

Healing and Deliverance in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Ghanaian Pentecostals and Charismatics have distinctive teachings that put emphasis on spiritual warfare which they interpret to mean an act of battling with demoniac powers and evil spirits to gain supremacy. Its common cosmology in Africa that most problems are regarded as spiritual in some sense, which why the deliverance ministry has become so popular in Ghana. Some worship services in Ghana are completely dedicated to healing and deliverance activities, ranging from casting out demons to breaking the so-called family-based covenant with spirit beings or inherited curses of one kind or another. The Pentecostals and the Charismatics believe that the promise of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8 was for the empowerment of all believers throughout the ages. As such, they continually expect God to empower them through the Holy Spirit to work miracles and experience signs and wonders, which are indications of spiritual authority and power to overthrow and eradicate the forces of darkness and evil. The Pentecostals and Charismatics see their ministry as being a continuation of the ministry of Jesus and the apostles.

Introduction

Healing and deliverance have become a big business for Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches. The author agrees with B.Y. Quarshie when he states that, most problems are regarded as spiritual in some sense, and

this is the reason why the deliverance ministry has become so popular in Ghana. He says that some worship services are dedicated completely to healing and deliverance activities ranging from casting out demons to breaking the so-called family-based covenant with spirit beings or inherited curses of one kind or another.¹

The focus of this study is on the Holy Spirit as the agent of healing and deliverance. The ultimate purpose of healing and deliverance is to provide well-being and relief from afflictions through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this study healing and deliverance are tied together and will be used interchangeably.

Healing, Deliverance and Well-being

In Africa (Ghana inclusive), both good health and sickness can be likened to two sides of the same coin. Good health is considered the well-being of the mind, body and spirit, living in harmony with one's neighbour, the environment and oneself, and in all levels of reality-physical, social, spiritual, natural and supernatural.² In other words healing and deliverance aims at restoring disturbed persons to proper functioning order, and it is symptomatic of correct relationship with one's environment.

According to Allan Anderson, another term for healing and deliverance is exorcism,³ which means total liberation, and it is used in connection with haunted places or spaces considered heavy as a result of the presence of malevolent spirit powers. According to Fosekett and Lartey, healing and deliverance is understood in a holistic sense and it is linked to social healing which is the restoration of disturbed

¹ B.Y. Quarshie, *Is African Christian Worship a Joyful Noise to the Lord?* (Journal of African Christian Thought, 8 No.2 2005), 9.

² Berinyuu Abraham A, *Pastoral Care to the Sick in Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1998), 32-36

³ Anderson Allan H, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 233.

relationships.⁴ Healing and deliverance is not merely expulsion of evil spirits but also has to do with freeing people from the bondage of sin and Satan.

Emmanuel Lartey says that healing presupposes that we have lost something we once enjoyed and that it is possible to regain what we have lost. He points out that as human beings, we find ourselves broken and bruised in many ways and that some of the things we have lost that need restoration include: physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual.⁵

Anderson refers to deliverance as salvation and argues that salvation is an all-embracing term which is usually seen as a sense of well-being evidenced in freedom from sickness, poverty and misfortune as well as deliverance from sin and evil.⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu points out that healing and deliverance is considered a vital visible sign of the outpouring of God's Spirit. He observes that healing and deliverance fit into the indigenous view of religion as a survival strategy. He buttressed his view with a popular Akan (Ghana) proverb that says: *se woretwe ade fi soro na emma na ekyerese biribi somu* ("If efforts toward an endeavour prove elusive it probably means that the venture is being hampered by forces beyond one's control")⁷. This African view suggests that anything that hinders one's success in life must be attributed to an unknown spirit and must be cast out before one can succeed in life.

⁴ Foskett John and Emmanuel Lartey, *Spirituality and Culture in Pastoral Care and Counselling, Voices from Different Context*, (Fairwater: Cardiff Academic Press, 2004), 125-129

⁵ Emmanuel Lartey, *In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London: Cassel, Wellington House, 1997), 37

⁶ H. Allan Anderson, *African Initiated Church Hermeneutics in Maimela and Konig'* (eds), *Initiation into Theology* (The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics), Chapter 24, (399-416), 404.

⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005), 190

Concepts and Causes of Sickness, Diseases and Curses

Now let us consider some of the concepts and causes of sicknesses and then suggest some methods and procedures to deal with them through the power of the Holy Spirit. According to Lartey, sickness includes and conjures up actual sickness, trouble by spirits, witchcraft, sorcery, bad dreams, the curse, the evil eyes, broken taboos, disrespect towards especially departed parents, misfortunes, accidents, failure in work or study, unproductive fields and animals, bad luck and so forth.⁸ Abraham Berinyu says, religiously speaking, sickness is interpreted as breaking or weakening the spiritual bond of protection, hence invoking the wrath of the ancestors, evil spirits, and indeed all the harmful elements in the society.⁹ The cause of sickness may be natural or instigated by sin or evil forces caused by the devil.¹⁰

Suffering, setbacks in life, insomnia, poor financial management, frequent illness, failure to receive business contracts, and even lack of academic progress, all of which may be attributed to satanic or demonic activities.¹¹ Sickness, possession and oppression are all perceived as instruments of the devil in denying people the realization of God's fullness or abundance of life in Jesus Christ.¹² It is believed that

⁸ Foskett John and Emmanuel Lartey, *Spirituality and Culture in Pastoral Care and Counselling, Voices from Different Context*, (Fairwater: Cardiff Academic Press, 2004), 125-129

⁹ Berinyu Abraham A, *Pastoral Care to the Sick in Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1998), 32-36

¹⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005), 166

¹¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005), 167

¹² Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005), 169

people become susceptible to the oppression of demons through personal sin, moral failure or ancestral curses. Asamoah-Gyadu in quoting Evangelist Vuha, writes: “If your ancestors are cursed, you are cursed until you are delivered. Since conversion does not automatically release a person from curses and demonic attacks, healing and deliverance are seen as by-products of spiritual warfare as Jesus is perceived to have demonstrated through his ministry.”¹³

In Ghana, it is believed that the devil can operate effectively with a curse on an individual or family. Curse is believed to be a weapon the devil uses to prevent victims from achieving their life goals. Asamoah-Gyadu quoting Derek Prince, defines a curse as:

Something like a dark shadow or an evil hand from the past-oppressing you, pressing you down, holding you back, tripping you up, and propelling you in a direction you do not really wish to take. It is like a negative atmosphere that surrounds you which seems to be stronger at some times than others but from which you are never totally free.¹⁴

When one is experiencing several problems or the recurrence of a particular problem, for instance, in one's business, professional career, relationships, financial affairs or health, and the premature death of a family; it is believed that there is a curse operation. Food taboos, forbidding families to eat the meat of specific animals are common in Ghana. Infraction of these taboos may invoke the wrath of the spirits and the ancestors. Those who defy the biddings of the traditional gods are likely to be influenced by an evil spirit.

¹³ Ibid, 169

¹⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005), 177

There is a popular Ghanaian belief that people exchange the lives of close relatives - especially wives and children - for *sikaduro* (*sika* which translates in Akan as money or gold and *eduro* (medicine) that is medicine to gain wealth, influence and power. The resultant effect is that such victims go through life either as losers, mentally disturbed, sexually impotent or die prematurely. It is widely believed in Ghana that witches can erase a person's *annuonyam* ("aura or glory"). Such victims fall out of favour with others. They lose respect and dignity. And unless the lost glory is regained through deliverance, no success can be achieved in any endeavour.

It is believed that ancestral spirits can manifest themselves as demons and get married to people spiritually, and as a result the victim may be sexually impotent in the case of a man, and in the case of a woman may fail to conceive or sustain a stable marriage relationship.¹⁵ Challenges and frustrations for which God's intervention is sought may include anything from physical ailments to failure in school examinations. Repeated failure in life, poverty, indebtedness, terminal illness, infertility, failure to secure a suitable spouse and other such conditions do not glorify God in any way.¹⁶ If a Christian has persistent moral challenges, like alcoholism, it means that the person is harbouring a stranger (referring to the devil) in his house. Alcoholism is interpreted in popular Ghanaian discourse as an immoral habit caused by the placing of a mystical pot in the victim's stomach, serving as a receptacle for the alcohol. Since the pot is mystical, the alcohol never reaches the brim.¹⁷

¹⁵Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005), 178

¹⁶Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana*(Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005),169

¹⁷Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana*(Leiden: African Christian Press, 2005),179

Another area of moral vulnerability that open doors to demons to operate in a person's life, is what healing and deliverance exponents in Ghana term as demonic doorways. These are believed to be doors and windows through which demons enter and go out. These demonic doorways provide demons with easy access to intrude on one's life and circumstances. The list of demonic doorways is long and covers a wide range of areas. For example, a curse is a major demonic doorway according to healing and deliverance exponents. They argue that negative thoughts that people have about themselves of poverty or death, even when they do not mean it, can become a curse on themselves resulting in the event actually happening. Another common demonic doorway in Africa (Ghana included), is bodily incisions and the application of herbal medicines to the body. Demons may enter into the body when people inject herbal medicines through the rectum (enema). Sexual organs also serve as entry points for demons through rape, fornication, adultery, masturbation and incest.¹⁸ Therefore, it is incumbent upon the victim of all the above situations and circumstances to find healing from sickness, deliverance from demonic possession, freedom from servitude of sin, from the fear and fascination with demons which many Ghanaian Christians seem to be trapped. Pentecostals and Charismatics are provided with weapons of the Spirit that they need to fight against the forces of evil which manifest themselves in diseases and discord.

Exploration of Some of the Principles and Practices in Healing and Deliverance

Pentecostals and Charismatics have procedures and measures they use through the power of the Holy Spirit to battle with evil forces. It is important to note that from the Ghanaian point of view, this world of sickness mentioned above does not disappear even if one becomes a

¹⁸ Ibid, 182

Christian. Asamoah-Gyadu quoting Evangelist Vuha points out that after being saved, Christians must take steps to ensure that they are also free from sicknesses and curses; otherwise, they will continue to be under Satan's control and will not enjoy abundant life.¹⁹

Paul Gifford points out (2004), that the basic idea of deliverance is that a Christian's progress and advance can be blocked by demons who maintain some power over him despite him having come to Christ. Gifford argues (2004) that the Christian may have no idea of the cause of the hindrance and it may be through no fault of his or her own that he or she is under the sway of a particular demon; which can result from a curse on his ancestors or ethnic group.²⁰ Religion is expected to serve as a survival strategy through conquests of evil and restoration of health and wholeness.

Christians going through inexplicable problems do not have to console themselves with the idea that it is the cross they are bearing or liken their difficulties to Paul's torn in the flesh.

People who usually go for healing and deliverance attribute their problems to witchcraft, curses and diverse demonic influences. Some of the problems people recount for seeking deliverance is driven by traditional African worldviews. The bottom line in healing and deliverance theology is that demons can exercise considerable influence on the lives and endeavours of people until such lives are brought fully under the control of the Spirit.²¹

How is Healing and Deliverance Carried out in Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity?

For Africans, Berinyuu writes, "Disease is an attack by a spirit upon one's

¹⁸ Ibid, 182

¹⁹ Ibid, 168

²⁰ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 84-85.

²¹ Ibid, 168

spirit and it can be overcome by medicine whose spirit is stronger than the spirit of the disease. An illness that does not yield to such a medicine must be attributed to other forces, such as witchcraft. Religion is the means of counter-acting evil, or reinforcing life through proper precautions against destructive powers.”²² Healing and deliverance ministry is wide ranging. It covers praying for the sick, directing them and the Church community to pray. Some Churches refuse to use either African or western medicines. Healing and deliverance, in the context of the definition, is the restoration of health through prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit. This prayer is often accompanied by a touch or laying on of hands or anointing the sick with oil as indicated for us in the book of James 5:14-16: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another and that you will be healed.”

Healing and anointing the sick with oil is noted in the Bible (James 5:14-16). The oil represents the grace to heal. The oil is used as a sacrament in Pentecostal-Charismatic thought and experience. In Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, it is believed that the Holy Spirit is the one who anoints, heals, and empowers. The anointing, if it has to be imparted physical, it is mediated through the application of olive oil accompanied by prayer.

According to Asamoah-Gyadu when narrating the testimony of Evangelist Vaglas Kanco, the founder of the Lord's Vineyard Ministry, the medicines or juju provided for clients may be unhygienic mixture: He writes: “For all the rich men, chiefs, politicians, businessmen and women, we prepare concoctions for them to drink. Some even involve concoctions prepared from animal faeces and dog vomit. It is the educated who surprise me; they just obey and drink all those filthy things

²² Berinyuu Abraham A, *Pastoral Care to the Sick in Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1998), 32-36

because of money and power.”²³ In other words, people will do anything to gain health, power, wealth and influence. As pointed out earlier, African traditions answer questions of cause and effect by attributing illness and misfortune to evil spirits. In *Akan* (Ghana) philosophical view, sin has the potential to bring misfortune to a whole community. The Ghanaian concept of communities shows that they believe that the consequences of one person's act in the family can be suffered by all.²⁴ This suggests that the African concept of sickness is both individual and cosmic, and it may be caused by an individual not acting appropriately, for example violating the spiritual laws that bond him or her, thereby invoking a curse by the ancestors. To remove this is to perform certain rituals to avert the curses, misfortune and sicknesses resulting from sin or breaches of the cosmic order. In spite of this traditional view, the intention of the Christian practitioners of healing and deliverance is biblical rather than African. The Bible is their main point of reference, as we have said earlier, that Jesus gave power to his followers to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons in his Name (Matt.10:1, 7,8 Cf. Lk.10:19). The Bible leaves Christian no doubt about the destructive power of Satan and evil and stresses that Satan is defeated through Jesus Christ. There is the belief among the Pentecostals and Charismatics that they have been given power to resist Satan because Jesus has destroyed his works and rendered him powerless (Col 2:15). An example of healing and deliverance prayer goes thus: “Spirit of anger, suicide, prostitution, envy, pride, masturbation etc we come against you in the Name of Jesus-Out! Out! Out! Into the bottom of the sea, loose him or her in Jesus Name.”

The authority to cast out evil spirits comes from Jesus and its efficacy depends on the anointing of the practitioner. In the Ghanaian context, the forces of evil include not just Satan and his cohorts the

²³ Ibid,174

²⁴ Berinyuu Abraham A, *Pastoral Care to the Sick in Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1998),32-36

demons, but also witchcraft, sorcery, magic, evil eye, ancestral spirits and traditional deities who may make their presence felt in the lives of people in order to oppress them.²⁵ Gifford suggests that to deal with such a situation, the victim must be diagnosed through questionnaire and then to bind and exorcise the demon, but it requires skill and special institution--the prayer camps or prayer centre evolved to cater for this activity.²⁶ Supplicants, in addition to their personal details, were to answer truthfully what dubious services they have attended; what traditional herbalist they have visited; what talisman they have worn; what incision they have received; what rites they have undergone; whom they have slept with; what shrines were in the family; what they have dreamed; what stool names they have received; what vows have been made on their behalf or that of ancestors; what serious illness they have suffered in life and whether they have come from a traditional royal family and so forth. Diagnoses may occur through word of knowledge, prophecy or discernment granted by the Holy Spirit.

The process of healing and deliverance includes, first and foremost, the victim's verbal confession of his or her sins and then the renunciation and breaking of all covenants. This is followed by the burning of all emblems, books and materials and religious paraphernalia and other apostrophic substances associated with membership of such association.²⁷ The healing and deliverance offered to people usually relies heavily on various symbolic healing and deliverance methods such as sprinkling by holy water which for the African Independent Churches (AICs) is a sacrament for ritual purification and protection, but for the Pentecostal-Charismatic, it is the anointing oil.

However, in most Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches, the emphasis is on laying on of hands with prayer. The laying on of hands and

²⁵ Ibid,177

²⁶ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 84-85.

²⁷ Ibid,188

the anointing of the sick with oil is alike and effective only through the exercise of faith in the name of Jesus according to Pentecostal-Charismatic thought and experience. The Pentecostals and the Charismatics anoint people for prosperity, protection, healing, opportunities, vengeance, and general release. These symbolic healing and deliverance practices are often justified with reference to the Bible where Jesus used mud and spittle to heal a blind man; handkerchiefs or aprons that touched Paul to cast out evil spirits and heal diseases and Old Testament prophets used staff, water, and various other symbols to perform healing and miracles.

The research that was conducted for this study in some Charismatic Churches, it was discovered that their deliverance was affected through the use of elements like holy water, ashes, ropes, staffs and whips to drive away evil spirits. In addition to these, a number of items are used which include candles, bathing, interpreting dreams, singing and dancing (in communal healing services), refraining from some foods and activities, observing particular rituals, reading the Bible (if the sick is literate), reciting Psalms, visiting areas like mercy grounds that are sacred for that particular Church and confessing sins and whatever may otherwise trouble the patient concerned.²⁸ They, however, maintained that instructions for healing and deliverance given by Church leaders were to be carried out carefully before deliverance was obtained.

Conclusion

The worldview from which the missionaries started was not that with which African concerned itself but the emergence of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity rather has come to help people in their needs by solving conflicts, taking personal interest in the sick especially those

²⁸ Foskett John and Emmanuel Lartey, *Spirituality and Culture in Pastoral Care and Counselling, Voices from Different Context*, (Fairwater: Cardiff Academic Press, 2004), 125-129

with illnesses related to African (Ghana inclusive) cosmology like sorcery and witchcraft, thus making Christianity holistic approach to life. It is discovered that people come to these Churches with problems that need divination, which the modern medical officer is not equipped to handle. The healing and deliverance ministry is able to explain in meaningful terms the why and how of misfortune.

Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity is a new religious movement that responds to religious needs and provides security, fellowship and spiritual guidance in the midst of crumbling traditional structures and the influx of foreign religious groups. The early western missionaries failed to meet the cultural and religious needs of Africans. Most scholars agree that the Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity is truly indigenous Christian movements whose innovative Christianity had much to teach about what it meant to be African and Christian at the same time without undermining any of these twin identities. Their major step forward is the attempt to make Christianity speak to African situations in more relevant ways than the historic mission Churches were doing to give treatment which may be simple but spectacular in its results.

The Bible in their local language which in most cases sparks off their ecclesiastical independence and gives them divine authority. It is said here in Ghana that they read the Bible so assiduously that they have been nicknamed, the people with the dirty Bible. The Bible is not just a historical record but a blue print for life. It is in the Bible that they find stories of healing through faith, prayer and laying on of hands. In the Bible they see the ministry of Jesus as consisting of teaching, preaching, healing and casting out of demons. It is in the Bible that they hear Jesus' instruction to his twelve apostles to: heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons (Matt 10:8). In the Bible they find the Great Commission of Jesus to his followers: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation---And these signs will accompany those who believe, in my Name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover" (Mark 16:15-18)

In Ghana there are hundreds of these Churches and it would be enrichment for any of us to be exposed to Pentecostals and Charismatics- to worship, to learn, to experience and perhaps be healed.

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