



Spiritual Powers

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for the **Stop Child Witch Accusations** coalition

an Action Forum theological paper

Kinshasa, D.R.Congo

August 2014

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This paper was originally presented at the Action Forum held in Kinshasa, D.R.Congo, in August 2014, organised by Stop Child Witch Accusations (SCWA), UK, and the Planning Committee in Kinshasa.

Introduction

The issue of spiritual powers has engaged people's attention throughout history. Right from the story of creation, there appears to be a fundamental conflict between God and a being, called Satan, in which humanity is involved. This being, Satan (also called the devil), appears to preside over a 'kingdom' in league with others spirits who oppose God and his people. It appears Satan's main business on earth is to thwart the mission of God in people's lives. Consequently, throughout history, human beings have tried diverse means to deal with Satan and his powers. Against the background many people in Africa believe that witchcraft is part of the devil's strategies to destroy people, families and especially God's children. Therefore, various efforts are made to destroy its activities since it is considered as destructive to society.

This presentation discusses spiritual powers in the context of witchcraft beliefs and practices in contemporary African deliverance ministries out of which 'child witch' accusation has become a significant part. It begins with a brief overview of the African view of the spirit world, and then highlights on the current realities. Then, it examines spiritual powers in biblical perspective and ends with some proposals for the way forward.

1. The African's view of the spirit world

For the African, the cause of evil is attributed to the evil forces; principal among these forces is the witch.¹ Max Marwick, a British anthropologist, simply describes 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' as, "the cardinal belief that certain members of the community harm their fellows illicitly by supernatural power".² Indeed, throughout Africa, there is this belief that some human beings have the power to hurt others.

¹ Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2012), J. S. Towards an African Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 100

² Max Marwick, "Introduction." 1952. in *Witchcraft and Sorcery*. Max G. Marwick, ed. Second Edition (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 11

Identification of the other evil forces depends upon the country a person lives. Generally these evil powers include the gods (deities), vindictive spirits of dead persons, animal and trees, dwarfs and sorcerers. The concept of one personalized being known as Satan was quite foreign to the African. This concept is associated with western missionaries' introduction.³ For many Africans, there were enough witches in the system to harm people than associating harm with one personal being. The introduction of Satan came along with the demonization of the gods. Nevertheless, it is believed that any other evil force can be in league with witches to effect an evil act on those they do not like.

Among the evil acts that witches are said to cause are infertility in women, impotence in men, inflict material losses on people, make people ignoble through their deeds, read people's intention and work against them. For this reason, all classes of people seek protection from witches. These include the poor and the rich, the illiterate, the pagan and the Christian. They often seek protections from shrines and so called powerful people including pastors.

2. Current realities: 'witchdemonology' in Africa

It is against this backdrop that the current deliverance ministry functions. The 'ministry' is the synthesis of the practices and beliefs of African concepts of witchcraft and western Christian concept of demonology. This phenomenon is what I term 'witchdemonology'.⁴

The terms 'witch' and 'witchcraft' are used synonymously with the terms 'demon', 'demonology' and 'evil spirit'. Demon possession is described as when a demon comes to live in one without one's consent. It is considered a covenant of soul and spirit without one's permission. Witchcraft is taken as an advanced form of spirit possession. Against this background, it is assumed that almost all traditional priests and sorcerers are witches. The origin of demons is linked with the fallen angels. It is held that these beings (fallen angels) with disembodied spirits, found themselves in rivers, seas, mountains, rocks, trees and in humans, and that these spirits have become the gods of the Africans. All African are therefore considered to come under a curse because their ancestors worshipped the gods.

The ancestral curse concept is also introduced. The effects of these curses in a person's life include chronic diseases or hereditary diseases, mental breakdowns, emotional excesses, allergies, repeated miscarriages, repeated unnatural deaths, such as through suicide and accidents, continuing financial insufficiencies, frequent breakdown of marriages, abnormal behaviour such as extreme anger tantrums or extreme reservedness.

Consequently the emphasis is on the practice of 'deliverance'. 'Deliverance' aims at freeing people from the influence or bondage of Satan and his allied evil spirits, who bring about afflictions, sufferings, bad habits, curses and failure in life. From the advocates of this ministry, this is different from exorcism. 'Exorcism' is used to mean a deliberate act of binding or releasing,

³ Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2012), 47–48. See also Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 77

⁴ Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 171

performed on a person who is believed to be possessed by a spirit of evil intent. Nonetheless the terms demon possession, demonization, or demonised and witchcraft are used interchangeably.

It is held that there are signs that hint that a person is demonised or a witch. One of the surest signs that proponents of this ministry offer is that such people are especially uneasy in the presence of 'spiritual people'. There are many ways through which demons are said to enter people and can be passed on to their families or others. The term for this process is demonic 'doorway' or 'opening'. Idolatry, sinful deeds, involvement in any other religion apart from the 'one prescribed by the Lord' and emotional traumas are doorways for demons to enter a person. It is assumed that all evil acts have their demonic counterparts. For example, a demon of fornication enters the one who fornicates while the demon of lust enters the person who views pornographic videos or pictures. The logical inference is that demons are at work any time some evil behaviours or diseases occur in the lives of both Christians and non-Christians.

It is, therefore, purported that in addition to salvation, every African Christian needs deliverance from witchcraft, demons, ancestral curses or diseases, before they will be set free. Prayer groups have been formed within the churches to cater for this need. In some places, residential prayer centres have been established to accommodate the sick. Deliverance becomes a major activity there. The centre of attraction at the prayer centre is the leader. In such centres the leaders prescribe specific days of fasting and prayer to the clients. So-called witches and demon possessed persons are chained until they are delivered or otherwise. There are two types of deliverance offered: mass and personal. The process of deliverance, whether mass or personal, may take two or more hours.

The discourse so far indicates that everybody, including Christians, could be a witch, demon possessed or could inherit ancestral curses. It is against this backdrop that, as reported in the Rapport Final of March 2014, "several cases of murders of adults accused of witchcraft are noted as well as an increase of the phenomenon of accusation of witch children and adolescents in DRC" is set.⁵

According to this report:

Everywhere in DRC, the accused children can be verbally and physically abused, let down and abandoned by their families and even killed sometimes. Because of the scale and devastating incidence of witch child accusation, it has become a community crisis and one of the most formidable challenges to the lives and dignity of children victims of this barbarism caused by those accusations that undermine their holistic development.

It is therefore imperative for us to consult the Bible to find out what the Bible says about spiritual powers.

⁵ Report of Commissions set to Research into Witchcraft Accusation in Kinshasa, March 2014.

3. Spiritual powers from Biblical perspectives

a. The Old Testament

Witch, witchcraft and related terms

Witch

Biblical scholars agree that the Hebrew term 'mekashshepah' (root word 'kâshaph') translated 'witch' in the Authorised Version can correctly be translated 'sorcerer' or 'sorceress' as in many versions, including Revised Standard Version and New International Version. The terms are found in Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:10.

Witchcraft

The term 'witchcraft' occurs in 2 Kings 9:22; Micah 5:12; 2 Chronicles 33:6 and Nahum 3:4. There is a general agreement among the Old Testament scholars that in passages where the term 'witchcraft' occurs, the terms 'sorceries' or 'magical arts' may be a proper rendering. The correct translation of "the sin of witchcraft" in 1 Samuel 15:23 is said to be "the sin of divination," translated from the Hebrew term 'qesem'.

Wizard

A proper rendering of the Hebrew term 'yid-oni' which is translated 'wizard' in Leviticus 19:31 is said to be a 'familiar spirit'. New International Version translates it spiritist. Similarly a proper rendering of the term 'wizard' in Isaiah 8:19 is said to be a 'familiar spirit', from the Hebrew term 'ob'.

Sorcerer, Sorcery

Sorcerers ('mekashšepîm', 'kâshaph') Exodus 7:11; Jeremiah 27:9; Isaiah 47:9, 12; Daniel 2:2; Malachi 3:5. This is the term that has been interpreted as the practice of witchcraft in some places as already stated in the Bible. It denotes the use of drugs, with the provision of charms and amulets, which is accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers. In Isaiah 57:3 (AV) the term 'ânan' was translated sorceress.

Magic, Magicians

Magicians ('chartôm', 'hartummîm', Genesis 41:8, 48; Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18, 19; 9:11; Daniel 1:20; 2:2, 27; 4:7, 9; 5:11). Magic is the attempts to make use of mysterious forces which most people cannot control or do not believe in. In a way, magic is in practice a human technique designed to control the environment.

Enchant, Enchanters, Astrologers

Enchanters ('nachash', Leviticus 19:26; Numbers 23:23; 24:1; Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 17:17; 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6), 'ânan' (Jeremiah 27:9); 'cheber', spell, Isaiah 47:9, 12; 'lahat', secrecy, Exodus 7:7; 'lât', Exodus 7:12; 'lachash', private prayer, Ecclesiastes 10:11. Another word

in King Version is translated enchanter in New International version is “Astrologer” (‘aššâpim’, ‘ashshâph’, Daniel 1:20; 2:2, 27; 4:7; 5:7, 11, 15). The term enchant connotes the skill to divine, diligently observe, prognosticate or conjure.

Astrologers

Astrologers, Chaldeans in KJV (‘kasdîm’, Daniel 2:2, 4, 7; 5:7, 10, 11, 30) Chaldeans was a term used for the alleged master race who ruled Babylon including Nebuchadnezzar. The term was also applied to a special class of astrologers–soothsayers. It was thought to have derived from an Akkadian term ‘kaldu’ (conqueror), which was also a loan word from the Sumerian ‘galdo’ (master–builder). The use of the term connotes the act of foretelling events concerning people personal, social, and business life. It is like divination.

Familiar Spirits, Mediums

Familiar Spirit (KJV), Medium. From the term ‘ôwb’ or ‘soel-ôb’ as in Deuteronomy 18:11. The New International Version translates it medium. The term means “inquirer of medium.” The one is a possessor of a spirit as in 1 Samuel 28:7–25. The one who can consult the dead (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11; 1 Samuel 28:3, 7, 8, 9; 2 Kings 21:6; 23:24; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Job 19:14; Psalm 41:9; Isaiah 8:19; 19:3; 29:4).

Charmers, Charm, Cast Spells

Charmer (KJV) or cast spells (‘chaber’, Deuteronomy 18:11; Psalm 58:5); ‘lchas’ Psalm 58:5, Jeremiah 8:17 charming, incantation, orator, prayer; ‘at’, Isaiah 19:3, to move swiftly, as in necromancy.

Necromancer, Necromancy

Necromancer (KJV), ‘dôrêš’, ‘el-hammêtîm’ (Deuteronomy 18:11) necromancy. One who consults or communicates with the dead.

Divination, Divine, Divining, Diviner

Divination, Divine, Diviner (‘qâsam’, ‘qecem’, ‘miqcam’, Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Samuel 6:2; Proverbs 16:10; Isaiah 44:25; Jeremiah 27:9; 29:8; Ezekiel 13:9, 23; 22:28; 21:29; Micah 3:6, 11, Zechariah 10:2). To determine by lot or magical scroll, soothsaying. It is the attempt to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by manipulation of objects or the interpretation of omens by the help of supernatural being. In Genesis 44:5, 15, another term ‘nachash’ was translated to divine. It connotes the ability to prognosticate.

Magic Charms (Fetishism)

There is also an unusual passage in Ezekiel which conveys the notion that some women, appear to have some ‘unusual powers’ to harm some people and to preserve others, but that God’s power supersedes theirs (Ezekiel 13:17–21). Take notice of the terms, “Prophecy out of their own imagination” (13, NIV); “By lying to my people” (19, NIV); “Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies” (22); and “therefore you will no longer see false vision or practice divination” (23). These indicate that the claims of these people were based on false premises.

Satan

The Old Testament is quite clear about a being, explicitly called Satan three times, who is powerful and presides over a 'kingdom' in league with others spirits, who oppose God and his people (1 Chronicles. 21:1; Zechariah 3:1–2; Job 1:7–2:10). It hints at the complexity of the spirit world (his kingdom) which implies some sort of hierarchical control (Daniel 10:13–21).

The gods of the nations are described as demons/devils (Deuteronomy 32:8, 16–17; Psalm 106:34–38). The Septuagint (LXX) term is 'daimonia'; the Hebrew term 'shêd' is said to be similar to the Assyrian 'shidu', which means any Assyrian deity.

The Old Testament assumes the possibility of Satan and his allied spirits' preoccupation with the causation of misfortunes and evil behaviour similar to the African world view (e.g. Job 1–2, Zechariah. 3:1–2).

Ancestral curses

The concept of ancestral or generational curses may be inferred indirectly from a few scriptural references. For example, in passages where the kings of Israel repeatedly give themselves to the allegiances to foreign gods (e.g. 1 Kings 15:3, 26, 34; 16:19, 16:26, 31; 22:52–53). Yet, to propound a doctrine on this is weak, since the texts imply that they followed their bad examples. There is no indication of a curse. Other texts which are misinterpreted for ancestral curses include Exodus 20:5–6; Deuteronomy 5:8; 7:9. However, see the clarification of the law in Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezekiel 18:1–2; Jeremiah 31:29–30. Even in Exodus 20:5–6, the curse was to follow those who hate the Lord. In other words, if a person loved the Lord or committed himself to the Lord, although there was cursed on the family generation, he or she was exempted.

Demon possession

The Old Testament indicates that the people of God may allow evil spirits to dominate and control their lives, when disobedience occurs. Saul was an example: The Spirit of the Lord came on him (1 Samuel 10:6, 10), yet an evil spirit later tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14, 23; 18:10–11; 1 Samuel 19:9–10).

b. The Synoptic Gospels

The term 'witch' not in the Synoptic Gospels

Surprising to the African, the word "witch" is not found in the Synoptic Gospels. However, Jesus' encounters with the demoniacs show that there is still the belief in the reality of human beings who are thought to be spiritually powerful (Mark 1:21–28; Luke 8:26–37; Matthew 9:18–25).

The term 'possession'

The terms 'demoniac(s),' 'demonised,' 'demon-possessed' or 'demon possession' are used to represent the Greek terms 'daimonizomai' and 'echein daimonion' in the gospels. New Testament scholars show that these denote a person who is being "possessed by a demon."

There are four main narratives of Jesus' confrontation or exorcism in the gospels:

- the man in the Capernanum synagogue (Mark 1: 21–28, parallel Luke 4:31–37);
- the Gerasenes man (Matthew 8:28–34, parallels Mark 5:1–17, Luke 8:26–37);
- the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Matthew 15: 21–28, parallel Mark 7:24–30);
- the epileptic boy (Mark 9:14–29, parallels Matthew 17:14–19, Luke 9:37–45).

There are also several summary exorcisms:

- brief reports of exorcisms by Jesus (e.g. Matthew 9:32–34; 12:22);
- a brief report of the disciples' mission (Luke 10:17);
- a number of references and sayings on Jesus' dealings with demons (Mark 1:32–34, 39; 3:7–12 and parallels);
- the accusation of Jesus as demon possessed (Matthew 12:22–28 and parallels).

The Nature of the Presentations

The writers leave out speculations and exaggerations such as in Jewish apocalyptic writers and rather use the confrontations to present their messages. Jesus personally confronts the demoniacs in some of the narratives (e.g. Luke 8:26–37; Luke 11:10–17). In others, the demons manifest their presence by their conducts (Mark 1: 21–28, parallel Luke 4:31–37) or through debilitating illnesses (e.g. Luke 9:37, see also Luke 13:1–17). Still in others, Jesus responds to a request by a parent or others (e.g. Mark 9:14–29; Matthew 12:22).

Demoniacs are shown as people:

- who are well settled and involved in the life of their communities (Mark 1:21–28);
- who driven to the margins of society by their families as a result of their behaviour (Luke 8: 26–38);
- who are being tormented and hurt by the inhabiting demons (e.g. Luke 4:35; Mark 5:1–19);
- who are physically ill because of their demonization (e.g. Luke 8:26–37; Matthew 15: 21–28; Mark 9:14–29). (Particularly, madness and epilepsy are associated with demon possession (e.g. Mark 5:1–19; Matthew 17:14–20);
- Who have multiplicity of possession (Mark 5: 9; Luke 8:2).

It is realised here that demon possessed people here were the sufferers.

The purposes of Jesus' healing and exorcisms

- **The authority of Jesus** (Matthew 8:16–17; 8:28–34 and parallels; Matthew 9:32–34; Matthew 12:22–29 and parallels; Matthew 15:21–28; Matthew 17: 14–21 and parallels; Mark 1:23–28 and parallels; Mark 1:39; Mark 9:38–41 and parallels).

- **The mission of Jesus**

- the reinstatement of the outcast (e.g. Matthew 8:2–4 and parallels; Matthew 9:20–22 and parallels; Matthew 15:21–28 and parallels; Luke 7:11–17; Luke 13:10–17; Luke 17:11–19).
- the initiation of the Kingdom (e.g. Matthew 4:23–25; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 10:1, 8 and parallels; Matthew 11:4 and parallels; Matthew 12:22–29 and parallels; Mark 7:31–37 and parallels).

- **Opportunities to believe** (e.g. Matthew 12:12–29 and par. Luke 13:10–17).

- **Opportunities to teach**

- about faith (e.g. Matthew 8:5–13 and parallels; Matthew 17:14–21).
- about obedience (Matthew 7:21–23; Matthew 8:2–4 and parallels; Matthew 12:43–45 and parallels).

Jesus' methods of dealing with demoniacs:

- command to cast out demons (e.g. Mark 1:25, Luke 4: 35; Mark 5:8; Luke 8:29; Matthew 8:32; Mark 9:25; Matthew 17:18; Luke 9:42);
- preventive measures, as evidenced in the command to demons not to return to the persons (Mark 9:25, see Matthew 12: 43–45; Luke 11:24–26);
- attempt to know the name of a demon (Mark 5:7–8; Luke 8:28–29).

Satan

The reference to Satan, his kingdom and allied spirits, and their opposition to the people of God are clearer in the synoptic gospels than the Old Testament. He is called Satan (Matthew 4:10), the devil (Matthew 13:25, 39), the adversary or enemy (Matthew 13:25, 39; Luke 10:39). Satan is initially presented as the tempter of the Son of God (Mark 1: 12–13; Matthew 4:1–13; Luke 4:1–13). He tempts to deflect Jesus from the fulfilment of his messianic task. He continues to oppose him (Luke 22:3 Matthew 16:23.)

The Synoptics hint that there are degrees of strength among evil powers (Mark 9:29; Matthew 17:21).

c. Johannine Literature

There are no accounts of exorcisms in Johannine literature yet the devil is very active. All of the references to the devil relate directly or indirectly to the death of Jesus (John 6:70; 8:44; 12:31; 13:2, 27; 14:30; 16:11; 17:15). John's portrayal of Satan focuses exclusively on his (Satan's) involvement in the suffering and death of Jesus. Some passages in the gospel of John denote that Judas, the onetime apostle of Jesus, was "possessed by the devil" (John 13:2, 27).

d. The Acts of the Apostles

The opposing work of Satan and his cohorts receive special attention in Acts, although like the gospels, the term ‘witch’ is not used. Satan is directly mentioned in four places (Acts 5:3; 10:38; 13:10; 26:18). The disciples confront spiritually powerful individuals and overcome them. Examples: Peter’s confrontation with Simon (Acts 8:9–23), Paul’s confrontation with Elymas (Acts 13:4–12) and Paul’s confrontation with the girl with familiar spirit (Acts 16:16–21). Satan is able to fill the heart of believers with evil intent that lead to misfortune — death. Peter speaks to Ananias “how it is that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied against the Holy Spirit?” (Acts 5:3).

Acts relates only one detailed successful exorcism; this is the account between Paul and the slave girl who had the spirit of divination (Acts 16:16–18). There is one unsuccessful exorcism by the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13–17). There are summary accounts of the apostles’ ministry of exorcism (Acts 5:16; 8:5–8; 19:12, 17–20). ‘Demoniacs’ have supernatural knowledge. This is conveyed in the confrontation between “the man who had an evil spirit” and the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13–16), because they claim to know Paul and Jesus but not the pretenders. Again it is shown in Paul’s confrontation with the slave girl who had the spirit of divination, the girl shouts, “These men are the servants of the most high God...” (Acts 16:18).

e. Pauline and Other New Testament Epistles

In Paul’s Writings: Satan and Evil Powers as Opposing God’s work or people

The opposing work of Satan and evil power continues to play a significant role in the rest of the New Testament (NT). The names given to him include Satan (Romans 16:20); the devil (1 Peter 5:8); the serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3); the evil one (Ephesians 6:16) and the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is mentioned in the rest of the New Testament books, except Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, Titus, Philemon and 2 Peter. Satan is portrayed as living up to his name as ‘adversary’ in Pauline Epistles. For example, he tempts, misleads, torments, traps, hinders and deceives Christians (Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Timothy 5:15; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 11:14). Paul himself “was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Other New Testament Writers: evil stems from devil attempt to devour believers

The writings of other New Testament authors also show that evil stems from the devil who seeks constantly to devour Christians and thwart the will of God (1 Peter 5:8–9; James 4:7–10; 1 John 5:18; Revelation 12:9). Paul’s terminology of “principalities and powers” (Ephesians 6:12) indicates an unexplained complexity of the spirit world, which hints about territorial powers (Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 15:24.). The use of the term ‘archangel’ by Paul and Jude implies some degree of angelic hierarchy among the angels of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9).

The epistles do not mention any encounter with demoniacs or witches. In Galatians 5:19–20, however, the word witchcraft was listed among the works of the flesh. The Greek term ‘pharmakeia’ translated “witchcraft” is said to be the common Greek word for “sorcery.” The more

literal translation is said to denote “the act of administering drugs, and then the giving of magical potion.” Thus the word can either be considered as witchcraft or sorcery.

No demonization in the Epistles

The epistles do not directly mention the demonization of Christians. However, several passages warn about the influence of false teachers to the extent that indicate that Christians stand in real danger of being tempted, falling and being controlled by demons, if they are not careful to remain completely in the faith (2 Corinthians 11:2–4, 13–15; 1 Timothy 4:1, 3:6–7; 2 Timothy 2:25–26; 2 Peter 2:1–22).

Do not give the devil the foothold (Ephesians 4:27)

The verse may best be considered a representation of several passages in the epistles, which speak of the devil taking advantages of Christians as the result of some sins in their lives (for example: Romans 6:12; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 4:9; Colossians 2:8, 3:5–10; James 3:9–15; 1 Peter 5:8).

4. Towards Practical Actions

a. Sovereignty of God must be stressed

The sovereign reign of God over all his creation, including Satan, the gods and the demonic, must be emphasised among Christians.

God’s sovereignty rules out demonic power over His people

God’s sovereign reign over the universe makes little room for demonic activity to overpower his people. Deuteronomy 32:39 clearly declares that it is the Lord who puts to death and brings to life, who wounds and heals.

Jesus linked His exorcism with the breaking down of Satan’s power

Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God at hand takes its special significance from the prophetic expectation in the Old Testament for the coming of God’s sovereign rule, where God’s people would be completely liberated (Luke 4:18–19; Mark 1:15; see also Isaiah 61:1–3; Isaiah 9:6–11). Jesus clearly links his exorcism with the kingdom of God that is breaking through the satanic kingdom (e.g. Matthew 12:28). Jesus’ exorcisms are visible signs of the kingdom of God on earth.

Paul shows the death of Christ has conquered all powers

Paul’s gospel also includes the conquering of all the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm through the death and resurrection of Christ (Colossians 2:15; see also Ephesians 1:21). For him, believers have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness, which is dominated by evil forces, and transferred into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). Paul’s emphasis is that in

Christ alone, by virtue of his work on the cross, the evil rulers no longer have control over the believers (Colossians 2:16).

However, the Devil is active in NT

Yet the New Testament also shows that the devil and the powers are very active in the world and will continue to be until the final consummation when his power will be completely subdued.

For example, Jesus shows in the parable of the sower that the devil is the evil one who snatches away the word of God from people's hearts (Matthew 13:19). In the parable of the weeds, he is portrayed as the enemy who seeks to destroy God's work by planting evil among them (Matthew 13: 25, 38–39). In John's gospel, the Pharisees' desire to kill Jesus is seen as fulfilling the desire of their master, the devil (John 8:42–45). Satan enters into Judas before he sets forth to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Paul and other New Testament writers also show that the evil powers are still in rebellion against Christ in attacking the Church and effectively working in unredeemed humanity (e.g. Ephesians 6:10–20; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:7–12).

Believers are to resist the Devil

Christians are therefore called upon to resist the devil (Peter 5:9; James 4:7). Christians are to put on the whole armour of Christ so that they stand up against "the devil's scheme" (Ephesians 6:10–18, see also Isaiah 59:17). This imagery has been understood by some Christians as a call to engage in spiritual warfare. However, taking into consideration that Pauls often stresses in his writing that the powers had already been defeated through the death and resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 3:10; see also Colossians 1:16; Colossians 2:16; Philippians 2:6–11), this can be fundamentally the conflict between God and satanic powers, in which the human being is both passively and actively involved. This appears to be power struggles in the mind (soul) of people and not basically warfare.

Thus, Christians are not to fight with the devil; their armoury for protection against the enemy is based on what God has done in history in the coming of Christ. Christians are, therefore, to stand by putting the word of God into practice.

b. The work of evil powers among Christians needs to be highlighted

Oppose God by influencing Christians

The specific work of Satan and the demonic among Christians needs to be highlighted. Basically, the work of Satan and the powers is to oppose God. To achieve their opposing intentions, they seek to influence Christians to live in ways which are contrary to their expressed intentions and the word of God. Some examples are the stories of Job, Eve, David and Peter.

In the Pauline writings, Satan is portrayed as living up to his name "adversary." For example, he tempts, misleads, torments, traps, hinders and deceives Christians (1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Timothy 5:15; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 1Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 11:14).

The writings of other New Testament authors also show that evil stems from the devil who seeks to devour Christians and thwart the will of God at every turn of event (1 Peter 5:8–9; James 4:7–10; 1 John 5:18; Revelation 12:9).

Sin as the ground upon which the Devil works

Consequently, the New Testament shows that the ground upon which the devil works is sin. It is precisely by addressing the problem of sin that Christ's atoning work also, in consequence, brings about the defeat of Satan and the powers (Colossians 2:13–15). Accordingly, in Colossians 2:15, the disarmament and public spectacle of the "powers and authorities" follow the cancellation of the written code against sinners. Other New Testament passages also suggest that forgiveness of sins, as an aspect of salvation, is linked with deliverance from the powers of the evil one (e.g. Acts 26:15–18; Hebrews 2: 14–18; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:7–12; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 4:13–14).

Do not give in to the craving of the flesh

The New Testament therefore urges Christians not to allow sin to have dominion over them by giving in to the craving of the flesh (e.g. Romans 6:12; Colossians 3: 5; Hebrews 12:14–17; 1 Peter 1:15–21; James 4:1–10; see also 1 John 3:2–6). Paul especially recognises that although, the compelling influence of the flesh has been broken by the work of Christ, the inner compulsion continually seeks to reassert its claim on Christians. He provides several lists of categories of sins, but in all of these he does not contrast 'the flesh' with 'the demonic,' but rather with the 'new man' or 'the Spirit' (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:9–10; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Colossians 3: 5–9; Ephesians 4:17–24; Galatians 5:19–23). Christians are warned against "the works of the flesh," not because they are demonic, but because they are concrete expressions of 'works' carried out by people who live in keeping with the human nature and that of the world around them. Such vices, according to Paul, may become the foothold of Satan and also bring the wrath of God (Ephesians 4:20; Colossians 3:6; Romans 1:18).

The Devil may attack physically

The purpose of the devil does not exclude the possibility of attack about which some Christians are so much concerned. Clearly the Bible indicates that the devil instigates persecution against Christians which results in suffering and some cases death of believers (e.g. Revelation 2:9, 13; Revelation 3:9; Revelation 13:7; 1 Peter 5:8–9). Again, the Bible hints that the devil induces spiritual attack which may manifest in physical infirmity as in the case of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). But that Paul prayed to God three times and was not "delivered" means the issue was not between Paul and the devil, but rather between Paul and his God. This indicates that the eschatological tension displayed in the New Testament means Christians are still exposed to the attack of demonic powers which, although defeated, may attack under the permission of God.

c. The place of misfortune or suffering needs to be discussed

There is the need to teach the place of misfortune or suffering in the life of the Christian. This needs to be set within the Christian doctrine of the Fall. The biblical concept of the Fall implies that the whole human race fell as a result of the fall of Adam. Therefore, the whole creation has “been subjected to frustration,” that is, suffering and death exist as an inevitable part of the world. Yet creation has a hope of being “liberated from its bondage to decay” (Romans 8:18–24). The death and resurrection of Christ marks the beginning of the end (the hope), which means, “God’s final (eschatological) saving of his people has already been effected by Christ” (e.g. Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 2:8). Believers, therefore, live between the times of ‘the already’ but ‘not yet’ (e.g. Ephesians 4:30; see also Romans 5:9; Galatians 5:5). The outcome of this eschatological tension is that Christians are still exposed to physical afflictions, including any type of suffering or misfortune. Misfortune or suffering does not necessarily mean that the devil has attacked; neither does it mean that the person has sinned. It can just be the result of the fallen aspect of humanity.

d. The role of exorcism or deliverance

Exorcism or deliverance should be seen as part of the means of dealing with a variety of manifestations of evil in human life.

When exorcism or deliverance is not needed

There may be times when deliverance may not be necessary. In the gospels, while Jesus sometimes cast out demons, there are some cases which appear demonic in which he does otherwise. For example, he does not cast out the demon of lust from the woman caught red-handed in the act of adultery (John 8:1–11) or the woman who it is said “had lived a sinful life” (Luke 7:36–50). He does not expel the demon of lie from Peter for betraying him three times (Luke 22:31, 22:54–60 see also John 19:15–19). Paul does not cast out the ‘demon of lust’ from the man who was having sexual relations with his father’s wife (1 Corinthians 5:1–5), the demon of division from the saints in Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1–9), or the demon of slavery from the Galatians who had been bewitched (Galatians 3:1–6). In the same way the saints who fell into sin in the Old Testament were not considered as demonised. These include Abraham, who slept with his maid (Genesis 16:1–15); David, who slept with Uriah’s wife (2 Samuel 11:1–27); Solomon for his polygamous and idolatrous life (1 Kings 11:1–8); and Absalom who rebelled against his father (2 Samuel 15:1–12).

No accusation of demon possession or witchcraft

It is very clear that there was no accusation of witchcraft or demon possession in the Bible. Rather it was the demonised persons who rather screamed or spoke at the presence of Jesus, and also of Paul. The apostles also did not accuse others of demons possession. Believers are therefore not to accuse others of witchcraft and demon possession. ‘Demon possession’ must be considered as one of the conditions that needs the healing of God.

When exorcism or deliverance may be needed

This does not mean that deliverance and exorcism has been completely ruled out of the scene. If Jesus' ministry and that of Paul's are taken into consideration, then exorcism may be needed in some cases. However, exorcism may be performed after a person has passed through a counselling session and it has become absolutely clear that the problem is demonic.

Arriving at a conclusion that a person's case is demonic needs extra care. From his analysis of Jesus' exorcisms, the New Testament scholar Graham Twelftree identifies the following signs of demonic presence: extraordinary strength, indifference to the pain of the sufferer, vocalisation of distress when confronted by Jesus, and a change in the sufferer's voice. Nevertheless, currently psychiatrists show that these symptoms can almost all be explained in some naturalistic way. While this does not rule out the possibility of demonic presence in some cases, it shows that many cases which people consider demonic may be natural issues. Therefore, arriving at a decision of demonic activity or witchcraft possession should not be made lightly. If the counsellor has not received discernment or a clear prophetic insight, which must have been accepted by the client, he or she must explore all possible natural explanations.

Methods of exorcism

As to the techniques or methods of exorcism, preferably those used by Jesus are to be followed. Jesus' main method of exorcism was a simple word of command. Since magico-religious practices have been prominent in African traditional practices, using them may be ways of communicating the biblical message to the people. However, such intent is undermined if the principles go against the ethical code of the people and Scripture. Allowing the 'demons to speak' or the client to project himself/herself outwardly by speaking during exorcism may be accommodated privately and never publicly, since the utterance may cause further problems. Dangerous practices such as extracting confessions publicly from self-claimed witches in order to arrest attention before exorcism must be discouraged. Such confessions can put a social stigma on self-claimed witches who may never be accepted in society again. Confession, however, can be done privately.

Furthermore, enforcing long periods of fasting and prayer on clients are quite dangerous practices, since the need for these may be an indication that the exorcists have no authority over the situations, or the problems may be natural and needing immediate medical attention.

e. The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians must be emphasised

The role of the Holy Spirit in effecting the work of Christ in the life of the believer must be emphasised. Therefore, the significance of water baptism as being a sign of the believer's identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection need to be highlighted (e.g. Acts 9:17–18; Acts 10:48; Romans 6:1–14). The guarantee of the believers' eternal security in Christ, with all its privileges such as their election, justification and glorification must be emphasised (e.g. 1 Ephesians 1:3–21; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:28–31; John 3:1–2). The person of the Holy Spirit and his role in the believer's life must be stressed.

In this case, stress needs to be laid on the purpose of Holy Spirit in the life of the believer; for example, to give one power for service, full assurance of salvation, edify an individual, and power to live the Christian life (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 11:18; Romans 8:9–16). Generally there is the need for teaching the basic Christian doctrines.

Christians must be encouraged to walk in the Spirit. The prosperity gospel and the deliverance ministry may be indications that Christians are now walking in the flesh. Paul's (and inferred from other New Testament writers) answer to believers' moral discipline or fleshly action is the Spirit or walking in the Spirit (e.g. Galatians 5:16, see also 2 Peter 1:3; 1 John 3:9).

5. Conclusion

An attempt has been made to present spiritual powers in the context of witchcraft beliefs, practices and accusations in contemporary African. Biblical perspective of the spirit world has been analysed. It was realised that the African concept of witchcraft and deliverance is quite strange in the Bible. The deliverance ministries out of which 'child witch' accusation have become a significant part have been exposed as unbiblical and unhealthy. A new approach which includes highlighting on the sovereignty of God, walking in the Spirit and counselling people before any possible attempt of deliverance has been recommended. It is hope that Christian will know and accept their position in Christ and help minimised the menace of witchcraft accusation in Africa.

Dr. Opuku Onyinah, August 2014

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edition 2017.0721 EN — stop-cwa.org