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## Spiritual Powers

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### Introduction

The issue of spiritual powers has engaged people's attention throughout history. Right from the story of creation, there seems to be a fundamental conflict between God and a being called Satan, in which humanity is involved.

Satan appears to rule over a kingdom in league with other spirits who oppose God and his people. Against this 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 Satan's activities since they are considered destructive to society.

### The African view of the spirit world

In many locations across Africa there is the belief that some human beings have the power to hurt others. It is believed that any evil force can be in league with witches to affect an evil act on those they do not like.

Among these acts are infertility in women and impotence in men, material losses, making people ignoble through their deeds, reading people's intentions and working against them. For this reason, people seek to protect themselves from witches.

### Current realities: 'witchdemonology' in Africa

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

The terms 'witch' and 'witchcraft' are used synonymously with 'demon', 'demonology' and 'evil spirit'. Demon possession is described as when a demon comes to live in a person without their consent.

There is also an idea of ancestral curses. The effect of these curses in a person's life are believed to include chronic diseases or hereditary diseases, mental breakdowns, emotional excess, allergies, repeated miscarriages, repeated unnatural deaths such as suicide or accidents, continuing financial insecurity, frequent breakdown of marriages, abnormal behaviour such as extreme anger or shyness.

Consequently, the emphasis is on the practice of deliverance. This aims to free people from the influence or bondage of Satan and his allied evil spirits, who bring about these afflictions and sufferings.

This is different from exorcism, which is used as a deliberate act of binding or releasing a person believed to be possessed by a spirit of evil intent.

It is held that there are signs that a person is demonised or a witch. One of the surest signs proponents of this ministry state is that such people are especially uneasy in the presence of so-called spiritual people.

The inference is that demons are at work at any time that some alleged evil behaviour or disease occurs in the lives of both Christians and non-Christians.

It is therefore claimed 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 churches to do this.

In these sessions so-called witches and demon-possessed people are chained until they are delivered or otherwise. There are two types of deliverance offered: mass and personal. Both can take two or three hours.

It is against this backdrop that the Report of Commissions set to Research into Witchcraft Accusation in Kinshasa last year [2014] made its shocking findings.

It found that there were 'several cases of murders of adults accused of witchcraft' as well as an increase in accusations against 'witch children and adolescents' in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The report claimed that children were 'verbally and physically abused, let down and abandoned by their families and sometimes even killed'. This was, the report claimed, 'a community crisis' representing 'one of the most formidable challenges to the lives and dignity of children [who are] victims of this barbarism'.

## What does the Bible say?

The Bible has a lot to say about witches, witchcraft and demon possession. But we are going to focus on the New Testament and Jesus' activities.

In the gospels Jesus personally confronts demoniacs (Luke 11:10-17) and he responds to requests by parents or others (Matthew 12:22).

Throughout the gospels demoniacs are shown as people who are involved in the life of their communities (Mark 1:21-28); who are driven to the margins of society by their families (Luke 8:26-38); who are being tormented and hurt by the inhabiting demons (Luke 4:35) who are physically ill as a consequence (see Luke again) and who may have a multiplicity of possession (Mark 5:9).

All this shows that the demon-possessed people are sufferers.

Jesus' healing therefore serves several purposes. It shows his authority and his mission. It reinstates the outcast into society. It gives people the chance to believe in him and it is a straightforward means of teaching.

How does Jesus do this? He finds out the demon's name (Mark 5:7-8), gives a command to cast out demons (Mark 1:25); and finally bids the demons not to return (Luke 11:24-26).

## How does this affect our actions?

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

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

Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand foretells a time where God's people will be completely liberated (Luke 4:18-19). Paul shows that all powers and principalities have already been defeated through the death and resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 1:21).

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

So there is a tension in the New Testament where Christians are still exposed to the attack of demonic powers, which, though defeated, may attack under the permission of God.

There is a need to teach the place of misfortune or suffering in the life of Christians. Believers live between the promise of complete liberation and its fulfilment. This means that they are still exposed to suffering and misfortune.

So, suffering and misfortune don't mean that the devil has attacked. Neither do they mean that the person has sinned. They are simply the result of living in a fallen world.

Therefore, exorcism and deliverance should be seen as part of the means of dealing with a variety of manifestations in human life.

## When exorcism and deliverance are not needed

There may be times when deliverance may not be necessary. For example, Paul does not cast out a demon of lust from the man having sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1-5), a demon of division from the saints in Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-9) or a demon of slavery from the Galatians (Galatians 3:1-6).

It's clear that there are no accusations made of either witchcraft or demon possession in the Bible. Instead, it's the demons that spoke in the presence of Jesus and later, of Paul. Neither did the apostles accuse people of demon possession.

So, believers should not accuse others of witchcraft or demon possession. The latter should be considered as something that needs God's healing.

## When exorcism and deliverance may be needed

This doesn't mean that deliverance or exorcism are completely ruled out. Taking both Jesus' and Paul's ministries into consideration, exorcism may be needed in some cases. But, it should be done after someone has had counselling and it's become clear that the problem is demonic.

Arriving at this conclusion needs great care. If the counsellor has not received discernment or a clear prophetic insight, which must have been accepted by the client, they must explore all possible natural explanations.

## Methods of exorcism

Jesus' main method of exorcism was a simple word of command. Dangerous practices, such as extracting public confessions from self-proclaimed witches in order to arrest attention before exorcism, should be discouraged. This could put a social stigma on a person who may never be accepted in society again. Confession, can however, be done in private.

## The role of the Holy Spirit

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 needs to be highlighted (Acts 9:17-18).

The role of the Holy Spirit to give one power for service, full assurance of salvation, and the power to live the Christian life (Acts 1:8) should also be emphasised. And Christians must be encouraged to walk in the Spirit.

## Conclusion

Deliverance ministries, out of which so-called child witch accusations have become a significant part, are unbiblical and unhealthy.

A new approach that includes highlighting the sovereignty of God, walking in the Spirit and counselling people before any attempt at deliverance is made, is strongly recommended.

Through this it is hoped that Christians will know and accept their position in Christ and the menace of witchcraft accusations in Africa will be minimised.

## Want to read more?

### Background reading:

- Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana, by Dr Opoku Onyinah, Deo Publishing, 2012
- “Introduction 1952” in Witchcraft and Sorcery, by Max Marwick, Penguin Books, 1982
- Report of Commissions set to Research into Witchcraft Accusations, 2014

### Biblical references:

- Old Testament references include: Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18: 10 and 1 Chronicles 21:1
- New Testament references include: Luke 4:18-19, Luke 11:24-26, Mark 5:7-8 and Acts 9:17-18.

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for the **Stop Child Witch Accusations** coalition

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