

UEM Africa Region

Think Tank on Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance

Pastoral and Theological Foundations for a Deliverance Ministry in UEM Member Churches



Why should UEM Churches in Africa encourage and develop deliverance ministries?

1. We share the belief that God deals with and in contexts with particular people, cultures, worldviews, languages, time, and concerns. Thus, contexts in which people live should be dealt with seriously in order to make the living Gospel of Christ meaningful to people. Contextualising the Gospel should remain a part and parcel of the mission work of the churches, since the Gospel should always touch all aspects and realities of people.
2. We all share the fact that people are afraid of witchcraft, spirits and demons. These are a part of the worldview of Africans, even those who have become church members. There is therefore a need to deal with the issues of witchcraft, magic and spirits in order to help people overcome the fear caused by beliefs in witchcraft, magic and spirits.
3. The western missionaries' view that issues of witchcraft, magic and spirits are mere psychological has not helped African people to get rid of these beliefs. We want to understand the realities of our context in order to engage in deliverance ministry for the wellbeing of God's people and the church as a whole.
4. Beliefs in demons and witchcraft are part of the African worldview. The Bible makes it clear that evil powers, Satan, demons and witchcraft do exist. We also believe there are some people who can manipulate these powers to harm other people.
5. Therefore, issues of witchcraft, demons and magic are not a mere belief, since every day we face situations in which we experience the manifestations of demons and witchcraft phenomena. As pastors, we have had many people coming to us for deliverance and we can testify that these phenomena are spiritual, psychological, and physical realities.
6. Members of our churches, though they believe in Christ, still have strong connections to their cultural backgrounds. Even today, many people are strongly linked to the invisible world which consists of spiritual and invisible beings. Most people find themselves "seated on two chairs" (syncretism). It is therefore very important for African churches to define, address and respond to these issues through teachings and deliverance ministries.
7. Church members' beliefs in the invisible world have a strong influence and impact on the life of people. Thus, ignoring those beliefs is a failure of the church to minister to the people of God.
8. We have seen many effects caused by the beliefs in witchcraft, magic and demons. For example:
 - a. Economic effects such as poverty, since people, due to fear, spend a lot of their money seeking protection, health and wealth. Some of them do not engage in economic activities because of natural phenomena like deaths of children thought to be caused by witchcraft.

- b. Sociological effects such as conflicts in families caused by beliefs in witchcraft. We have seen divorce cases, abuse of children, the rape of children or of old and senile people.
 - c. Political effects like aspirants of leadership positions in the political domain engaging in magic practices in order to be able to win elections. We have also seen the failure to address witchcraft and magic beliefs and their consequences by politicians, due to a fear of losing votes especially in cases when many people are involved in unjust actions in the name of punishing witches.
 - d. Physical effects like body cuts, injuries, trauma, violence and killing of albinos and twins.
 - e. Psychological effects: Due to beliefs in witchcraft, magic and superstition, people live in fear to an extent of withdrawing from engaging in developmental activities lest they be bewitched by jealous wizards.
 - f. Spiritual effects: syncretism, hypocrisy and unstable church membership.
9. In Africa, there is a strong fear connected with beliefs in ancestral spirits. Ancestors are believed to bless and / or inflict punishment on living people. The memories of and about ancestors are something we cherish, since ancestors are our historical forefathers who mark our genealogical identities. We respect them for what they were, and for what we have received from them when they were still alive.
- We hold, based on Scripture (Gen 3:19; Ps 103:15-16), that the ancestors are dead and cannot communicate with living people; that their present whereabouts are based on their spiritual status, either in paradise (Luke 23:43) or in hell (Luke 16:22; 1Peter 3:18-20). We will join them when we die in respect of the same criteria waiting for the resurrection and last judgement.
- The belief that ancestors are mediators does not conform to our Christian faith. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the only mediator between God and human beings (1Timothy 2:5). Furthermore, Hebrews 9:27 says a human being is destined to die once and wait for judgment. According to Jesus (Luke 16:26), it is impossible for the dead to come back from the place where they are. Many texts from the Old Testament clearly forbid living people to try to communicate with ancestral spirits (Isaiah 8:19; Deuteronomy 18:9-15; Ecclesiast 9:5-6; Job 14:10).
- We share the notion that there are spirits which torment and cast fear in people's life in the name of ancestral spirits. Our viewpoint is that these are just evil spirits / demons pretending to be our ancestors by putting on their characters, mannerisms and imitating their voices. Since evil spirits are not bound to human cognitive principles and natural forces, they are capable of pretending to be ancestors. Those spirits affecting people's lives are merely demons. They come to disturb people and we must be aware of the fact that even Satan can pretend to be an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).
10. We are aware that in our African context, Christian deliverance conflicts with other kinds of deliverance, e.g. the practice of chasing away an evil spirit with a more powerful evil spirit, or turning to the moon or to the sun, human or animal sacrifices, or making use of charms etc. We reject these practices and want to replace them with a Christian deliverance ministry.
11. The ministry of deliverance is important and vital. We should encourage this ministry because of the need of casting out demons. Because of the tendency of church members to "demonize" everything (to see demons everywhere), we should teach the people of God to commit to God. They may know witches are there, but also know the power of Jesus is there, more powerful than those witches' powers (Romans 8: 7-39; Ephesians 6 10-18; Luke 10:19; Matthew 28:18). We should teach the people of God to be confident and not to fear.

How do we understand “deliverance”?

12. Deliverance is a ministry of bringing wellness to people suffering from affliction and oppression brought by social, psychological, spiritual, economical, and political evils. The triune God uses different people to practice the ministry of deliverance in different ways. Deliverance can be done in various dimensions. For instance, people with psychiatric problems need to be properly diagnosed and treated. People struggling for justice and reconciliation can also be part of deliverance ministry. In the spiritual dimension, deliverance is done for people afflicted by evil powers, demons, or Satan. People with such an affliction can develop different symptoms: They may develop illnesses that cannot be diagnosed medically; they may show mental illness or behaviors that are contrary to the values of the society, etc. Though there are different ways of deliverance, prayer is a common tool in deliverance ministry. We pray because we connect the evil powers with the powerful powers of the triune God, believing that eventually, evil powers will surrender themselves to God’s power and get out of people afflicted. (Mark 9:29). Deliverance is not fetish, magic or yoga. Deliverance is not a power to conquer but a power to redeem from oppression and possession. Deliverance can be done by ministers, counselors, medical doctors, chaplains and people gifted for this ministry. We believe in the universal priesthood of all believers and that all believers have been given authority to cast out demons (Mark 16:16-17). Therefore, we think that the healing ministry is in principle open to all, but that our churches should, among the clergy and lay, identify people with the gift of healing, and acknowledge, train and appoint them for that specific task under the guidance of a pastor.

A theological basis for a deliverance ministry in our churches

13. The Bible is the foundation for any deliverance ministry. However, for unclear reasons this ministry was ignored in our churches, as we have seen from the presentations during our Think Tank. But we need to do this ministry today because the same Bible is still the basis of our actions. The need of the people in our context calls us once more to help the people and our communities who are oppressed and afflicted.
14. We rely on the Bible because it is the authoritative word of God. We do not only have to rely on single verses. Texts have to be put into their historical context, when, where and to whom the message was delivered, and then to our context today.
15. Basic theological convictions that lead us to engage in deliverance ministry:
- Deliverance is already found in the Old Testament (1Sam 16:14-23).
 - Jesus has done it and ordered it. (Mk: 9:29, 10:9, 16:17, Mathew 8:16, Luke 9:37, Math 10:8.) Jesus promised that we will do the same ministry and even do more miracles and bring wellness to people.(Mk 16:17)
 - The deliverance ministry is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 5:16), and a gift from God (1Cor 12:9) for the edification of the church. In the invisible world, there are invisible spirits who have power, but the Holy Spirit who is more powerful is at work to restore life abundantly.
 - Deliverance ministries have been practiced throughout church history starting with the apostles, as there has been an ongoing need for them until today.
16. There is also a missiological aspect to deliverance ministry: So far, people have often been helped to come to faith, but they have been left with spiritual affliction and oppression. So deliverance ministry should be added as another aspect of the same goal of letting people



have life abundantly (John 10:10b; Mark 6:7-13). By engaging in deliverance ministry, we take part in the mission of God. (Is. 61; Lk4:18)

The issue of power

17. Power is of God and God uses us to perform deliverance in the name of Jesus. There are two types of power: oppressive and redeeming power. Oppressive power comes from Satan to destroy, and the redeeming power comes from God. God's power is powerful and God uses people. People can accept to use it or not.
18. The power of our prayer does not lie in how we pray (shouting, jumping, crying etc.), but rather in our intense faith and relation to God. It is the power of the Holy Spirit through us. When God requires us to take responsibility and participate in this ministry, we should not give glory to ourselves, because faith is a gift of God.

The question of using symbols during deliverance ministry

19. The use of symbols like anointing with oil is Biblical. In the Bible, symbols represent for our senses what is stated and performed by the word of God. However, objects and symbols (such as water, salt, mud or sand, stones from the Holy land, a carpet, candles, crosses, the rosary etc.) are not the basis of our faith. Thus, we should be careful about how we use symbols in deliverance ministry, as they can easily be misunderstood as bearers of power like fetish, especially in the African context.

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