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# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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Opoku Onyinah

## **Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana**

*Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*

Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2012

ISBN-10: 1905679068. ISBN-13: 978-1905679065. 356 pages, paperback

Amazon US \$39.95

Reviewed by Zachs-Toro Gaiya

PhD Student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Apostle Dr. Opoku Onyinah (PhD, University of Birmingham, 2002) has been the chairman of the Church of Pentecost (CoP), and a pastor with the denomination for about three decades.

Issues related to witchcraft, i.e., accusations, divination, exorcism, and the state of the accused (or exorcized), while endemic in the church, are often neglected due to the myths surrounding witchcraft. Onyinah has done the church a great service by seeking ways to demythologize the subject using contextual theologies. Since people travel with their religions or beliefs wherever they go, we should enter into constructive dialogue with Onyinah. The Book's focus "is divinatory consultation ... [and] exorcism" from a "classical Pentecostal" perspective.

Onyinah's tapestry of Akan cultures, strong Pentecostal theological and biblical word analysis, and anthropological and socio-psychological interpretations and descriptions could disturb some evangelicals, but there is value in the work. This seven-chapter book is a modified Ph.D. thesis aimed at "the development of some properly safeguarded ministry of exorcism," and contributes to the "ongoing formation of African Christian theology from a Pentecostal perspective" (5). Onyinah describes the cosmology of the Akan people and the historical development and practices of Christianity in Ghana, with an emphasis on CoP. He relates an Akan understanding of witchcraft with a western understanding of demonology, coining the word "witchdemonology" to describe this. He then provides some insights for contextualization for the CoP and the Akan people's Christianity.

Onyinah interviews a number of "self-claimed witches ... [and] self-claimed delivered witches," accused and self-confessed witches, ordinary people, Muslims, diviners and exorcists, and theologians. He describes the cosmology and religious beliefs of the Akan people, especially their understanding of the spirit world, including the Supreme Being - *Onyankopong* in relation to their understanding of humanity and their sociological context, in which any major change has always been a fertile breeding ground for witchcraft accusations.

Central to *bayie*, or witchcraft, “is the belief that some people may possess supernatural powers, which may be used for either good or bad ... in accordance with the belief of the Akan” (50). *Abisa*, or “divinatory consultation”, is “the act of consultation to find out the supernatural causality of one’s problem and knowing how to combat it” (87). *Abisa* is necessary because there cannot be an exorcism without a proper prognosis of the accused “witch”. In fact, *abisa* is “the crux of the matter” (85), the core of Akan religiosity (87).

Onyinah deals with the discontinuity and continuity of Akan cultures and Christianity as these relate to exorcism - the conflicting understanding of “witches” introduced by the lack of proper synthesis of Western and Akan cultures or beliefs vis-à-vis Christian doctrine. The author describes the historical development of the spiritual churches, the ministry of their prophets, and the practices of exorcism. Parallel to this is the description of the historical development of CoP, including the various theological turning points taken in order to reposition the church in the midst of social change. According to the author, the CoP became stronger and more popular while seeking to correct some of the erroneous practices of the spiritual churches and secessionists by adapting into the church some relevant Akan cultural practices as it relates to exorcism. Some practices that were corrected were unscriptural according to the author. The author also describes the various movements and individuals that contributed to the development of a strong ministry for exorcism or deliverance that (with some modifications) became the practice in CoP.

Onyinah’s helpful combination of demonology with witchcraft holds in tension the diverse Western understandings of these concepts and the Akan beliefs. “Witchdemonology” is the “beliefs and practices of deliverance ministry in Ghana ... [which is] a synthesis of the practices and beliefs of Akan witchcraft and western Christian concepts of demonology and exorcism” (172). After analyzing the concept of “witchdemonology,” the author highlights the positives and the negatives of this concept.

In seeking contextual theologies of exorcism, the author appeals to some biblical passages with direct and indirect bearing on “witchcraft”/demonology and exorcism or deliverance from both the Old and New Testaments. We must appreciate the pastoral insights derived from these texts even when we may disagree with the hermeneutics. Onyinah’s theological constructs fit within “classical Pentecostalism”.

The book is not without its problems Onyinah provides a contextualization of exorcism by simply presenting public beliefs. His analysis is not sophisticated and though he attempts to critique some of the practices of exorcism, issues remain. For instance, “exorcism is used in this research to mean a deliberate act of binding or releasing, performed on a person who is believed to be possessed by a spirit of evil intent” (17-18). Onyinah knows his method of exorcism, deliberate binding and releasing, contrast’s with Jesus’ methods as he admits, “*preferably* those [methods] of Jesus are to be followed.

Jesus' main method of exorcism is a *simple* word of command" (276, my italics). Though Jesus' method could be a model, Onyinah seems to suggest (in the spirit of contextual theologies) that we apply our discretion in exorcism. In fact, we know that Jesus did not bind the spirits. Even when Michael (Jude 1:9) was face with some sort of spiritual entity, he cautiously appealed to the Lord to rebuke Satan. There are some areas of disagreement on exorcism between "classical Pentecostals" and other evangelicals. If the motif of binding is taken from Matthew 18:18, then the context is not spiritual warfare but forgiveness.

Jesus' model of "identifying" those who need exorcism is very different from that practiced today. In some biblical encounters with demons, the demoniac may identify the healer (such as Jesus or Paul) and then exorcism takes place. We must also reject the uncritical acceptance of witchcraft confessions – are they a means of simply *extracting* information or a *process* of truth/fact-finding?

In addition, what comes next after exorcism? It is not enough to simply exorcize, Onyinah needs to address the "witches" sociological needs. He earlier demonstrates the danger of neglecting this, but not only does he fail to nuance this central factor, he fails to recognize it as a need for further study. Some of Jesus' actions go beyond "exorcism" to reconciliation and reintegration into the society or family circle (e.g. Luke 8:39; 9:42; 17:14,19). Reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with humans. Exorcism should not be an end in itself but a means to correct the inherent problems of social isolation experienced by those accused of witchcraft, such as threats of excommunication or execution. The goal is reconciliation with God, the church, and the society, especially for evangelical Christians who seek to make the gospel of Jesus known to all.

If some of Onyinah's ideas cause unease, this should lead to dialogue, not distrust. The use of interviews, observations and minutes of meetings as primary source material is a strength of the book. The diverse primary sources meshes well with the "bilingual" theological approach. Using primary oral sources as well as written sources is necessary when doing contextual theology that addresses issues of concern to academics and local people. We must take seriously witchcraft and witchcraft accusations, especially the African and Biblical definitions of these words. With globalization, "witchcraft" related issues are no longer limited to Africa. The subject calls for dialogue and not apathy.

This work will be a good dialogue starter for those interested in this issue, despite the lacunas in the work. I commend Onyinah's work, especially to academic libraries, seminary students and faculty, pastors, and Christian ministry workers who are interested in contextualized theologies related to witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

Samuel Waje Kunhiyop

## African Christian Theology

HippoBooks, 2012, an imprint of -  
WordAlive Publishers in Nairobi, Kenya,  
African Christian Textbooks in Bukuru, Nigeria,  
Challenge Enterprises of Ghana in Accra, Ghana,  
and Zondervan in Grand Rapids, USA.

ISBN 978-9966-003-16-4. 250 pages, paperback  
1090 Ksh; Amazon US \$18.98 (Kindle \$20.22)

Reviewed by Andrew Wildsmith, Scott Christian University

Samuel Kunhiyop (PhD, Trinity International University, Illinois) is formerly the Provost and Professor of Theology and Ethics at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS), and the Head of the Postgraduate School of South African Theological Seminary. Currently he is the Secretary General of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and a visiting Professor of Ethics at Bingham University, Karu, Nigeria.

There is a sense in which this is the systematic theology book that evangelicals in Africa have been waiting for. Not only is it written by an African evangelical, not only does it address a range of theological topics familiar to traditional Western systematic theologies, it is also accessible, conservative, Biblically-oriented, and focused on Africa. Kunhiyop's *African Christian Theology* does not replace Wilbur O'Donovan's *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, but it does, in a sense complete it. As Kunhiyop, himself a former student of O'Donovan's in Nigeria, points out, O'Donovan desired his book to be a forerunner: "It is the prayer of the author that the book may be a means of stimulating African authors to present the truths of their own study in written form" (p. 2). Kunhiyop says, "As a former student of Wilbur O'Donovan, I see this present book as a modest response to this desire" (p. xiv). These are not the only full length books on theology from Africa written by a single scholar, of course. J.S. Mbiti's *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (1986); J.N.K. Mugambi's *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989); K. Bediako's *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (1995); A.E. Orobator's *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (2008); James H.O. Kombo, *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought*, Leiden: Brill, 2007; and Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions*, Bukuru: ACTS, 2011, the same book is also published by Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2013 - each covers a lot of ground, but is not quite the same sort of systematic theology book. And of course, edited collections of articles by African theologians, each also covering some of the same topics, from K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres' *African Theology En Route* (1979) to S. Ngewa, M. Shaw, T. Tienou's *Issues in African Christian*

*Theology* (1998) to D.B. Stinton's *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (2010), threaten to outnumber the grains of sand it seems, but again are not systematic theologies in the traditional sense. Kunhiyop's book covers many of the usual topics found in a systematic theology, it does so from an evangelical perspective, and it has the African flavour that we've been waiting for.

But it is not a radical book in its intention, structure or conclusions, nor is it exhaustive. Kunhiyop is not reacting against or hostile to theology that has been developed in the West. Indeed he makes use of it and critically interacts with selected thoughts of Western theologians from many traditions, from Carl F.H. Henry to Karl Barth, from John Calvin to Clark Pinnock, from F.F. Bruce to Hans Küng, from Donald Bloesch to Charles Ryrie, and many others. Kunhiyop also avoids equating the study of African theology with a comparative religion approach that sees Christianity as merely equal to ATR, Islam and other religions. Kunhiyop's attitude is that, "Christianity based on biblical revelation stands above all other religions." (p. xiv) Nor does Kunhiyop assume that all academic theology by African theologians is inevitably liberal and syncretistic. "But *African* is no more a synonym for *liberal* than *American* is a synonym for *evangelical*. Scripture is always interpreted within a context, and Africa is the context in which I seek the true meaning of Scripture." (p. xiii) Kunhiyop looks for positive contributions by a wide variety of African academic theologians from many backgrounds, but he also interacts critically with them and is not afraid to differ when he detects deviation from biblical conclusions. Similarly he critically examines African traditional thought and practice with sympathy as well as antipathy when necessary. He is aware of the continuing effects of the traditional worldview and is also cognizant of post-missionary Western imports such as Pentecostalism, prosperity theology and secularism. His goal is to "articulate a theology that originates from an authentic search for the meaning of Scripture in order to apply it to African life today." (p.xiii)

Kunhiyop deals with many topics that are familiar to traditional, Western evangelical systematic theologies because certain themes and concepts are important in all contexts: God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation, the Church, eschatology and some of the issues that often accompany these topics, such as angels and demons, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the extent of salvation. He also focuses on the African context of each theme or issue. For example, chapter three, "God and the Spirits", begins with the fact that God and the spirit world are familiar ideas to Africans who become Christians, touching on M.N. Nkemnkia's *African Vitalogy*, Parrinder's *African Traditional Religion*, and Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa*, but insisting that ATR does not give a reliable picture of the true High God. Such a picture can only come from the Scriptures. As he discusses the God of the Scriptures, Kunhiyop deals with the Trinity from a biblical point of view, but also briefly noting that while African titles for Christ, such as Ancestor or Liberator, can be used, they must be used carefully. As he examines what the Bible says about the spirit world, Kunhiyop



highlights such issues as the relationship between evil spirits and disease, and possession and exorcism, as well as the deep fear of evil spiritual powers that distress many Africa Christians. As the Forward to the book notes, Kunhiyop scratches where the African church itches.

Kunhiyop's ability to interact with African and Western theologians from a wide variety of backgrounds, and his determination to anchor his thinking in the Bible, yields conclusions that are generally evangelical and conservative. But at times, his goal of applying the Bible to African contexts leads him to broader thinking. For example, when speaking of salvation and the Christian life, he stresses a holistic view of the extent of salvation, one that goes beyond the spiritual, to include physical, and emotional salvation. But when discussing the topic of prayer, he not only has a firm belief in the efficacy of prayer ("Through prayer, impossible things can become possible."), but he also warns that prayer is not magical, and that "Total salvation, which will remove all physical problems, temptations and evil, will only be realized in heaven." God's will is paramount (pp. 134-135). Also in the area of salvation and the Christian life, Kunhiyop discusses a biblical theology of the ancestors, focusing on where one goes for help to deal with some of life's crises – Christ or the ancestors. Here he deals with traditional beliefs, the temptation to revert to them when a crisis strikes, and the need to maintain loyalty to the God who saves believers and who has far greater power than any other, including the ancestors. Christ replaces the ancestors as the only legitimate, lawful Mediator (pp. 135-139).

It is this section also that we can see that Kunhiyop's theology is not exhaustive. The essentials are there – salvation applies to all aspects of life, prayer is answered according to God's will, when a crisis strikes Christians must stay loyal to the all-powerful and loving Creator and not seek help from other powers. But what happens when God says "No" to our prayers for healing, or school fees, or a better job, or a son to carry on the family line? Much more can be said about the many pastoral issues that arise from this theology, correct as it is. Christians in Africa are greatly attracted to Prosperity Theology which always provides hope for "Yes" answers. But Kunhiyop knows this and has not tried to be exhaustive on any topic.

One could have hoped for longer discussion of certain issues (such as Prosperity Theology) and the inclusion of a topical index, but these are small quibbles compared to what is included. Kunhiyop ends each chapter with questions and suggestions for further reading. The book's length makes it ideal for use as a textbook in Africa at the diploma and bachelor's levels and as a supplementary textbook at the master's level. Theological colleges and universities elsewhere should include this title in their libraries alongside those by African theologians of different traditions in order to have a well-rounded view of African Christian Theology.