

# **IMPOSITION OF HANDS: A THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAAN CHRISTIAN EXORCISTIC PRACTICE.**

By:

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## **Abstract**

Exorcism, which is mainly the act of driving out of demons and/or evil spirits from people, is a common practice in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. In Christianity, the practice of exorcism is usually aimed at freeing people who are under the bondage of Satan and to help them live a life that God intended for them. In exorcism and or deliverance services, there are many acts or formulas that are used to exorcise demons. Some of these include flagellation, anointing with oil etc. This article basically focuses on the imposition of hands during exorcism. By employing a hermeneutical approach, the study examines the practice of laying on of hands during exorcism in the light of scripture. The study looks at a brief historical background of Christianity in Ghana and discusses the processes through which the practice of exorcism became very prominent in Ghanaian Christianity. The study also samples opinion of some practitioners of healing and deliverance and their views on the practice of laying on of hands during exorcism. The views of the practitioners are discussed and analyzed in the light of Jesus' own examples in the scriptures. We argue that even though the practice of imposition of hands is not entirely out of place in scripture, the practice seem to have seldom taken place in the Lord's own example in dealing with similar situations. It is therefore imperative for Christians to come terms with reality and find biblically balanced ways of addressing issues that confront our faith and practice.

## **Introduction**

An observation of the practice of laying on of hands within contemporary Ghanaian Christianity has prompted a desire for a closer theological analysis of the practice to ascertain the appropriateness of the practice and its theological relevance as a religious practice. In contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, it is not uncommon to see hands being imposed by various deliverance ministers to cast out evil spirits from people. In Ghana, one of the charismatic preachers who is popularly known for his emphasis on laying on of hands is Pastor Eastwood Anaba, the founder of the Fountain Gate Chapel International, and currently the President of

Eastwood Anaba Ministries headquartered in Bolgatanga, Ghana. He attests to the fact that laying on of hands features prominently in his ministration to crowds and individuals. According to him, he can lay hands on 5000 to 8000 people in a single meeting “without collapsing from exhaustion”.<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Laying on of Hands*, Anaba lays emphasis on the theological relevance of the laying on of hands in Christian practice. He argues that:

The laying on of hands is not just a tradition of the church but a component of the principles of the doctrine of Christ. It is listed with repentance from dead works, faith towards God, baptism, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. It is equal with these other doctrines and must be treated with the same amount of importance.<sup>2</sup>

But the question is, is there any theological basis for the imposing of hands in exorcism as a religious practice? In what cases should hands be imposed on people for prayer? Should there be an imposition of hands during exorcism? What was Jesus Christ’s normative approach to exorcism? This study seeks to explore the theological appropriateness of the laying on of hands during exorcism.

Exorcism is primarily thought of as the rite of driving out evil spirits or demons from people and/or places. . The practice is usually referred to as “deliverance ministry” where gifted people (usually deliverance ministers) drive out enigmatic or malevolent elements from people and heal them by authorizing the spirit to leave the person and/or by touching the person with their hands, called laying on of hands, and pray over them. “Exorcism” is derived from the Greek preposition *ek* with the verb *horkizo* which means “I cause [someone] to swear” and refers to “putting the spirit or demon on oath,” or invoking a higher authority to bind the entity in order to control it and command it to act contrary to its own will.

Exorcism is mostly an extended version of deliverance. However, a number of Christians have distinguished between the two.<sup>3</sup> *The Christian Exorcism Study Group* of the Church of England,

for example, draws a line between the two. They explicate that “exorcism is a specific act of binding and releasing, performed on a person who is believed to be possessed by a non-human malevolent spirit.” It may also refer to the “spiritual cleansing of a place believed to be infested by the demonic.”<sup>4</sup> However, “Deliverance”, on the other hand, has got to do with the general idea of “freeing people from the bondage of Satan.” This may occasionally involve exorcism but generally, it does not.”<sup>5</sup> It is using certain “methods to bring the Lordship of Christ to bear on people or places or situations which are troubled by the results of folly, or unbelief, or sin or the works of the devil, but are not actually possessed by an evil spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

In recent times, the practice of exorcism in African Christianity has received considerable attention by scholars. However, one aspect of the practice which has not been adequately examined is the laying on or imposition of hands during exorcism. John Richards has observed that, there has been a great increase in the laying-on-of-hands in recent decades, but little attention has been given to its meaning, symbolism or practice.<sup>7</sup> Kimberly Rogers adds that it is such a common practice in the church and only few stop to consider its ramifications.<sup>8</sup>

In Ghana, one person who has contributed to the discourse on exorcism in contemporary Pentecostal Christianity is Opoku Onyinah, the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost. However, he also attests to the fact that a closer look at literature on African Christianity shows that there has not been a careful attempt to investigate and study a particular topic like exorcism, which features prominently in African Christian and religious lives. He argues that as far back as 1963, John V. Taylor made a call for the development of some properly safeguarded ministry of exorcism in African Christianity. Again, Mary Douglas, M.L. Daneel and Paul Gifford have made significant calls in the same direction.<sup>9</sup>

Onyinah's monumental work on *Pentecostal Exorcism* approaches the issue of exorcism from a Pentecostal perspective using the practice of divination and witchcraft activities among the Akans as a framework for understanding exorcistic practice among Christians in Ghana. Even though he makes a conscious effort in showing how spirits are exorcised from people, in both the African Traditional religious practice and also among Christians, the issue of the imposition of hands during exorcism is not addressed in his work despite the centrality and popular nature of the practice within contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. Exorcism as a religious practice has pervaded every stream of Christianity in Ghana. The practice is not only found in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches but also within the western missions established churches which were formerly known to have opposed such practices.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that it is not only within Christianity that this practice takes place. In fact, the act of exorcising is universally practiced in all or most religions and is at the same time a part of the indigenous religious activities of several ethnic groups in Africa and all over the world. Arguably, almost every religion has preventive techniques which are performed to ward off "evil spirits".

In exorcism, there are several acts that may be performed with or without a spoken formula to expel evil spirits. In Ghana, these include flagellation (flogging or beating as a religious discipline); and the application of various substances which may include anointing oil.<sup>10</sup>

However, one such common practice in Christianity is the imposition of hands. There is no query about the fact that imposition of hands is a Christian practice with numerous examples in scripture for various reasons. Examples abound in the Old Testament (OT), in the Lord's own practice and in the ministry of his disciples where hands were laid on people or people were

touched for various reasons. In the OT there are records of imposition of hands for blessing (Genesis 48:14, Leviticus 9:22), commissioning (Numbers 27:18-19), dedication, sacrifice and capital offenders (Numbers 8:6-13). In the Lord's own practice, there are many instances of imposing hands for physical healing (Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-44 – leprosy, Matthew 8:14-15 – fever, Matthew 20:32-34; Mark 8:22-25; Luke 5:12-14 – blindness, Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40; – various unspecified sicknesses, Mark 7:32 – speech and hearing impairment, Luke 13:11-13 – a bent spine, Luke 22:50-51- restoration of a severed ear among others). There are also other instances in which Jesus imposed his hands other than for the purpose of healing. In the case of the disciples, there are records of imposition of hands for blessing, commissioning, healing, initiation, impartation of the Spirit among others. It is, therefore, not totally out of place for this practice in contemporary Christianity.

However, in instances of exorcism, no clear scriptural references seem to suggest that it was practiced. Some cases that seem to give some indications is the case of the woman with the bent back in Luke 13:11-13 and Peter's mother in-law (Luke 4:38-39). As to whether it is a real case for imposition of hands in exorcism will have to be explored. Besides this case, there is also a suggestion in Mark's Great Commission (Mark 16:17-18) to the effect that hands are imposed for exorcism. But this will also have to be explored hermeneutically to be established or discounted.

The study employs a hermeneutical approach to discuss the issues at stake. Hermeneutics deals with interpretative issues that originate in religious and literary studies of textual material, in which in-depth inquiry into text and relating its parts to the whole can reveal deeper meanings.<sup>11</sup> The study also employs the use of questionnaires, unstructured interview format and participant observation as methods of data collection.

## **The Emergence of Christianity and Exorcism in Ghana**

One can argue strongly that a good deal of discussion has already been made on the origins and development of Christianity in Ghana and that, there would be no need to spend extensive time to do a rehearsal of the same discussion here. However, in looking at the focus of this study, it is imperative to discuss the various epochs that led to the proliferation of Christianity in Ghana in order to help readers appreciate these developments and also properly understand how the practice of exorcism emerged within Ghanaian Christianity.

Christianity in Ghana has gone through different stages. The first epoch is the coming of the Europeans to West Africa, specifically Ghana, which dates back to January 1471.<sup>12</sup> However, church historians including Agbeti and Sanneh, attribute the first attempt to propagate the gospel in Ghana to the Portuguese (Catholics) in 1482.<sup>13</sup> According to some church historians including Groves, Sanneh and Debrunner, what was close to the first effective missionary work began in 1735 in Cape Coast by the Reverend Thomas Thompson of the Anglican Church. After this period, there was a span of hundred years without any missionary activity taking place. It has been argued that it is during this period that other Europeans scrambled for Ghana.<sup>14</sup>

The second epoch saw the coming of various missionary societies into the Gold Coast (now Ghana) during the nineteenth century. Latourette calls this century the “Great Century” of world mission.<sup>15</sup> The activities of these missionary societies saw the emergence of churches in Ghana such as the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, The Anglican Church and the Catholic Church. However, one significant event that is worth mentioning in the life and development of these western missionary established churches is the emergence of Prophetism. Some charismatic figures emerged within the mainline churches who were generally called prophets. These people began to exhibit some features of the Akan traditional practices, especially what

Baeta calls “Prophetism” within Christianity. Baeta’s description of ‘Prophetism’ includes the person who secures a following because of his or her claim to have the ability “of revealing hidden things [and] predicting the future”. Some of these prominent prophets or charismatic figures include Samuel Nyankson, William Wade Harris, John Swatson and Sampson Oppong.<sup>16</sup>

These prophets never sought to break away from the church but to revive the church through evangelism, healing and deliverance. However, their massive input into Christianity in Ghana was not without challenges. For example, the missionaries did not recognize them within the institutional structures of the church. The failure of the missionaries to recognize or handle them satisfactorily, were to be pictured in the emergence of the ‘Spiritual Churches’ mostly called *Sunsum Sɔré* in the 1920s.<sup>17</sup>

The *Sunsum Sɔré* is classified as the third epoch or third face of Christianity in Ghana. Some Ghanaians with strong personalities, who claimed to have received calls from God either through dreams and visions or some special awareness, broke away from the mainline churches and established their own independent churches. The group that claims to be the first of these churches recorded in Ghana is the Twelve Apostles Church of Ghana, started by two former *akɔmfɔɔ* (traditional priests), Grace Harris Tani and John Nackabah, whom Harris baptised during his ministry in Ghana. Others include the Africa Faith Tabernacle Church, Musama Disco Christo Church, the Church of the Lord (Aladura Group), Saviour Church of Ghana and Apostles Revelation Society.<sup>18</sup>

The most attractive aspect of these churches was the prophetic phenomenon that they displayed. They were also able to blend the traditional beliefs and practices with their Christian faith. Associated with the prophetic phenomenon is the *Abisa* (divinatory-Consultation), which comes

into focus before, during or after exorcism and healing. Healing and exorcism are the central attractions of prophetism. The practice of exorcism characterized all the ministries of the *Sunsum soré*. Almost all of them established healing camps which were also called gardens or centres.<sup>19</sup>

Onyinah has posited that the ritualistic procedures for exorcism in these indigenous churches were of two main types. One such practice of exorcising spirits was the carrying of water which was more prevalent in the Twelve Apostles Church. The second form of exorcising spirits from people was in the form of ritualistic prayer which was mainly found in the other spiritual churches.<sup>20</sup>

Even though these churches have witnessed a remarkable decline in their numbers, there is no doubt that their practices have left an indelible mark on the practice of Christianity in Ghana today especially among the Pentecostal movement, which is the fourth epoch of the history of Christianity in Ghana. Practices associated with healing and deliverance among Pentecostals today in Ghana seem to draw a lot of inspiration from what took place during the hey days of the spiritual churches.

### **The Practice of Exorcism (deliverance) in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity**

The practice of exorcism is found in almost all types of denominations in Ghana, especially among the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. The whole practice of deliverance, as it is done in the charismatic deliverance ministries, seems to be centred on exorcism. This probably stems from the traditional African belief that every problem has a spirit which is responsible for it.<sup>21</sup> There is always a belief among Africans that seem to associate any problem or difficulty in life to the work of the devil, be it witchcraft or ancestral curse, etc. Africans believe that there is always a causative element behind whatever happens to them. So generally, deliverance



(exorcism) is always meant to expel any malevolent powers that prevent people from enjoying the abundant life that Christ offers humankind.

Generally, there are two types of deliverance offered– collective and personal. A deliverance minister and his team in a service often administer the mass deliverance service. Deliverance can also be administered to an individual or the person can be given specific instructions and guidance to administer self-deliverance.<sup>22</sup> Self-deliverance mostly happens in situations where the client is enlightened and is not a non-believer or a recent convert. For such, Gifford echoes the position of many other deliverance ministers in Ghana on the fact that one can expel or exorcise demons by oneself or another can cast them out.<sup>23</sup> In such situations, the persons are either given verbal directions to follow on their own or given some printed instructions to follow. Most of the deliverance ministries, however, for obvious reasons, would want their clients to be in a service for them to be ‘delivered’.

Deliverance in such situations mostly takes place on special days set apart for deliverance services. A typical deliverance service begins like a normal Pentecostal type of service. Onyinah, a typical Pentecostal minister, recounts that the focus is on testimonies and some preaching about the works of demons and how God’s power can set people free from them.<sup>24</sup> Before the service, people due for deliverance are sometimes made to undergo initial processes of filling in a questionnaire or are made to go through counselling to ascertain the causes of their problem(s). Various deliverance ministers may have different approaches to dealing with the people but for most of them, the people are called in front of the congregation. Amidst mostly loud music and frantic dancing and clapping of hands, specific instructions are given to the people in front to pray.<sup>25</sup>

Onyinah recounts that following Tabiri's innovation of 'breaking', instructions are given to participants to write down the names of some specific relations for the 'breaking ritual'. Following the instructions of the leader, prayer is often said "repeatedly with gestures to 'break' (*bubu*), 'bind' (*kyekyere*), 'bomb', trample on them (*tiatia wonso*), 'whip with canes', 'burn with fire of God', 'strike with the axe of God', 'cast out demons' behind diseases and 'break' curses. In the course of the prayer, which is mostly very aggressive, people in bombing and shooting and caning the demons, literally fashion their hands into the various weapons that are supposedly being used and with their mouths produce the sounds that those weapons are supposed to make. One can therefore hear sounds like *poo, poo, poo, pee, pee, pee*, supposedly the sounds of rifles and bombs being shot at the demons or whatever spirits that are believed to be behind various problems.<sup>26</sup>

In some instances, as the prayer goes on, the minister and his team members move among the people and lay hands on them. The 'blood of Jesus' and 'the name of Jesus' are repeatedly invoked to rebuke the spirits responsible for the various problems. "People begin to sob, groan, shout, roar, fall down and struggle on the ground".<sup>27</sup>

An interesting observation is the belief that the demons leave the people through openings on the body. The supplicants, at the moment of the actual deliverance, are made to open their mouths and breathe in and out. They are also instructed not to hold back any unusual feeling such as wanting to vomit, spit, or to yawn.<sup>28</sup> Convulsion, or 'slaying in the spirit',<sup>29</sup> as it is normally called, is a normal occurrence which many deliverance ministers expect to happen to people they pray for.<sup>30</sup> It supposedly signifies the power of the Holy Spirit confronting the powers of evil that are afflicting people or that are the cause of the problems confronting them. Many new strategies keep coming up. In most cases, the exorcists lay hands on people standing and shouting, by

commanding and sometimes pushing them. When there is resistance, the leader engages in dialogue with the person, asking the name of the demon.

There are instances where supplicants are made to take along fruits and/or anointing oil. Sometimes too, they are made to buy porridge prepared and sold at the deliverance centres. These are blessed by the deliverance ministers and eaten by the supplicants. They are said to be the medium through which God works to deliver them from any problems that they have. Various deliverance ministers keep coming up with different strategies which are claimed to be revelations from God to get the people delivered. Some of their strategies have sometimes sparked off protracted media speculations and criticisms. Significant among recent applications are the provision of special well water and various brands of anointing oil.

Clearly, the methodology for the deliverance session is a mixture of a wide range of practices. For example, like the traditional shrines and the spiritual churches, psychology is implied in the confession of witches, the drumming and the repetition of the songs and instrumental simulations that build up pressure on the people before deliverance is carried on. Again, like the spiritual churches, ‘magical methodology’ is apparent in the repetition of the ‘prayer languages’ during deliverance. In addition to these, the techniques of hypno-therapy are applied indirectly during the teaching and testimonies around demons and deliverance. The use of psychoanalysis is also evident in the questionnaires and the interviews conducted by the exorcists before and during deliverance.

### **Views on the Imposition of Hands in Exorcism**

As part of the study, questionnaires were sent out and interviews were also conducted to ascertain people’s views and experiences on the issue of laying on of hands during exorcism.

This survey was conducted in order to ascertain the extent to which the phenomenon of laying on of hands has taken or is taking place within contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. It was to find out how pastors, particularly those engaged in deliverance ministries and Christians, have experienced the phenomenon and what their views were on the issue.

In the light of this, 200 questionnaires were sent out to churches comprising charismatics, Pentecostals, Mainline and the Neo-prophetic ministries. Purposively, one church each was singled out from these strands of denominations to collect data for the study. These churches were selected because they do organize constant healing and deliverance services at least once in a week. Therefore, they stood at a better place of offering the needed responses that were very paramount to this kind of study. This is because, most of the respondents in these denominations have in one way or the other experienced the phenomenon. Apart from the questionnaires and the interviews, the researchers also made personal observations on the issues in churches that organize healing and deliverance services. These observations were made in churches in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi.

Two fundamental questions pertinent to the study were posed to respondents regarding their views on deliverance. These were whether or not they had participated in healing and deliverance services and what their reasons were for participating in the service. If yes and for whatever reason, we wanted to know whether or not hands had been laid on them before during their participation in such services. Out of the 200 respondents, 192 of them representing 96% indicated that they had attended healing and deliverance services before and 185 respondents representing 92.5% indicated that hands had been laid on them before during such deliverance services. Despite this evidence from the respondents, the researchers' own participation in healing and deliverance services in churches across the three major cities in Ghana indicates that

in most deliverance services, the deliverance minister or his team members consciously or unconsciously move through the crowd and lay their hands on the heads of the people or touch some part of the body where the person might have been suffering an ailment to pray for them.

We can, however, state that this kind of practice of laying on of hands during deliverance service has almost become a ritualistic practice in deliverance services in Ghana and has gained an acceptability, consciously or unconsciously within the church. It has taken a central grip to the extent that an individual who goes for a deliverance service and is not touched by the pastor or the person praying for him or her does not feel prayed for or the demon not exorcised from him or her even if indeed he or she was relieved from his or her demonic bondage or ailment without a touch or the laying on of hands.

In the interviews that were conducted, there seemed to be the notion that most pastors, consciously or unconsciously, have laid hands on people during deliverance service to pray for them. However, it was clear that some of them do not support the idea of laying on of hands during exorcism.

In the interview, some pastors were of the view that sometimes it is good to lay hands in order to have a direct contact with the demon in the person. They are of the view that demons hate the power of the Holy Spirit that comes through the laying on of hands and when hands are laid on people in Jesus' name, demons are more likely to leave quickly. Some argued that it is not an absolute requirement but it can be a point of contact for faith.

According to some, the demons are sometimes 'stubborn' and for one to deal with them directly, they need to exude them by having a direct contact with them. In the opinion of some of them, by laying on of the hands, the demons feel the power that comes directly from the hand that has

been laid. This comes to explain that for such people, there is always the belief that without the laying on of hands, it will be difficult to exorcise any evil spirit from a person. The whole idea here is that, they seem to emphasize the role of point of contact as very fundamental in healing and deliverance hence, the laying on of hands. But as to whether this is biblically correct needs to be explored. However, some of them narrated instances when they encountered a demonic attack (in the form of swelling of hands, headache, sensations like snake bite etc.) as a result of the laying on of hands.

In situations where pastors have prayed for people under demonic influence unknowingly by the laying on of hands, it was indicated that sometimes there might be an ongoing impartation service which is aimed at helping the people receive gifts of the Holy Spirit for empowerment and transformation. Some pastors indicated that during such services, people sometimes manifest familiar spirits when hands are laid on them during the impartation service, whether for an anointing or to receive a spiritual gift from God. A pastor argued that in such situations, the pastor had unknowingly laid hands on the person and he or she might be compelled to continue laying his or her hand on the person in most cases to expel the demon. The observation made here is that sometimes, pastors or churches do not, in most cases, examine or investigate people's spiritual background before calling them for impartation service.

### **Jesus' Encounter with Demons in the Gospels**

Since we are trying to establish the theological appropriateness or otherwise of the imposition of hands in exorcistic practice, there is the need to turn our attention to scripture especially the gospels to find out how the Lord Jesus Christ himself dealt with similar situations. This will help us to acquaint ourselves with the Lord's own practice and significantly draw some lessons from them to inform what we do as Christian ministers. One can argue that not every type of demon or

spirit power that exists is represented in the gospels. However, the principles that can be learnt from this study might be of general application to the whole deliverance ministry and also show us the various approaches that one can adopt to exorcise spirits based on the Lord's own examples which should be the standard orthodox practice for all Christians.

A careful study of the gospels reveals the encounters our Lord Jesus Christ had with demonic related situations or personalities and how He dealt with them. The following encounters show some of Jesus' experiences.

#### **At Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37)**

At Capernaum, when Jesus was speaking in the synagogue with authority after being anointed by God in the wilderness, the demons could not stand Him any longer. A man possessed by a demon screamed out in a loud voice, "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Here we have a man screaming out words at Jesus indicating that he was not alone. This meant that evidently, the man had more than one demon in him. When Jesus responded to the situation, He initially ignored the man altogether and only addressed the demon, commanding it to be quiet and come out of the man. Here, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ only commanded and asked the demon to come out of the man without any touch or point of contact with the demon possessed person.

#### **At Simon's House (Mathew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41)**

After leaving the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus went with his disciples to Simon's house, where Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever. Without antibiotics and modern medicines, fevers were dangerous and potentially lethal. So Simon's question to Jesus was

probably a request for help in a potentially life-threatening situation rather than a passing minor illness.

The Bible tells us in specific detail just what Jesus did but significantly, the accounts are not the same in the parallel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The mechanics of this healing are particularly significant, having enormous relevance to the matter of physical healing through deliverance. Jesus clearly discerned that the illness was not just a bodily condition, but that there was a spiritual power behind the physical symptoms of the fever. So in Luke's account, instead of healing her of the condition, Jesus rebuked the fever (addressed the spirit of infirmity causing the fever) and ordered it to go without any contact (Luke 4:38-39).

In Matthew and Mark's accounts, however, there is no indication of any demonic dimension and significantly, Jesus touches (Matthew 8:14-15; Marks 1:29-31) and she is healed.

### **Jesus Encounters a Dumb Man (Matthew 9:32)**

Matthew's account of the reason why this dumb man could not speak is very explicit – because he had a demon. We are not told whether the demon was affecting the tongue, the voice box or the speech centre in the brain. But we are told that the direct consequence of the demon's presence was very specific, and that as soon as the demon was driven out by Jesus, the man started talking.

The Bible simply says that, the demon was driven out without any indication of a touch. This had been preceded by an encounter with two blind men who had been healed by Jesus touching them (Matthew 9:27-30) and that had also been preceded by the raising of the synagogue ruler's daughter from death (Matthew 9:23-26). In this instance too, there is a specific mention of Jesus taking the girl by the hand, an indication of a touch.



### **The Blind and Dumb Demoniac (Matthew 12:22-32)**

All three gospels include the discussion about the blind and dumb demoniac but only Matthew tells us of the blind and dumb demoniac whose healing started the discussion. One of the dangers of studying individual cases in the gospels is the temptation to think that once you have understood one case of, for example, blindness, you have understood them all. This is manifestly not true, for not all cases of blindness have the same root cause. If you look at the ways Jesus healed blind people, you will see several different ways in which He treated them, ranging from putting mud on their eyes to ordering out a demon. He appeared to vary the ministry according to the root cause of the blindness.

In this particular instance, as recorded in Matthew's account, the *modus* is simply "He cured him ..." (Matthew 12:22). No hint was given as to whether or not there was a touch. Strikingly significant is the fact that in an earlier encounter with two blind men, Jesus had touched and healed them, (Matthew 9:29) but in this case where there is an indication of demonic involvement, there is no indication of a touch.

### **The Epileptic Boy (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43)**

The account by Mark is the fullest of the three descriptions of the healing of this boy. But each account contains significant extra details, and when all the symptoms that the boy had are recalled from the three accounts and put together, it is clear that the boy suffered from grand mal epilepsy. Jesus, with Peter, James and John, had just shared the incredible experience of talking with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. While they were away, the other disciples were clearly carrying on the teaching and healing ministry.

The actual deliverance of the boy is very significant. First, Jesus did not disagree with the father's diagnosis of the boy's condition, that it was caused by a demon. The father reported that "whenever the spirit attacks him, it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth, grits his teeth, and becomes stiff all over" (Mark 9:18). We agree that epilepsy is not always demonic in origin. But in this case, it clearly was. The disciples brought the boy to Jesus, and as they were bringing him, the demon recognized Jesus and tried the only defense system it knew and threw the boy down in another fit so that "he fell on the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth" (verse 20).

After Jesus had asked the father a very important question and that is "How long has he been like this?" he ordered the demon to come out of the body. None of the accounts gives any indication of a touch by Jesus. He simply rebuked the spirit to leave the boy.

### **The Gadarenes Demoniac (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)**

Gerasa, Gadara and Gergesa are all variations of the same name. So whether people talk about the Gadarene demoniac, the Gerasene demoniac or any other similar-sounding demoniac, they are talking about the same person and the same incident. The only significant difference between the three different accounts is that Matthew describes two men, whereas Mark and Luke say there was only one. Possibly, Matthew remembers the man as having been so savage that he seemed to have the strength of two. But what is far more likely is that the burial caves in this area were often frequented by demoniacs and Matthew is likely linking two separate deliverances into one composite account. In all other respects, the stories are similar with various extra details provided by each writer. We would like to highlight or draw information from each of the accounts.

Firstly, all three writers tell us that the area of Gerasa where this violent man was to be found was a burial ground, giving an aura of terror to an already sinister place. Why should anyone want to live among the dead? What is certainly the case in the story is that the man was highly demonized and that his demons had been successful in attracting a huge army of evil spirits, many of which could have come from the dead who had been buried in the tombs. The more demonized a person is, the greater the control by demonic powers and the greater the supernatural strength that can be displayed through the victim's body.

Again, the effect of this man on the local community was severe. Matthew tells us that the local road had become a no-go area, such was his fierceness. Mark and Luke describe the chains that had been used to attempt to contain his violence and protect the community from his menaces. But nobody had been able to get chains on him strong enough to hold him down. Many times people had tried, but always in vain for whatever chains they used were always smashed. He was simply too strong for anyone to control.

Most importantly, Mark adds another significant detail in his account of the story of the Gerasene demoniac. He tells us that the man wandered through the tombs day and night screaming and cutting himself with stones- presumably sharp flints or other such sharp edges with which it was possible to draw blood. Luke adds another significant detail in his account. "For a long time this man had gone without clothes" (Luke 8:27). People who are mentally deranged very often lose all sense of personal modesty.

At this point Jesus must have said, "Come out of the man," for both Mark and Luke record that the conversation with the demon was only continued because the demon had remained entrenched and was refusing to go. The demon's response to the command to leave was a cry for

clemency: “I beg you, don’t punish me” (Luke 8: 28). Mark quaintly adds that the demon even said: for God’s sake... don’t punish me” (Mark 5:7). The fact that the demon was still there after Jesus had commanded it to leave must be a source of much encouragement to those who have experienced difficulty during deliverance ministry. So Jesus changed His method of approach to the situation and asked the demon a question: what is your name?

In this example too, we see Jesus ordering the demon to leave the man without any personal contact.

### **The Syro-Phoenician or Canaanite Woman’s Daughter (Matthew 15:21-28).**

This particular deliverance has four special features that are not expressed through any of the other healings that Jesus did.

Firstly, it is what we would call today, proxy deliverance, where the mother of the girl came to Jesus pleading for help for her demonized child, who was left at home. Secondly, it is a ministry to someone who was, at that time, beyond the limits of Jesus’ ministry of deliverance. Thirdly, Jesus used this particular ministry to illustrate that deliverance is a “bread” ministry (bread meaning staple diet) for the people of God. And fourthly, He demonstrated through this story that persistence in asking, which is a product of faith, will be rewarded.

We are often asked if we can pray for deliverance for someone who is not present at the time of the prayer. The answer is that it is very possible to do that believing in the omnipresence of God. However, we do not make a general point of saying that this is a normal ministry to be applied in all situations. For there is a unique feature to the story that does not apply to every situation and would seem to restrict its general application but the fact remains that Jesus healed the daughter

of her said demonic torment without the possibility of a touch. In actual fact, the victim was not even present at the scene but only her mother.

### **The Woman with the Spirit of Infirmity (Luke 13: 10-17)**

This last of the individual deliverance ministries described in the gospels is, nevertheless, one of the most important. Only Luke, the physician who carefully described important cases, includes this ministry in his gospel record. Luke's account begins with describing the woman who had had a spiritual attack for eighteen years and who, as a result, had a spine that was so bent that she could not straighten up at all- a severe case of curvature of the spine.

In this case, there was a touch by Jesus but it does not indicate exorcism of any demon from the woman. To attribute the cause of her predicament to Satan was in line with the general truth that Satan, the thief, comes not but to steal, kill and destroy but Christ came that humanity might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10: 10). Jesus touched her like he touched Peter's mother-in-law and healed her.

### **A Theological Assessment of the Imposition of Hands in Exorcistic Practice**

Comparatively, there seems to be a missing dynamic in the ways Jesus Christ went about exorcising demons in the scriptures cited above compared to contemporary practices especially within the selected churches that were used as case study for this work. Our visits to deliverance centres and prayer meetings where the practice of exorcising demons and or evil spirits are very common indicates that the practice of laying on of hands has almost become an unavoidable practice or involuntary action when expulsing a demonic spirit. Most of the interviewees did not see anything wrong in laying on of hands on a demon possessed person though most of them argued that deliverance ministers or exorcists should always discern before laying their hands on

people. This view is supported by Anaba who argues that hands should not be laid on “demonized people without discernment.”<sup>31</sup> However, he again argues that this does not mean the Bible prevents the laying on of hands on demonized people.<sup>32</sup>

During the interviews, some pastors were of the view that God has anointed them. This anointing of God upon their lives makes them instruments of blessing to their followers by praying for them, healing them of their diseases and blessing them. They are of the view that since God has anointed them to bless and heal the sick through the laying on of hands, they can also lay hands to cast out evil spirits from people. For instance, Anaba is of the view that healing the sick and casting out demons go hand in hand. Therefore, one should not separate them if they want to achieve great results in ministry. He opines that, “the healing and deliverance ministries flow through the same hands. The spirit of infirmity is the cause of disease. Jesus combined the teaching and deliverance ministries. It is wrong to see Jesus as a nice teacher of the Word of God who did not confront demons and diseases.”<sup>33</sup>

Mostly, the texts that were cited in support of this argument is Jesus’ encounter in the house of Simon Peter (Mathew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41). To understand this apparent dilemma, one must consider these texts in their relevant context. A critical examination of the synoptic gospels (Mathew, Mark and Luke) reveals that the accounts of the various writers regarding this particular incident differ. In evangelist Luke’s account, Jesus clearly discerned that the sickness was not just a bodily condition, but had a demonic origin or influence. So in Luke’s account, Jesus rebuked the fever (addressed the spirit of infirmity causing the fever) and ordered it to go without any contact (Luke 4:38-39). However, in Matthew and Mark’s accounts, there is no indication of any demonic dimension and significantly, Jesus touches (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31) and she is healed.

In the stories cited above, Jesus actually did not touch any demon possessed person through the laying on of hands. People were totally released from their bondages through the exercise of His authority by commanding and rebuking the evil spirit to leave the person.

It was, however, realised from the contemporary Christian practice that, of all the cases observed, both recipients and ministers of exorcism simply laid hand on their clients without recourse to orthodox practice. This is a clear indication of people acting out of ignorance or emotions. One needs to understand the fact that we are only able to exorcise demons not by one's own strength but through the power of the Holy Spirit. If the exorcist, indeed, has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as Christ Jesus did, there should be no point of contact as some pastors have argued in the casting out of demonic spirits from people. A thorough search and examination of the gospel accounts regarding Jesus' encounters with the demonic reveals that, he never laid hands but either rebuked or commanded the spirit to leave their habitat.

Generally, as to the techniques or methods of exorcism, preferably those used by Jesus are to be followed but not the unconventional. Jesus' main method of exorcism was a simple word of command (E.g. Mk. 1:25; Mk. 9:25).

Comparing Jesus' method with the ritualistic techniques used by proponents of witchdemonology, Onyinah has argued that some of the areas need to be reexamined.<sup>34</sup> According to him, John White has objected to the use of rituals in exorcism, since, for him, such an approach is to depend upon magic and also undermines dependence on God.<sup>35</sup> But Arnold observes that magical beliefs and practices can be found in the mystery religions and even in Judaism and Christianity.<sup>36</sup> Drawing from David Aune's definition of magic,<sup>37</sup> however, Arnold draws a distinction between religion and magic as, in religion one prays requests from the

gods; in magic one commands the gods and therefore expects guaranteed result.<sup>38</sup> Thus

magical practices or rituals may not necessarily be magic, if the rituals are seen as making a request to the gods. Since magico-religious practices have been prominent in Akan traditional practices, using them may be ways of communicating the biblical message to the people. However, according to Onyinah “such intent is undermined if the principles go against the ethical code of the people and Scripture.”<sup>39</sup>

We argue strongly that there should be a simple trust and faith in the power of Jesus, whose death has given the believer the authority to exercise this ministry. Too much ritual may show a lack of spiritual power on the part of the exorcist and, in a way, the authority, that is, Jesus the Christ, to whom he appeals for deliverance. Martey argues that casting out demons in Jesus’ name should, by no means, be seen as a magical power or formula that may be used by anyone at all to exercise deliverance. According to him, the true power behind the name of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who gave Jesus of Nazareth the power to cast out demons.<sup>40</sup>

The focus should always be on Christ and what He has done for the world. It is very tempting to look at scriptural passages out of context, especially if they suit our particular practice or theological orientation.

The role of exorcism should be seen as part of the means of dealing with a variety of manifestations of evil in human life. Christ has given us all the power to trample on the devil and nothing will harm us if we believe and have faith in his name (Luke 10:19). As people of God endowed with power and authority, we should be ready to allow the Holy Spirit to direct exorcism or healing.



## **Conclusion**

Clearly, the Bible does not lose focus of the existence of demons. The biblical references cited in this study show that the Bible takes the devil and demons seriously. The scriptures present demons or evil spirits as a living reality. The ministry of Jesus Christ and that of His followers affirmed the existence of Satan and his angels (Matt.25:41 cf. Rev 12:7). And both Jesus and His followers dealt uncompromisingly with the enemy, knowing that God's power was far greater than that of Satan. Parts of Johannine theological interpretation of God's salvific act accomplished through Jesus the Christ is the destruction of the kingdom of Satan: "The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The followers of Jesus cast out demons only through the delegated authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:1; Mk.16:17; Lk.9:1; 10:17-19: cf. Acts 8:7).

The reality and nature of the situation demands strategies and methods that can be used to counteract any activity of demonic influence. As Christians we have been empowered by the Spirit of God to fight demons through prayers and with the help of the Holy Spirit. We should bear in mind that any ritualistic format without the help of the Holy Spirit cannot yield any result. Again, we do not entirely say that the laying on of hands is wrong and entirely out of place in contemporary Christian exorcistic practice. However, great caution must be exercised in the laying on of hands during exorcism. As far as this study is concerned, the biblical examples cited do not depict the Lord Jesus Christ laying hands to cast out demons in all His encounters with demon-possessed people. Even though this might not be conventional, we argue that, preferably, the Lord Jesus Christ should be our ultimate example in such practices such as exorcism.

Exorcising evil spirits from people can be very dangerous. Therefore, one needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help him or her embark on such ministry successfully.

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<sup>1</sup> Eastwood Anaba, *Anointing with Oil* (Accra: Design Solutions), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Eastwood Anaba, *The Laying on of Hands* (Accra: Design Solutions, 2012), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Perry, (ed.) *Deliverance: Psychic Disturbances and Occult Involvement* (London: SPCK, 1987), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Perry, *Deliverance*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Perry, *Deliverance*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Perry, *Deliverance*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> John Richards, *Renewal Servicing* 2003, [www.helpforchristians.co.uk](http://www.helpforchristians.co.uk)

<sup>8</sup> Kimberly Rogers. *The lessons of laying on of hands*

<sup>9</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Dorset UK: Deo Publishing, 2012), xi.

<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Martey, 'Deliverance Ministry in the Church: A Theological Assessment' *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. IX January 1999, No. 1, 18.

<sup>11</sup> W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. (Boston: Pearson, 2004), 87.

<sup>12</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (London: Hurst, 1983), 21.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations 1482-1919* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 3. Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Hans. W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1976), 45.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 1939 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 281.

<sup>16</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 111.

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- <sup>17</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 122. See also Bediako, Mary Gillian. "The Relationship Between Western Missions and the Indigenous Christian Prophets of West Africa, William Wade Harris, John Swatson and Sampson Oppong, and Its Significant for Christian Mission." (MA. Diss., Aberdeen, 1980), 23.
- <sup>18</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 114-115.
- <sup>19</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 116.
- <sup>20</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 117.
- <sup>21</sup> Emmanuel K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, (Accra: Blessed Publication, 2001), 8.
- <sup>22</sup> D. K. Olukoya, *Prayer Rain* (Lagos: MFM Press, 1999), x.
- <sup>23</sup> Paul, Gifford, *African Christianity: its public role* (London: C Hurst & Co., 1998), 98.
- <sup>24</sup> See Onyinah, Opoku 'Deliverance as a way of confronting witchcraft in modern Africa: Ghana as a case history', *Cyber Journal for Pentecostal/Charismatic Research*. Retrieved March 24, 2015, for a detailed description of a typical Ghanaian charismatic deliverance service.
- <sup>25</sup> From Larbi's account of Normanyo's deliverance service, he writes: "The deliverance service which takes a long time, is done mainly through prayer and the laying on of hands either by the deliverance minister or by the client himself/herself in case of certain sensitive areas. Signs of its efficacy may include vomiting, spitting, unconsciousness, screaming, weeping, loud cries, jumping and other extreme motor reactions". (Larbi, 2001: 306).
- <sup>26</sup> See Onyinah, 'Deliverance as a way of confronting witchcraft in modern Africa' for more details.
- <sup>27</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity*, 99.
- <sup>28</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity*, 98.
- <sup>29</sup> "Slaying in the spirit" became a big issue in Ghanaian Pentecostal practice generally. For someone to convulse after being prayed for came to be associated with the anointing of God upon the minister. There were instances when people were virtually pushed down to portray this situation. Many of the western Pentecostal video clips that were in circulation in Ghana seem to have contributed to this perception. Much as we believe people can be convulsed for various reasons after being prayed for, there were also a lot of reasons for people to doubt the genuineness of some of the so-called slaying in the spirit. There are instances where we have personally witnessed people intentionally fall at such meetings because they believe that by so doing their problems will be solved. Its adoption into the deliverance ministries is therefore not a surprise. Gifford lists it as one of the signs that the deliverance ministers expects to see Gifford. See Gifford, 1998, 98.
- <sup>30</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity*, 98.
- <sup>31</sup> Anaba, *The Laying on of Hands*, 71.
- <sup>32</sup> Anaba, *The Laying on of Hands*, 71.
- <sup>33</sup> Eastwood Anaba, *The Laying on of Hands*, 73.
- <sup>34</sup> Opoku Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost', A PhD thesis submitted to Department of Theology, (University of Birmingham, February 2002), 396.
- <sup>35</sup> Onyinah, 2002, 396. See also John White, 'Problems and Procedures in Exorcism,' in *Demon Possession*. 296.
- <sup>36</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 18. For monotheists, such as Christians and Jews, he contends that reliance on the aid of powers portrays a lack of confidence in the one God (p. 18).
- <sup>37</sup> Aune gives a two-stage definition of magic. Firstly, he defines magic as the form of religious deviance in which individual or social goals are sought by means not normally sanctioned by dominant religious institutions. He continues that second, such religious deviance is magical only when the goals sought within the context of religious deviance are magical when attained through the management of supernatural power in such a way that the results are virtually guaranteed.<sup>312</sup> David E. Aune, 1915, "Magic, Magician," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Geoffrey Bromiley, General Editor (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 214. Note, it is the second stage that is important to Arnold. The first part however shows that it is a dominant religion that sees some practices of others as magical. In other words, these are not considered magical by those who practice it.
- <sup>38</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 18. See Onyinah, 2002, for further reading.
- <sup>39</sup> Onyinah, 'Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost', 397.
- <sup>40</sup> Martey, 'Deliverance Ministry in the Church', 21.

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