution to the life of the patient.

Second, the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches is also informed by the instructions and prescriptions given by the prophet for the remedy of the identified problem. Modern medicine also involves prescriptions for the patient but not as part of the spiritual problem. Therefore, the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches is different from modern medicine when it comes to prescriptions because the instructions by the prophet are more than the medicinal prescriptions given by the medical doctor. The prescriptions and instructions of the prophet are aimed at the spiritual side of the sickness. The prophet would also prescribe certain rituals that are aimed at addressing the problems of witchcraft, misfortune, and sorcery. Consequently, the patient cannot ignore these instructions and prescriptions of the prophet as they not only form part of the ritual healing process but also deal with evil spirits in the spiritual realm. The latter is what distinguishes the ritual healing process in the African Independent Churches from mainstream Christianity in addressing the spiritual realm as part of the healing package. However, the importance of the ritual healing process in African Independent Churches should not be emphasized at the expense of medical treatment, as patients need both medical treatment and ritual healing. Therefore, there is a need to explore the co-existence of both, rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive.

## **Conclusion**

This article used the ritual healing process as a theoretical framework to assess the role of prophecy in African Independent Churches such as the Zion Christian Church, Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, and the International Pentecost Holiness Church. The article argued that both the diagnostic and prescriptive prophecies are used in these churches as part of the ritual healing process in distinctive ways compared to both modern medicine and

mainstream Christianity. It was found that while modern medicine would rely on modern technology to trace the root cause of sicknesses and diseases, the African Independent Churches would rely on diagnostic prophecy on the same. Mainstream Christianity confines divine healing only to conventional methods such as laying on of hands without necessarily addressing the root cause of the problem. In some cases, mainstream Christianity, the clergy would not even talk about divine healing but rather refer the patient to a medical doctor. In some instances, the medical doctors cannot trace the spiritual causes of sickness and diseases, making the ritual healing process in African Independent Churches very unique. Second, while modern medicine would prescribe some medications to the patient, this should not be equated to the instructions and prescriptions by the prophet in African Independent Churches. The prescriptions and instructions by the prophet involve rituals that address spiritual problems such as witchcraft, misfortune, and sorcery. Finally, while diagnostic prophecy is similar to divination in tracing the root cause of the problem, it is different when it comes to the source of these revelations but also the sources of the solution to the problem. This changes how we have been studying the prophecy in African Independent Churches. It is not only the gift of the Holy Spirit but also part of the ritual healing process in tracing the root causes of diseases and offering relevant prescriptions.

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### **Informed Consent**

The author declares that informed consent was not required as there were no human participants involved.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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