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Perspectives on Power Encounter in Missions and Influence on Missionary Work: A Theological Discourse in Context of Africa

By

Mipo Ezekiel Dadang, PhD and Fwangmun Oscar Danladi

Abstract

Christians are bound to encounter the unseen forces of Satan throughout their years of service for Jesus on earth. How should the church deal with the unseen spiritual world and the phenomenon of power encounter? What attitude should the church in Africa reflect and what action would be consistent with biblical teaching? It is in response to these questions, that biblical themes of spiritual warfare and power encounter, with the intention to incorporate theological position that should inform mission practice in Africa were studied. In addition, this paper examines church history, to show how God used spiritual warfare and power encounter for the expansion of the Christian faith into new missiological areas. In so doing, the research explores the impact of worldview on the formation of one's theology and the practice of theology. What attitude should people in the context of the African church have? What action may be consistent with biblical teaching in respect to power encounter? Does biblical theology of power encounter have a divine mandate or is it only the concern of a few misinformed and overzealous enthusiastic persons who have committed themselves to such a ministry? What does spiritual conversion mean? Does it include deliverance? What type of deliverance might people expect? This research submits that power encounter cannot be understood apart from God's mission in the world. The beginning and the end of biblical record presents God, who creates a purposeful world and accomplishes a purposeful mission. God's concern for human's total deliverance lies at the core of theology and it is rooted in the very character and action of God Himself. The whole theme of deliverance is vital to theology, because to believe and obey matter in concrete application of biblical truth. And Christians must overcome nominalism in order to live victorious Christian life that overcomes the assault of Satan in their lives. Scholars, church ministers and Christians who want to understand the unseen world phenomenon and help counsel those suffering from afflictions from the spiritual world will benefit from this work.

Key words: Power encounter, missions, theology, worldviews, creation

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1. Background to Study

In recent times there are many studies concerning the powers of the unseen world by scholars of different backgrounds. With the emergence of charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity in the 1960s, the scope of studies concerning the powers of the unseen spiritual world by scholars of different backgrounds have continue to raise a lot of concerns. There are many varying opinions concerning the subject and this has made it more difficult to ascertain which opinion is to be accepted and that which should be discarded. Thus, one may wonder, does power encounter truly exist or it is simply formulation of the human mind? What does power encounter mean? What does the bible teach about power encounter? What is its implication to missions and what should be the response of believer?

On March 7, 2001, we were driving to facilitate a Green Eye Seminar at a rest home, the *Miango* Rest Home. Just when we were approaching a certain junction, we were attacked by some unknown people. They threw an object at the windscreen of the car and shattered it into pieces. We immediately sensed that it was not safe to stop the car so we kept driving. Suddenly, our first daughter cried out, “Daddy, Daddy, blood is running out from my forehead.” Considering the danger, we might encounter if we had stopped, we kept moving until we got to the *Dadin Kowa* overhead Bridge in Jos, Nigeria. We pulled out of the way and parked, in a state of shock, we began to contemplate whether we should postpone the journey or not. As we were pondering on what to do, a man dressed in a white shirt and short appeared. He entered the car and cleaned all pieces of the broken windscreen while we all watched with surprise. After he ensured that there was no single piece left, he looked at me who drove the car and said, “Man of God, you are on an important assignment. Go! It is well!” Immediately he spoke those words, the man disappeared. We were able to muster courage and drove through the night to *Miango* Rest Home, the venue of the seminar, though in a state of amazement.

On reaching the rest home, we narrated our experience with the participants and one of them with an outburst remarked, “It was power encounter with Satan because he did not want you to come.” His words kept us thinking of the reality that truly there are spiritual forces that constantly attempt to work against believers in Christ Jesus. These forces make physical manifestation in our world, and as far as we live on earth, we are bound to encounter these unseen forces through our years of service for Jesus on earth. However, the questions that must be answered are: “how should the church deal with the unseen spiritual world and the phenomenon of power encounter? What attitude should the church in Africa reflect and what action would be consistent with biblical teaching? It is in response to these questions, that we examine the biblical themes of spiritual warfare and power encounter, with the intention to incorporate theological position that should inform mission practice in Africa. In addition, this paper examines church history, to examine how God used spiritual warfare and power encounter for the expansion of the Christian faith into new missiological areas. In so doing, the research explores the impact of worldview on the formation of one’s theology and the practice of theology. Scholars, church ministers and Christians who want to understand

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the unseen world phenomenon and help counsel those suffering from afflictions from the spiritual world will benefit from this work.

2. Studies on Power Encounter

Scholars have employed two approaches to understand these kinds of phenomena. The first is the post Enlightenment thinking, which assumes a naturalistic approach to understanding power encounter. This view was concretized by well renowned psychologist, Sigmund Freud, who believed that demons were a creation of a deluded mind: Cases of demoniacal possession correspond to the neurosis of the present day. What in those days were thought to be evil spirits to us are base and evil wishes, the derivatives of impulses which have been rejected and repressed (Udelhoven, 2015: 30).

This view was common in Europe and America; and had influenced the thinking of western missionaries who came to Africa. The missionaries considered these beliefs superstitious, which, only western education could wipe them away. Notably, not all these beliefs are true or unverifiable. Some are a figment of the imagination of those who hold them. Udelhoven gives us an example of a story of a supernatural phenomenon that was constructed out of ignorance and fear, which on a close observation and examination removed its super naturalness. This happened in a Catholic Church and was told by its priest:

When we moved into the new Parish, we started to renovate the community church. Once we finished, strange things started happening: Whenever a person died, drumming was heard in the church, starting at around midnight. The church building is located between the mortuary and the graveyard. “The Satanists celebrate before the burial,” people commended. “Whenever somebody dies, the drums will talk!” I made sure that the church was locked every evening, yet the drumming continued. “Satanists can walk through closed doors,” people explained (Udelhoven, 2015:30).

The priest further recounts:

The charismatics asked for permission to hold overnight prayers, accompanied by fasting, to re-dedicate the church to God. For me, this did not make sense, since the bishop had already blessed the church. Had his blessing expired? The issue continued and became the talk of gossip far beyond our neighborhood. I had to do something. One night I got up and walked towards the church, which is located a few hundred meters from our house. I now could hear the drumming for myself. It was midnight. The church building was still locked – nobody had tampered with the keys. There were no lights inside, yet the sound of the drums was very clear. “So people are right!” I thought. I had a strange feeling, and opened the door with my keys. I stood there in the dark for a moment, listening to the frantic drumming. Then I flashed the torch inside the church to look out for the “Satanists”, but I saw nobody. I now realized that the drumming was coming from the roof, above the new ceiling boards. I took courage, climbed up the ladder and peeped with my head through an opening. When I turned on my flashlight, the mystery was solved, and I burst into laughter: The drumming Satanists turned out to be bats that had fallen onto the ceiling boards. Bats had always lived in the church, but they were not used to the new ceiling boards. In their attempts to get back up and fly, their wings beat on the ceiling boards to produce the sound of drum (Udelhoven, 2015:30).

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The attribution of every strange phenomenon, death and sicknesses to unseen power or power encounter is the staple diet of new generation churches, but this is certainly erroneous. Gainfully, Charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity has done a lot in propagating the Gospel globally, but its teaching of the demonic causation of every strange happening or misfortune is not correct. That is why its approach to health and healing, which most times excludes scientific means of diagnosis and treatment, can be destructive. A phenomenon is supernatural when it cannot be understood naturally, however, Udelhoven is right when he says, “Prayers alone may heal a person in some miraculous circumstances, but the expectancy that God solves all problems according to one’s own terms produces spiritual laziness.” (Udelhoven, 2015:39).

The second approach takes belief in supernatural happening seriously. These scholars do not consider these beliefs as primitive or mere superstition. The works of the unseen powers or spirits are real. This is because God Himself is spirit. Not to believe in the unseen powers amounts to not believing in God who is The Spirit! This is the approach adopted for this article. Its first reaction is to stamp a total belief in the powers of the unseen. This approach allows the scholars to listen to the people at the grassroots and gather their beliefs and practices, which become a source of theological reflection. (This process is called grassroots or oral theologizing – the theology of those on the streets. The opposite of grassroots theology is cerebral or elitist theology or magisterial theology). But does this belief have a foundation in scripture?

Belief in the supernatural is not a matter of ethnic or racial worldview; it is a Christian worldview. Studies have shown the increasing belief in the unseen powers even in the technologically sophisticated West (Baker, 2008:206-220). The Bible’s worldview, especially the worldview of the New Testament, is full of super natural happenings. The Gospel cannot be properly taught without bringing to the fore, the reality of the unseen world. This explains this article’s second response, which assess the manifestation of the unseen powers through the Holy Scriptures.

3. Biblical-Theological discussion on Power Encounter

The biblical, historical and social perspectives on the subject of power encounter, is a theological phenomenon that has religious implication. Hence, the question is, in this world of complex religious, social and economic problems, what attitude should people in the context of the African church have? What action may be consistent with biblical teaching in respect to power encounter? Does biblical theology of power encounter have a divine mandate or is it only the concern of a few misinformed and overzealous enthusiastic persons who have committed themselves to such a ministry? What does spiritual conversion mean? Does it include deliverance? What type of deliverance might people expect?

Power encounter cannot be understood apart from God’s mission in the world. The beginning and the end of biblical record presents God, who creates a purposeful world and accomplishes a purposeful mission. God’s concern for human’s total deliverance lies at the core of theology and it is rooted in the very character and action of God Himself. The whole theme of deliverance is vital to theology, because to believe and obey matter in concrete application of biblical truth.

Power encounter is a theology of the salvation (deliverance) activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the course of history. It deals with the realization of God’s self-revelation of His redemptive purposes in both the Old and New Testaments, carried out

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through human agency. The reality of the activities of the powers of darkness is evident in all human history. Satan constantly seeks to dehumanize, destroy, defeat and to deflect the purposes of God as in John's Gospel (John 10:10). But God does not allow Satan succeed in his destructive mission (John 3:8; John 3:16). God stands at the beginning of all history known to man and precedes his creation. Thus, Power encounter must of necessity, start with God's intentions in His creative acts. Why did God bring the universe into being? Why did He create the earth and all that dwell on the face of the earth? The Bible presents God as dynamic in his creation and His continuing rule of his creation.

God acts and continues to act in his created world with authority and visible power (Psalm 37:13-15). God's response to his world is one of objective observation. He observes the fact that it is well suited to the purpose for which it was created. As a result, his expectation and anticipation are that, his creation will be a perfect expression of his glory. Westermann notes that, "for that purpose He blessed His creation as He instilled within it a beneficial power that produces fertility in man, beast and field and enabling energy to grow and develop" (Westermann, 1978:60). God is not a deist that ignores his creation. Westermann further affirms that, by God looking at creation, He endowed it with potentials, and specifically gives man the ability to relate to it and his role is that of service ultimately to God (Westermann, 1978:60)

When it is said that God rested from His works, it was not a rest of exhaustion but one of completion and of the fulfilment of His purposes. It was not a rest of weakness or inactivity, but of power and determination. It was a waiting for a response from His creation, to ascribe Him the glory, the glory due His name (Psalms 96:3, 8; (5:3; 97:9; 103:20-23). The account of creation underscores that God has limitless power to accomplish his purpose. God's creation is not an extension of himself because creation is purposeful. God has not abandoned his creation, but continues to "work" within and through creation. God expects and anticipates that his creation will fulfil the purposes for which he brought it into being; and that man has a very special relationship to both God and his creation.

By God's providence, he places man at the very center of his purposes for all of his creation. Man was appointed to maintain all of creation, and given dominion over it (Psalm 8). Genesis shows that the phenomenon peculiar to man is the consciousness of his responsibility (Genesis 1:26-28). To fulfil his responsibility in keeping with God's purposes for his creation, man was made with the capacity to have a spiritual and personal relationship with God. Danladi opines that,

...the earth is orderly and purposeful, we will accept it as a product of a divine hand and that does not displace the principle of objectivity and reasoning. The orderliness of creation supports the fact that God is behind the creational process. Creation is a product of orderliness, design and purpose. Our understanding of God's creational action as the designer of the earth helps us determine the purpose of the earth" (Danladi, 2020:44)

Man made in the image of God is a personality that can take responsibility, be accountable, plan, love, communicate, create, reform his environment and be mutually accountable and responsible for his fellow man. The potential to bring creation back to God and to "unwrap" the goodness in God's creation in the makeup of man. As man serves and lives before God's presence, he will be able to present the works of his hands, and the actions of his encounters with others, as gift to Him. Man's role in God's mission arises out of the

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fact that he has been made to have fellowship with God and to know Him. He has been given a mandate of stewardship, to rule over the works of God's hands, subdue, maintain God's creation and make him known for who and what he is. Man was commanded to exercise control (govern) over the earth: "rule over every living thing that moved on the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

The Scripture leaves no one in doubt as to the greatness of God's power. If man is to fulfill God's purposes, he must be endued with power. And this was certainly God's intention when he gave man dominion to rule over all of His creation (Psalm 8; Ephesians 3:20). The theme of power starts at creation (Genesis 1) and is seen in the confrontation and conflict with powers which occurs throughout the Bible. Moses, Gideon, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Peter and Paul are examples of those who confronted power encounter (Exodus 7:6-13; 14:25; Acts 8:9-25; Acts 16:16-18).

3.1 The Nature of Spiritual Power

Mankind, in spiritual warfare, is involved in the greatest war of all times. Every Christian ought to take spiritual encounter seriously. Scanlon notes that "we cannot be indifferent to the fact that there is a war going on. The war does not stop because a person does not believe in it." (Scanlon, 1998:27). He further affirms that "the war is a fact, a dangerous fact that you ignore to your own peril" (Scanlon, 1998:27). Brant states SIM's position on power encounter noting that "Our position is that believers do, indeed, have authority over demonic principalities and powers because of their position in Christ" (Brant, 1993:185-192). Believers are challenged to get into the battle, to take up God's full armour against a naked and defenceless foe, and wield the offensive weapons of praise (Ephesians 6:16; I John 2:13, 14).

In Africa, people are aware of spiritual reality of life and are usually prone to understanding supernatural power due to the knowledge that there is a cosmic war which has dire consequences here on earth. Yet, Lewis offers a good caution with regards to dealing with power of darkness. Lewis notes that the first is in giving the power of darkness too much emphasis. The other is in not giving it enough" (Lewis, 1991:22).

There are facts that demonic powers are present in this world, working to destroy man and in the process, rob God of his glory. The god of this world has blinded the eyes of man (2 Corinthians 4:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-5). To bring captives from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, is the expected task of Christian witness. Rob argues that "great harm has been done to the cause of Christ, because demonology and the victory view of the atonement have not been considered respectable during the modern missions' era. (Rob, 1995:27)" But God's kingdom is supreme, and Christians are to testify to the presence and power of that kingdom. Believers do not need to live in fear and frustration because of satanic attacks.

However, Satan's old temptation to man hinges on man's denial of the creator-creature distinction. From the day that Adam tried to test the word of God concerning his destiny, man has attempted to find some voice of authority other than God's (Genesis 3). Danladi opines that, "It is still the reality in our time that whenever God's moral law is broken and disobeyed, chaos and anarchy are the by-products. Contravening God's moral law is a clear attempt to replace God and His order of things with human quest (wisdom)" (Danladi, 2020:67). The fall demonstrates Man's attempt to substitute his own knowledge in the place of God's knowledge, and he became susceptible to occult forces. To escape the wrath of God by pushing the creation and the judgment out of his world, man puts his faith in

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witchcraft (Exodus 22:18). Maxey and Umar agree that “magic and sorcery are radically prohibited because their very inferior display robs God of his own glory” (Maxey and Umar, 2019:85).

3.2 Function of Worldviews in Power Encounter

Worldviews of people determine how they respond to the subject of power encounter in missions and ecclesiological practices. Worldviews deal with basic reality of major functions on how things are explained and evaluated. A certain worldview explains and provides a framework of how and why things are, and how they change or do not change. Worldview provides the basic assumptions concerning ultimate things on which human beings base their lives.

Consequently, worldview evaluates and serves as a judging, evaluating, and filtering grid in accepting and determining certain values and goals as better than others. Additionally, the psychological reinforcement of things is usually in tandem with the worldview a person holds. Because worldview determines the perception of reality, serenity, peace, and ends up producing a sense of right things. In addition, it the function of worldview that integrates, by categorizing a person’s life experiences in an orderly stability and maintains its cultural orientation so that all new information is reinterpreted according to the basic culture orientation.

There is the probability of depending on concepts of science and the supernatural for a matter to be realized. However, the actual nature of things is incontrovertible considered as facts, based on the culture a person holds, which is supported and built into the worldview of the individual. The worldview of a person usually deals with beliefs. It has values that determine how to analyze what is experienced, what to reject, accept, and avoid. It helps a person to priorities how to categorize experiences and events and develops behavioral patterns in a given community or society. A person’s worldview determines how he or she lives, functions within his or her family and how he or she views things. There is the need to make few notes on worldview and how it determines the effective or defect of every human society. Miller notes that “the Bible teaches that there is only one true worldview in the world, which is the biblical worldview” (Miller, 2005:8). However, let us examine other worldviews and how they experience or interpret power encounter.

3.2.1 Western worldview

The western worldview deduces that all there is in life is what can be seen and experienced with the physical senses. This worldview promotes that religion is only an option at best and not an accessory to life. The truth, in this worldview, is found in the cognitive and intellectual not in the spiritual realm. Thus, spirits are not real and cannot influence life and man can be educated to handle every area of life.

3.2.2 African worldview

The African worldview is considered to generally promote that all of life is spiritual, thus, both the physical and spiritual are of one fabric. The spiritual controls everything that happens in life because spiritual power is seen to be necessary to face life successfully. Kunhiyop notes that, “African traditional religion asserts that the world is permeated with divinities and spirits who can have positive or negative effects on every aspect of life” (Kunhiyop, 2012:53). Furthermore, “this worldview affects how Africans understand and interpret Christianity” (Turaki, 1997:41).

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African beliefs and religious practices before the gospel showed that, Africans had an idea of a Supreme Being existing somewhere. But they really did not know or served the Supreme Being. If they really served the Living God, they would have not resorted to the man-made images they worshiped as God (Romans 1:21-23). However, any African who comes to faith in Christ can live and practice Christianity in the light of biblical worldview.

3.2.3 Biblical worldview

Matter is not evil because God's creation was all good. Man is made in the image of God, and is therefore good but not good apart from Jesus Christ. God is in control of the world and his angels are sent to mankind to be ministering spirits. There is a usurper, Satan, who has his own evil kingdom, constantly challenging God's kingdom, but is not a threat to God. Neither God nor spirit-beings are absent from the world.

Having presented the different worldviews at work in the life of individuals and how they inform our understanding of conflict constantly happening between the Kingdom of God and Satan's evil kingdom, thus, the missionary task involves power encounter as it works to bring the full expression of God's kingdom on earth. Paul's missionary task involved encounter with powers and principalities because people were in bondage and under the control of these powers (Ephesians 2:1-4; 6:12). Pierson opines that

...there are two opposing hierarchies, eternally at war. Good angels in alliance with God, and all saints, to promote all that is good; evil demons confederating with each other and all evil men, to work disaster and ruin, and if it were possible, supplant even the Almighty (Pierson, 2012:58).

Pierson further affirms that Scripture presents a consistent picture of these two rival hierarchies as they wage traceless warfare. Since both God and Satan concentrate on men in an endeavor to win their loyalty and cooperation, the Christian finds himself at the center of a cunningly waged war (Pierson, 2012:59). Pierson however assures that God and all the good angels are concerned with the highest good for man (Pierson, 2012:59). We will therefore need to understand the identity and nature of these opposing powers that militate against the work of God and his own servants in the world.

3.3 Opposing Powers in Battle

Principalities and powers operate in the heavenly realm. Scripture captions the hierarchy of evil and presents the origin and identity of demons. The hierarchy described scripturally include Satan which is described in Mark as strong man; ruler; and prince (Mark 3:27; 12:29; John 14:30; Ephesians 2:2). There are rulers and princes (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 3:10). Prince of Persia is described in Daniel (Daniel 10:13, 20); there are authorities and powers described in Ephesians (Eph. 1:21; 6:12). There are spiritual forces of evil at work in the lower atmosphere as demons, evil spirits, deceiving, dividing, anti-Christ, unclean, rebellious, fear and infirmity (Mark 3:15; Matthew 12:43; Luke 13:12; Acts 16:17; I John 4:3).

However, Christ overthrew the kingdom of Satan and set up his own in its place. He casts out spirits by his name and by his word. Jesus Christ could delegate this power. That power was regarded in human history as something new. He did not treat those who were possessed of evil spirits as sinners, though sinfulness was fertile soil in which evil influences could take root. The divine nature of Christ was recognized by the spirits who feared him. At

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Christ's second coming, all powers of the kingdom of darkness would be eternally condemned (Revelation 20:21).

Religion as a system, aims at drawing man beyond himself. It appears to provide a solution that deals with problems of pain and suffering. It promotes a sense of rightness and brings meaning to life. It seeks to portray a community outfit that establishes a common bond among people. Its motivations are towards security, success and happiness. It downplays sin by saying man is not responsible. They do not deal with guilt and there is no answer to human guilt, only blame. There is no forgiveness, only more "works" required. Dadang notes that "some religious doctrinal philosophies place much emphasis on their human shortcomings so find it difficult to forgive" (Dadang, 2018:10). He further points out that "others make little or no distinction between human and or divine forgiveness." (Dadang, 2018:10). Religious systems are systems of manipulation and so it is about getting the gods to do men's will (1 Timothy 4:1; 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, 21; 8:4-6; Isaiah 44:8-20). The Christian message is strongly opposed to what is obtainable in other religions of the world (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; 2:18; Romans 15:22). The place of success is the Calvary through the death of Christ on the cross (Colossians 2:14-15; I Corinthians 15:21-28; Psalm 110:1-2) There is power in the cross because there stands the power of God; resurrection. Jesus passed through the heavens (Hebrews 4:14; Ephesians 4:8).

Believers who have placed their faith in Christ have the power of Christ to engage in power encounter and the healing of demon possessed people. Guthrie observes that, "healing of demon possession was almost always by a word of command, with the patient passive, in contrast to the healing of illnesses (Guthrie, 2013:128). Satan attacks Christians in ministry. Christians must take the initiative in the battle against the devil, but it is an awareness of his devices that will enable a Christian to know victory. Anytime a Christian leads people to Christ, the kingdom of darkness is offensive. When people are introduced to objects previously used in occult practices, they may not know if the objects are potent with demonic powers. As a way to minimize such danger, it is needful to pray over them and command any spirits in them to leave or burn them if they have any substance that symbolizes demon possession.

Many places are resistant simply because the gospel has never been presented in the power of prayer. Prayer is very significant power encounter. Morgan notes that "our weapons are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. Healing is a normal part of ministry, but it is to be according to God's direction" (Morgan, 2004:99). The ministry of healing was the manifestation of God's power to work as well as to preach. Such manifestation was a revelation of the Divine government. But Keener calls attention to the reality that "both Jesus' proclamation and practical acts of compassion go beyond what Christians call ministry today" (Keener, 1997:199). Keener opines that "our communities are ravaged by demonic forces, violence, injustice and all kinds of human pain, while the church often remains irrelevant except to the few who venture through our doors" (Keener, 1997:199).

The Scripture's teaching is clear that evil spirits have access to man's spiritual being and can influence him for good or evil. Sanders notes that "it is part of the human situation that man can be influenced, now by a good and now by an evil spirit" (Sanders, 1975:67). A theological question is "Can a Christian become possessed by demons?" The preceding section will attempt to answer this.

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4. A Christian and Demonization

Biblical guidelines for power encounter encourage every believer to put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11). Satan can, and does occupy grounds given to him. But he does not have a legal ground that is not given to him (John 7:49; 14:30). If a person does not come to repentance, Satan can gain control of him or her. A classic example is seen in the life of Saul. He was attached with a spirit of insanity as a consequence of his rebellion; Saul's refusal to repent also made him targetable for direct affliction (I Samuel 16:14). More so, unbelief creates an opening for a believer to become vulnerable to Satan. Thus, Peter, unknowingly, became a vessel for satanic influence (Luke 22:31). In addition, deceit led Ananias and Sapphira to willful lie and they fell prey to immediate satanic "invasion" (Acts 5:1-11).

How do we explain scenarios where missionary have been oppressed in the course of reaching out to communities that have long been under the stronghold of Satan? A district church chairman and secretary employed a church planter and posted him to Nshar in Shendam Local Government Area of Plateau State, central Nigeria in 1992. The area the church planter and his family were posted to, was known to be a strong hold for spiritual battle because the community were pagan worshippers. The couple experienced spiritual attack and warfare. It happened that each time they were to hold devotion and prayers, the lantern they lighted to see and read the Bible would go off mysteriously. This happened three times and eventually, the church planter was afflicted with mental beardedness. The couple had to be withdrawn from that mission field because he experienced demonic oppression. Unger explains that "believers can be oppressed and enslaved by demon powers. Believers can be hindered, bound and oppressed by Satan who may derange the mind and afflict the body" (Unger, 1964:185). Additionally, Unger believes that "some believers are delivered from evil spirits when they are saved, others are not, and must be delivered later by fasting and prayer" (Unger, 1964:185).

As we wrestle with understanding the complexities that could surround demon oppression in the life of a believer, we must be explicit here that a Christian cannot be totally possessed. But a Christian can be invaded or afflicted. John guides Christians to know that "we know that no one who is born of God sins; but he who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him" (I John 5:18). This suggests that a believer in Christ has daily provision empowerment to overcome sin, and not be vulnerable to the devil's assault. The church that truly worships God can easily get people delivered. Medical personnel, psychiatrists and psychologists may fail but the power of Jesus, once contracted, and never fails. There is deliverance for children of God! Christ defeated Satan at Calvary. Satan is a conquered foe. Though, Satan has been a conquered foe, yet, Christ's victory is not automatically applied to a person's life. Every believer must receive the victory Christ won for him or her. Christians can apply the blessing secured at Calvary, only in the fulfillment of those conditions.

As children of God understand the scriptures, God has provided two methods whereby man may receive deliverance from demonic oppression. One is the casting out method; the other is the resistance method. First, demons may be casting out instantly by direct command from a Christian who has the faith to do so. Second, Christ commanded the demonic spirits to flee. They are glad to leave! For them to stay would mean great torture from the power of words. This is what the word "resist the devil, and he will flee" means (James 4:7).

What conditions need to be fulfilled to get this inner build-up? Mark notes that the conditions are by prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). Biblical theologians and missiologists

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would prefer this second method of dealing with spiritual powers. It is the best in most cases for field missionaries. It accomplishes deliverance by building our faith in Christ as well as by taking demons out. When our faith is built in Christ, it will provide the secret and the power for a whole lifetime of spiritual victory.

The faith which comes into one's life by prayer and fasting, will provide the basis for a million blessings which go far beyond the mere deliverance from demon oppression. The same faith-changed life that made the demons flee, will also assure their permanent absence. Frequently, when the deliverance is accomplished by the first method, that of the direct command, the work is not complete or the person is again invaded. This is because he lacks the inner spiritual fullness and vitality to prevent the demons coming back. Fasting and prayer produces a spiritual foundation and character in a person, enabling him to be invincible against demons.

Believers should know that God has delivered them from the domain of darkness and translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13). Also, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). In Nigeria, Christians perceive fasting is generally abstinence from food. But Isaiah describes the correct attitude of fasting God wants. The Prophet warned the Israelites against fasting without pure motives. Right fasting is not so much abstinence from food as much as expending resources in setting free the bound and oppressed; and assisting the poor and afflicted. (Isaiah 57:3-7). The best expression of such a fast is when one becomes burdened or involved in seeking the Lord.

For an effective power encounter, prayer and fasting cannot be avoided. Nominal church goers and evangelists who go into mission field without having a relationship with Christ to transform them first, cannot be effective in power encounter because they are not in a relationship with God.

5. Nominal Christians and Power Encounter

Nominalism is not a foreign term. It is both a western and a non-western problem. Turaki opines that “nominalism among second generation Christians is on the increase in Africa” (Turaki, 2000:281). Turaki confirms that “children born to Christian parents show a lack of interest in Christianity. Nominal second generation Christians are the major target of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements” (Turaki, 2000:281). Consequently, Weber laments that “the Church of England claims thirty million baptized constituents in Great Britain but less than two million are active members” (Weber, 2010:40,41,42,43,44,45).

Weber provides an alarming statistic that nominalism is not only applicable to the church in Africa. He notes that in Western Europe only five to six percent of church membership is active. In United States of America “almost half of the persons in a fundamentalist home fail to continue in their childhood faith.” (Weber, 2010:55). Weber explains that in some non-western countries, indifference to and ignorance of the most elementary truths of Christianity are the rule; sin, apathy, and worldliness are the norm. Early recipients of Christian mission however succumbed to Christo-paganism (Weber, 2010:56). Weber affirms that “the turning of Christians to Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, as a result of missionary efforts by these groups is not uncommon” (Weber, 2010:57). He argues that “nominalism is not a matter which is merely generational, afflicting only second, third and fourth generation Christians” (Weber, 2010:58). “Moreover, it is not a distant problem encountered only by some and then only in certain circumstances” (Weber, 2010:58).

The nominal phenomenon is an ongoing problem in most churches in Africa. Steyne gives reasons why nominalism continues to prevail. He states, “Nominalism is a natural

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response to sociological factors and that Lausanne committee has established five sociological factors of nominalism” (Steyne, 1989:32). Steyne notes these factors: (1). One who attends church regularly and worships devoutly, but who has no vital personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (2). One who attends church regularly but for cultural reasons only. (3). One who attends church only for major church festivals (Christmas, Easter, Good Friday,) and ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals). (4). One who hardly attends church regularly, but maintains a church relationship for reasons of security, emotional or family ties, or tradition. (5). One who has no relationship to any specific church and who never attends, but yet considers himself a believer in God (Steyne 1989:32). Steyne affirms that “all five types of nominalism listed by the Pattaya Thailand report on Christian witness to nominal Christians among Protestants are essentially socio-psychological factors” (Steyne 1989:32). Additionally, Paul states that man wants benefits of religion, but rejects commitment to its dynamics (2 Timothy 3:5). When Christian life becomes nothing more than identification with, and the accommodation to a body of beliefs and practices, nominalism is the natural result.

It is unfortunate that today religious practice and activities are more of socio-cultural, rather than possess true meaning and relationship with Jesus who is the giver of life to such activities. This is tendency to revert to or embrace nominalism in the place of a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. Nominalism waits for an opportunity to overtake the Christians at any time in their religious pilgrimage.

There are three enemies of believer that entices them into nominal ways of living: the flesh, the world, and the devil.

6.1 The Flesh

Paul refers to the flesh as the old man, the natural man – that aspect of humanity that opposes God – man’s fallen nature (Galatians 5:17-21). It is programmed for sin because it is built in the law of failure. It cannot please or serve God (Romans 8:7, 8). The flesh is a difficult enemy because of its close inner relationship with man’s personality. It cannot be tamed, reformed, or improved through human effort. The flesh invites and encourages acts of violence against man. Scripture attests that the flesh rouses man’s desire for physical gratification without spiritual responsibility. It tempts to the desire to gratify sensual appetites through thoughts and words. It stirs up lasciviousness – the desire to attract attention to one’s self in a manner that flaunts God’s standard of moral purity. It yields to idolatry – the desire to choose a god that pleases and condones sins of the flesh. (Galatians 5:19-21). Bubeck alleges that “it encourages drunkenness- the physical stimulation to produce a sense of wellbeing which only the Holy Spirit can give. It craves reveling - the desire to gratify the body and its appetites without moral responsibility” (Bubeck, 1975:29, 30, 31, 32). Thus, the battle with flesh is a lifelong one. The flesh desires to settle for nominalism. The world itself contributes to nominalism.

6.2 The World

The reason that the world system is such a deadly enemy and promotes nominalism is because, Satan uses the world’s system to deceive, delude, deflect, dehumanize and destroy man so that he finds it difficult to walk in obedience to God. Through Satan, his devices and his legions of evil spirits, he manipulates and rules the world system so that man will bow before him. Satan appeals to man’s pride, personal ambition and independent action apart

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from God's knowledge and mandates. Sinful man relishes in what the world stands for and offers.

John reminds Christians that "the world appeals to man's depravity, his sinfulness, even as it provides a person within a pleasurable atmosphere to practice his sin with approval (1 John 2:15-17). Satan uses the world to tempt nominal Christians to seek and gain its treasures by enticing them to materialism, not stewardship; its approval through its acclaim, accolades, and recognition, rather than turning to God in thanksgiving for his grace and mercy; its power to control circumstances and people, to assert self, and so to achieve its position and honor; its wisdom, to act by it; to conform to its standards; and to strive after its objectives and to achieve its goals. The devil is the chief architect to nominal lives of many Christians.

6.3 The Devil

The Apostles Paul reminds Christians that Satan and his kingdom pose a constant challenge and threat to the effectiveness and stability of Christians. Satan opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God and therefore is persistent in his onslaughts on the church (2 Corinthians 2:11). The devil keeps the church busy and turned in on itself, working hard at sponsoring the socio-psychological functions of the religion. Mohr alleges that "the devil deliberately seeks to keep Christians from being pilgrim-people of God" (Mohr, 2004:14). This is true because he keeps Christians focused on peripheral issues which seldom have anything to do with bringing people into a dynamic relationship with Christ. He deliberately makes Christians ineffective because he knows that they are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Missionaries serving across mission fields in Africa are reminded that Satan's tricks employ every conceivable means to keep human from walking in newness of life. It is therefore essential that missionaries prepare every convert to Christianity to choose daily to walk in newness of life, to reckon himself or herself dead to sin and to submit to the Holy Spirit. This is not a once for all kind of a decision. The response to God must be a daily one. Therefore, put on the armor of God and be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit and only then will the Christian be able to overcome demonic strategy and not be drawn into nominalism. Missionaries must be invested in mobilizing their members to be committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of life, because it is the best prevention against nominalism and the best way to be effective in dealing with power encounter in church or mission fields.

7. Implication for Mission practice

Here are few counsels for missionaries who serve in mission fields across Africa, to prepare them before encountering power encounter.

Missionaries must understand Biblical theology and hold to biblical worldview, which is based on the whole Bible. This brings the importance richly being indwelt by the text. Missionaries should first deal with exegesis of the biblical text on its own terms rather than allowing philosophical and sociological factors to influence their understanding of biblical text.

Generally, missionaries must to go to the mission fields with the understanding that peoples' worldview, particularly with regards to power encounter, consists of cognitive, affective, evaluative, attractive, and assumptions; which provide the people with a way of looking at the world, giving them a feeling of being at home, and assures them that they are right. This worldview serves as the foundations on which they construct their explicit belief

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system, value systems and the social institutions within which they live their daily lives. When missionaries understand this, it will help them point new converts to develop the culture of biblical worldview.

Biblical worldview shows that Matter is not evil because God created it and it was all good. Man is created in the image of God and therefore good, but not good apart from Jesus Christ. God is in control of the world and His good angels are sent to godly mankind to be ministering spirits. There is however, a Usurper—Satan—who has his own evil kingdom constantly challenging God, but not a threat to God. God or spirit beings are not absent from the world.

Agencies and Mission Boards are to orient missionaries to understand that the study of the nature of power encounter, with special concern for its manifestation in human experience. While strongholds in power encounter include political and social oppression, religious bondage, physical disease, spiritual oppression, temptations, financial bondage, and relational difficulties, these can affect marriages, family members, churches, employment and every area of life. Therefore, there is a need for a holistic view of problems before solutions can be proffered.

Missionaries are to assist new converts to know that nominalism is the natural response to and the identification with the socio-psychological function of religion. When the Christian life becomes nothing more than identification with the beliefs and practices, nominalism is the natural result.

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