

EXORCISM IN THE BIBLE AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

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1. Introduction

The belief in the omnipresence of various species of evil spirits, like jennies, ghosts, vampires, malignant disembodied ghosts, and vast hordes of hostile spirits which lurk in graves and solitary places, on mountains, in dens of the earth and in marshes, is a universal phenomenon which started in biblical times. They were believed and still are believed in modern time to be roaming about the streets, striding through the doors and walls of houses and are even born on the wings of mighty winds that sweep through lands and seas. Wherever they go they bring misfortune, sickness, and death in their train. The Babylonians thought demons to be malodorous. One of the evil spirits, Pazuzu designated as ‘son of Hampa’ was believed to be the King of evil spirits of the air responsible for spreading fever.¹ Abney highlights Hebrews’ common belief that demons were ubiquitous and caused ill health and sickness such as fever, wasting conditions, leprosy, blindness, asthma, and headache.² In African traditional society, a man’s mental instability and any sign of abnormal behaviour are not necessarily seen as a result of only physical distortion of the physiological process but something far more than that, like attack of wizards, witches, a god, an offended ancestor, an evil spirit, or demon. Biblio-Tradition task of healers, physicians, and exorcists is to keep off or drive out the malignant spirit and set the patient physically, mentally, and spiritually fit and free. Exorcism is, therefore, a biblical and traditional method and an aspect of healing. In this article we briefly discuss biblical concept of demonology, Jesus as an exorcist, exorcism in African Traditional healing and conclude with highlighting a common denominator of biblical exorcism and exorcism in African traditional medical service.

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¹A. Lefevre, “Angle or Monster: The Power of Evil in the Old Testament,” in *Satan*, New York, 1951, 54.

²L. L. Abney, “Demons in the First Century,” *Ogbomeso Journal of Theology* 2 (December 1997), 46.

2. The Old Testament Concept of Demonology and Exorcism

Though biblical idea of the devil will probably remain for us an enigmatic figure, nevertheless it is not out of place for us to try and delineate what biblical writers and other traditions tell us about his being and activities. At this point we need to distinguish between the demon, *diamovion*, and the devil, *ho diabolos* also called Satan, *Satanas*. The Old Testament contains remnants of popular poetic demonology which have little to do with what gradually became the strongly differentiated devil in Johannine writings. The popular type of demons in the Old Testament is believed to live in desolate places like ruins and deserts. Azazel,³ the desert dweller, is believed to be a fallen angel inhabiting the wilderness who caused men to sin. Some demons are called *se'irim* – hairy demons, or satyrs.⁴ There are demons that have names indicating the plagues they represent or cause. Demon is personified as pestilence: *Deber*. It is believed to cause or afflict people with pestilence.⁵ Sabourin succinctly notes that the foreign gods are sometimes called demons – *shedim* rendered *daimonia* in the LXX and *daimonia* in the Latin versions and related to the Akkadian world *sedu*, demon⁶ (good or evil). Israelites were known to offer sacrifices to evil spirits to appease them. This practice earned them rebuke.

An aspect of Old Testament demonology involves explanation of moral evil. Demons were mostly responsible for causing physical calamities and diseases while the evil spirits would lure men into egoistic tendencies and

³See Lev. 16:10. The scapegoat carrying away people's sins was believed to be driven to Azazel, evil demon inhabiting the desert.

⁴See Is. 13:21; 34:14. In LXX, they are designated *daimonia*, literally meaning hairy demons.

⁵See Habukkuk 3:5; see also Pslam 91:5f. Scapegoat is the translation of the Hebrew word *Azazel* (Lev. 16:8; 1026). The word occurs in this one passage only, although there are several translations of it. According to one translation, it signifies a solitary desert while in another translation it means dismissal. Further, it is used to mean demon of the desert/wilderness. The literal meaning is "going away" (*azel*) "goat" (*az*). On the Jewish Day of Atonement, the High Priest, out of the two goats provided by the nation slew one as a sin-offering for the people. The other symbolized the removal of sin. The going away goat was dismissed and sent away into the desert as scapegoat. Figuratively, possibly, the name is given to the demon believed to cause men to sin so as to be afflicted.

⁶Leopold Sabourin, "The Miracles of Jesus (II): Jesus and Evil Powers," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 4, 2 (June 1974), 143. See Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:20, 28.

eventually to commit sin. In Old Testament monotheistic thought all beings, good or evil, are subject to God. Therefore, physical evils like calamities, sickness, plagues, and death are said to originate from God while pagan nations attributed such things to the demons. In Old Testament trend of thoughts, it is God who sends angels to execute punishment.⁷ The sacred writers are not like us, who are aware what God permits and what He wants and, thus, they do not hesitate even to represent God as a ‘tempter’. In the story of Egyptian plagues Yahweh is said to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart.⁸ However, elsewhere Pharaoh is presented as the author of his own obstination.⁹ Yahweh is represented as sending an evil spirit to arouse the men of Shekem against Abimelech and an evil spirit of the Lord to torment Saul (Judg. 9:23; 1Sam. 16:14).

Further, it is a spirit of the host of heaven surrounding Yahweh on his throne that is sent to be “a lying spirit” in the mouth of all the prophets of Ahab and thereby “entice him” to go up and meet his doom at Ramoth-Gilead. It is pertinent to note that the actual working of destructive powers, which in the neighbouring heathen nations are attributed to demons, are in the Old Testament attributed to the rule of God. This essentially maintained Old Testament monotheism since there is no other power to which people might turn in any matter except to God and there is no other power outside the one God of Israel.

Tobit, one of the deuteronomical books classified as apocryphal by the Protestant churches, speaks of “the evil demon” called *Asmodeus* (Tobit 3:8). The name means destroyer. This evil demon is said to have slain each of the seven bridegrooms of Sarah, before they had been with her as wife, out of mere jealousy. This demon corresponds to the Persian *Aeshma Daeva*, known to be one of the evil spirits. Although basically there may be an aspect of folklore in the story, it is significant for one reason. It marks a new development in biblical demonology since in it, for the first time, an evil and envious spirit, a “*poneron daimonoion*” (evil demon) enters the picture as the adversary of man, whom he effectively destroys.¹⁰ Demons (*Daimonnion*, plural *daimonia*) are hostile spirits of popular belief who generate hostile and

⁷See Gen. 19:1-13; Exod. 12:23; 1Sam. 24:18; 2Kings 19:35, 16:2; Chron. 32:21.

⁸Refer Exod. 4:21; also Rom. 9:18.

⁹See Exod. 7:15-22.

¹⁰Sabourin, “The Miracles of Jesus (II),” 144.

destructive powers against human beings. As a result of the prohibition of magic (Deut. 18:10), demonology is very marginal in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament does not contain specific methods of exorcism. Nevertheless, there are some specific features of the Israelite worship which bear resemblance to measures employed in exorcism in Pagan religions. Bells were hung in the robes of the high priest (Exod. 28:33-35). These bells, however, were not used for occult practices. They rather recall the use of bells in other cultures. The priest of Amadiaoha (Thunder god) in Igbo tradition wears a cloth on which a tinkling bell is hung. It is believed that the tinkling keeps off unsuspected evil men by drawing their attention that the person approaching is a priest of god of thunder. Israelite religious practice encouraged use of horns,¹¹ use of incense,¹² smearing blood on the door posts,¹³ the use of colours,¹⁴ and written scripture texts (phylacteries).¹⁵

¹¹The Israelites had many uses for the horns of animals. They made them into trumpets (Josh. 6:13) and used them as containers for oil (1Sam. 16:1, 13). The horn was also a symbol of power (Ps. 132:17) and of the monarchy (Dan. 7:8, 11, 21). The corners of the altar for burnt offering resembled horns (Exod. 29:12; Lev. 4:7). When one's horn was exalted by God, it signified favour (1Sam. 2:10; Ps. 89:24). The expression "to lift up ones horn" denoted arrogance and pride.

¹²Incense is a fragrant substance burned in the religious services of the Israelites (Exod. 25:6, 35:8, 28). The High Priest burned incense every morning (Exod. 30:1, 9). The burning of incense is symbolic of the prayers of saints rising to heaven (Rev. 9:3, 4).

¹³Exod. 12:7. The blood, to the Israelites, represented life. The life is in the blood (Lev. 17:1, 14; Deut. 12:23), and was regarded by God regarded as sacred. After the flood it was forbidden that the blood of animals be eaten (Gen. 9:3, 4; Acts 15:20, 24). The law was announced that a shedding of man's blood would be punishable by death. (Gen. 9:6). The penalty of sin was the loss of life (Heb. 9:22) as denoted by the death of animals used in the offerings for sin under the Mosaic Law. It signified atonement (Lev. 17:10-14; Deut. 12:15-16), hence the expression in the New Testament "the blood of Jesus Christ" or "the blood of the Lamb," referring to the atoning death of Jesus Christ (1Cor. 10:16, Heb. 9:14).

¹⁴Num. 15:38. Man living in a world being challenged by Satan can easily forget and change his creator God. So, He commanded the Israelites to make special borders of a particular colour on their clothes as a reminder. Thus, skins were dyed in various colours by the Hebrews (Exod. 25:5). Vestments were also woven of various coloured threads. Reddish, purple, and blue dyes were extracted from different kinds of shell fish (Exod. 27:16; Acts 16:14; Ezek 23:6). Scarlet was obtained from an insect (Is. 1:18). In the Bible, white signifies purity (Mk. 16:5; Rev. 3:4), the black, famine, the red, war and bloodshed, and the pale, death. Purple was the colour of princess and the wealthy (Lk. 16:19; Judg. 8:26).

These have parallels in other cultures as devices to ward off evil spirits. For example, the belief among Egyptians that sickness was induced by demons led ancient Egyptians to swallow formulas written on Papyrus to expel the evil spirit.¹⁶

3. New Testament Demonology

The New Testament reflects in part a contemporary belief in the notion of Satan and the devil – *diabolos*. It also contains references to demons, *daimonia* and to “unclean spirits.” This is mainly in connection with possessed demoniacs. The two words, ‘demon’ and ‘impure spirit/evil spirit’, *pneumatōn akathartos*, are used interchangeably in the New Testament, for instance, Mk. 6:7, 13:¹⁷ “And he called the twelve and began to send them two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits... And they cast out many demons...” Each of the expressions occurs eleven times in Mark but *daimonion* is much more frequent than impure spirit/unclean spirit. In Luke and Matthew, they are used twenty three times and eleven times, respectively. ‘Evil spirit’ occurs three times in Luke and once in Matthew. The author of Luke writes strangely in 4:33, that the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum had “a spirit of an unclean demon/devil.” Unclean spirit is used once in the Septuagint (Zech. 13:2). It is used to denote ritual uncleanness. The use of the expression later became common. In Hellenic Judaism, it is used synonymously with “spirit of uncleanness,” *rugh tume’ah* (unclean spirit). These words like *ruah* (spirit), *ra’cah* (evil spirit), and *mazzia* (smiter) are used in Judaism to denote demons. It is typical in Judaism to call demons “spirits.” In rabbinical writings, the demons are depicted to inflict physical harm on human beings while in the pseudopigrapha they are mostly seducers of people.

¹⁵Deut. 6:8, 11:8. The injunction in Deut. 6:1-8 and 11:8 gave birth to the use of the phylacteries. Phylactery, otherwise known as Frontlet, was a small case made of leather worn by Jewish men on the forehead and the left arm. The forehead case contained four compartments each of which held parchments inscribed with scriptural quotations from Exod. 13:1-10, 11-17 and Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21. The arm case had only one compartment which held the same passages. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their ostentatious display in wearing unnecessarily large phylacteries (Mk. 23:5).

¹⁶Sabourin, “The Miracles of Jesus (II),” 143, cited in *CBQ* 1970, 279.

¹⁷See also Matt. 10:8; Lk. 4:33-36, 8:29f.

In later Jewish and to Christian belief, Satan is a fallen angel who consequently becomes the master of all demons. While the Old Testament speaks of Satan-angel¹⁸ at the service of God, New Testament designates Satan as the enemy of God and of his kingdom. As an adversary of God's salvific plan to be realized in Jesus, Satan, also called the devil, first tried to make Jesus, the Messiah, deviate from his mission¹⁹ and in the end instigated Judas to betray him. One thing is clear: the Testament recognizes the existence of a personal hostile power in Satan, demon, or by any other name. The essential aspect of New Testament teaching is that Jesus waged a ceaseless successful war against the hostile demonic powers.

4. Jesus as an Exorcist

It is noteworthy that Jesus is nowhere called an exorcist in the New Testament in his healing activities. He is rather represented as having expelled demons. The Greek word *exorkistōn* is used only once in the New Testament to designate the Jewish exorcists (Acts 19:13). The Greek verb *exorkizō* is used once in the sense of 'adjure' (Matt. 26:63). Etymologically, then, exorcism is an adjuration to the demon to oblige him to leave a place, to abandon a situation or to liberate a person whom he has in some way under his dominion.

Gospel records show that healing was an integral part of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The author of Mark reports twofold ministry of Jesus in the first chapter as follows:

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came Jesus went into the Synagogue and began to teach... Just then a man who was in the Synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What have we to do with you Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God." Jesus sternly quietened him and commanded the evil spirit to come out of him and it did (Mk. 1:21ff.).

Jesus visualized the world as dominated by evil powers which He knew human beings could neither withstand nor surmount by their own will and power. He, therefore, laboured to defeat the realities of evil powers by

¹⁸In the Old Testament time monotheism, a dogma of Yahwism – belief in One Almighty God – was not firmly established. It would be confusing to speak of a personal evil spirit working outside the sphere and command of divine will.

¹⁹For further information on this read Matt. 4 and Lk. 4.

bringing the creative and redemptive power of God to bear on the moral, mental, and physical illness of the people around him, caused by evil powers. Jesus perceived that much of the mental illness which afflicted the people was the result of the work of the devil/evil spirits/demons that were always seeking ways to enter and possess men's lives. He noted:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and finding none, then it goes and takes seven other spirits more, wicked than itself, and they go and live in there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.²⁰

It was, imperatively Christ's task to rescue the weak and the helpless from the powers and torture of evil spirit/demons.²¹ Jesus in his salvific mission was the stronger one who had come to bind the power of evil spirits and to set men free.²² Consequently, Jesus rejoiced to see "Satan fall like lightning from heaven" after his disciples' return from a healing mission (Lk. 10:18). We now focus our discussion on the gospel data of Jesus' resolute attack and expulsion of demons/evil spirits, from their victims.

5. Exorcism of a Man with an Unclean Spirit (Mk. 1:21-27)

The Synoptic Gospels record that the devil tempted Jesus shortly after he had received his title 'Son of God' at Baptism. Matthew and Luke give longer version of the Temptation. Probably, this episode depicts divine encouragement/exhortation given to Jesus as a messianic investiture to start his salvific work. No compelling argument has been proposed against the historicity of this episode. Its insertion at the beginning of the Gospel clearly indicates that the synoptic evangelists attached great importance to the Messiah's task of confronting the ancient adversary in his own realm. The devil, the arch enemy of God would not easily give up his plans to destabilize man's peace and to rule the world, while Jesus 'the Son of God', his challenger would not give up attempt to dislodge the devil and his agents.

The exorcism of a man 'with an unclean spirit' (the gospel designation for the demon who afflicts man) in the Synagogue of Capernaum introduces in the Gospel of Mark the series of individual healing miracles attributed to Jesus' spiritual powers. By his acts of power, *exousia*, over the demons, Jesus exercised the power of the spirit he received at baptism, showing himself as 'the mightier one' (Mk. 1:7; also 3:27). The demon acknowledged the person

²⁰Lk. 11:24-26; see also 1Pet. 5:8.

²¹See, for example, Mk. 1:25, 5:8, 9:25.

²²Mk. 3:27; Lk. 11:21-22.

of Jesus as “the Holy one of God.” O. Beuermann opines that the words “I know who you are, Holy one of God,” must have originally been “protective words” spoken by the possessed man to the demon. This is more important than certain. By showing recognition he gained power over him. Bultmann, however, admits that Mark understood the story as a messianic confession by the demon.²³ We rather opine that the demon recognizes in Jesus someone very close to God, possibly a prophet. A prophet of God was called “Holy man of God.”²⁴ The demon sensed a new peril of himself in the challenge which Jesus’ *exousia* represented for demons. The text in the New Testament is the earliest to visualize in this way Jesus’/Messiah’s carrier as a struggle against demon, the spirit of evil.²⁵ Another text of Mark tells us why Jesus commanded the spirit to ‘shut up’ (v. 25). He would not allow the demons to speak ‘because they knew him’ (Mk. 1:34).

Mark in his narrative dramatically notes that the unclean spirit convulsing the possessed, and crying with a loud voice came out of him at the command of Jesus (v. 26). Luke picturesquely describes how, at the exorcistic command of Jesus, the demon came out of the possessed man when the demon had thrown him down, having done him no harm (4:35). The episode was really understood as an exorcism, and not as a healing. This is depicted in the author’s conclusion: “With authority he commands even the unclean spirit, and they obey him.” This episode has literal affinity with the episode in Mk. 4:39-41 and 5:2-8; nevertheless, this is the first description of Jesus’ expulsion of an unclean spirit that is distinctively a historical episode, which is in actual fact a healing in that the demoniac was restored to peace, physically, mentally, and spiritually. The healing was wholistic. The episode depicts the messianic era (see Lk. 4:17-21).

Another account of Jesus’ exorcism is a narrative written as a chiasm – the account of the Gadarene demoniac, in Mk. 5:1-20. The evangelist clearly uses the chiasm to describe the incident. The tale starts and concludes with

²³R. Bultman, *The History of Synoptic Tradition*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1963, 209.

²⁴See 2Kings 4:9; see also 1Kings 17:18. F. Hahn sees as more probable that ‘*ho hagios tou theou*’ (The Holy One of God) designates a charismatic person perhaps as in Judg. 16-17. F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology*, London: Lutherworth, 1969, 235.

²⁵There are references in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Testament of Levi* 3:12; *Testament of Dan*. 5:10f. recording the vanquishing of demons by the messianic high priest. Due to difficulty of dating the writing, they cannot be used as evidence against our statement.

Jesus the Lord of life, physically entering and leaving the scene (vv 1-20) after restoring life. In the next and second to the last episodes, Jesus actually faces the demoniac who is later freed of the devil (v 2, 18). The description of the demoniac is third (vv 3-5, 15) while the demon's request comes next (vv 7, 10). The peak of the story is the moment when Jesus asked the demon's name. Mark, in his narrative, carefully and methodically leads us up the mountain past each facet of demon's control to the peak encounter with Jesus, then down the victorious side of the summit the man is freed of the demon's power, all in carefully inverted sequence.²⁶

First, the demoniac is described as one who has dwelling among the tombs and that no man could bind him, not even with chains, because he had been often bound with fetters and chains and the chains had been plucked asunder by him and the fetters broken in pieces. Always, night and day, the demoniac was in the tombs. Thus, Mark uses this elaborate chiasm to demonstrate the demoniac bondage of the man and how Jesus through exorcism restored the man to physical, mental, and spiritual freedom.

This episode has, no doubt, literary affinities with Mk. 4:39-41, nevertheless, this description of exorcism of an unclean spirit by Jesus at Gerasa obviously refers to a distinct historical episode. This similar episode took place in pagan territory which we could deem a natural habitat for the devil to exercise his infliction on people freely. We may attribute the demon's resentment to be a challenge to Jesus, 'the Son of Most High', not to invade him in his own territory. The name given to Jesus by the demon may be seen not as a messianic name but recognition of his very close relationship with God. In Sabourine's view, the unexpected title given to Jesus by the demon points to authenticity of the episode.²⁷ He also opines that the demon's appeal to God (v. 7) to influence Jesus seems to reflect Jewish formula of exorcism. Hans strongly opines that the title Jesus, 'Son of the Most High God', could signify the sphere of early Christianity in which the idea of Jesus as 'a man of God and the Holy one of God' has been exchanged for the conception of him as "Son of God."²⁸ In his convincing argument, Longenecker²⁹ strongly contends that the title "Son of God" is perfectly

²⁶J. I. Packer, *et al.*, *The Bible Almanac*, New York: Guideposts, 1978, 364.

²⁷Sabourin, "The Miracles of Jesus (II)," 158.

²⁸Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology*, 291.

²⁹R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, London: A. R. Allenson, 1970, 95-97.

understandable among earliest Jewish believers, as Jesus had spoken of God as being his Father. Matthew in his contribution of the episode specifies what torment the demons feared. He definitively designates it as the punishment before the appointed time. Matthew may be alluding to Enoch 15-16 which contains the Jewish tradition stipulating that the demons have freedom to operate in this world, which will cease to operate at the final judgment when they will be thrown into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devils and his angels.³⁰

Matthew may also be alluding to Jewish eschatology represented at Qumran which expected that the devil and these demons would be deprived of their powers at the end of time. The episode emphasizes the Lordship of Jesus, the Son of God, over all creatures. Paul the Apostle alluded to the unlimited power of Jesus in his letter to the Philippians:

And being found in a fashion as man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross... That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus is the Lord (Phil. 2:8-11).

It is known from Lk. 11:24 that unclean spirits expelled from a possessed man, painfully searched for a new habitat. In the case of the demons expelled from the Gadarene demoniac, they possessed swine, as they were sacred animals in pagan cults, but ritually defiling for the Jews and seen as sacrificed to demons. The demons found in the swine a connatural place of asylum. In the end contrary to what we would expect from Markan account, Jesus urged the man to go and spread the news of his deliverance. Jesus visualized that as the region was semi-desertic and Pagan there was no fear of messianic upsurge. Besides, the miraculous event would likely bring a Gospel message to the region where Jesus could not reach.

Some critics see this miracle as unusual of Jesus' miracles from economic point of view. The miracle led to wanton destruction of innocent people's means of economic livelihood with consequent heavy loss to the owners. It is further questioned whether Jesus anticipated the result or not. Davidson³¹ sees as more satisfactory the view that the destruction of the swine was permitted by the Lord as an ocular demonstration to the demoniac

³⁰See Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10; 2Pet. 2:4.

³¹F. Davidson, ed., *et al.*, *The New Bible Commentary*, London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1965, 816.

that the demons had in fact departed from him and to confirm his faith. We can agree that the sacrifice of brutes and property is justifiable where the sanity and lives of persons are at stake.

Another Episode of exorcism by Jesus is found only in Mark and Matthew. Jesus expelled an unclean spirit from the little daughter of a Syrophenician (in Mark) or a Canaanite (in Matthew) woman (Mk. 7:24-30; Matt. 15:21-28). From all indications, inauguration of a Gentile mission was not in Jesus' agenda, but the Syrophenician's faith compelled him to stay as well as perform a miracle of favour – exorcism of the unclean spirit from the woman's daughter. Unlike the previous ones where Jesus registered his presence physically, he exorcised the unclean spirit by proxy by a simple wish. On the woman's return to her home she found the daughter "thrown" (*beblemenon*) on the bed, and the (*daimonion*) demon gone. Matthew in his narrative notes that the child had been cured! Luke in 9:42 uses the verb *iaomai* to denote the healing of a demoniac child, which implies restoring the girl wholly physically, mentally, and spiritually. In this last case, the symptoms of the "possession" depict the symptoms of 'epilepsy' in modern medicine. Some scholars are of the view that it is possible that the narrative of the epileptic demoniac as depicted in Markan account (Mk. 9:14-27) results from the literary combination of two stories, an exorcism and a healing. However, it is not impossible that demons/evil spirits can very well hide their presence behind the curtain of certain diseases. With the traits of a resurrection story Mark succinctly describes the exorcistic healing by Jesus: "And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted up and he rose" (Mk. 9:26f.).

At this juncture, we cannot escape highlighting Jesus' statement about the source of his exorcistic power to exonerate himself from the accusation of using Beelzebub's power. The controversy occasioned Jesus' important statement: "if it is by the finger of God" ('Spirit of God' in Matthew) that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk. 11:20). 'Finger of God' is a designation of the power of God.³² Jesus exercised his exorcism with the power that came from God, and not by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Among the various people Jesus healed, there were the physically sick and those possessed with demon. Jesus Himself is noted to say: "Behold I cast out demons and perform cures today

³²See Exod. 8:19.

and tomorrow and the third day I finish my course” (Lk. 13:32). Jesus also used his disciples as his instruments. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them (Mk. 6:13). To them Jesus had given “authority” (*exousia*) over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and infirmity (Matt. 10: 1).

The Gospels offer no evidence that Jesus used the technique of psychotherapy. He expels demons by simple command (Matt. 8:16). He is obeyed even if the patient is not present. Such a circumstance absolutely excludes psychological or hypnotic explanations. It is noteworthy in that there is usually no mention of faith on the part of the demoniac, except, however, in the instance of the epileptic boy where the need for both prayer and faith is emphasized (Mk. 9:23-29). It is the faith of Jesus that is decisive for the exorcism. In this instance, the disciples had previously failed to cast out the demon. The simple reason is that they lacked sufficient and deep-seated faith. Jesus casts out demons/unclean spirits/evil spirits with a simple command because he is the one with a complete faith in and obedience to the active power of God and his divine will. It is with God’s spirit that he heals (Lk. 4:18) and casts out demons (Matt. 12:28). It is to ‘Heaven’ he looks for help in his working miracles (Mk. 7:24; Jn. 11:41). It is to God that the glory is given for the achievement (Mk. 2:12).

6. Exorcism in African Traditional Religious Medicine

Exorcism as an aspect of healing to restore good health physically, mentally and spiritually was not only in vogue in ancient Israel in Biblical time but also in vogue in many nations of the then world. In ancient Egypt, one of African countries, exorcists gave patients believed to be afflicted by demons to swallow prayer formulas written on Papyrus to expel the evil spirit.³³ Exorcism is also an aspect of present African traditional religious medicine, because as Onunwa observes that a man’s mental instability in Igbo society (or any other African society) and any sign of abnormal behaviour are not necessarily only seen as a result of physical distortion of the physiological process but also as something far more than that which must be tackled and expelled.³⁴ For us to appreciate exorcism in the New Testament time by Jesus

³³Sabourin, “The Miracles of Jesus (II),” 143.

³⁴Udoabata Onunwa, *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Uruowulu-Obosi: Pacific Publishers, 1990, 82.

in African traditional religious context it is pertinent to briefly discuss the therapeutic system in African Traditional Religions.

Healing in African Traditional Religion is a corporate affair that involves restoring the totality of the patient's personality so that the individual is in a conscious healthy mood to play his/her role in the family and the community. This is an aspect of African concept of corporate responsibility. Restoration of possessed people/mentally afflicted people becomes the concern of every member of the community. Traditional healers specially gifted with art of exorcism usually are invited to find a solution to the sick person's mental disorder. Onunwu further rightly notes that healing ministry in African Religion, therefore, is an elaborate one in which the practitioner seeks to attend to the patient's physical wellbeing as well as to his spiritual, mental, and psychological dimensions and, at the same time, tries to reintegrate the person to the full membership of his community.³⁵ Healing in African Traditional Religion is an effort sincerely geared toward bringing peace to a patient's life and family as Jesus did in his ministry. Exorcism belongs to a group of traditional medical men who are believed to have the power of driving out evil spirits/demons from possessed persons.

Exorcists in the African medical cure use various methods to achieve their objective. Umoren writing on healing act notes:

An African traditional religious solution to health falls in with the African worldview which usually attributes ill-health to powerful malignant deities and forces such as "mammy water," witchcraft, ... use certain herbs, mixtures, incantation, ritual objects, ritual actions, to ward off the evil forces or remove them.³⁶

In African societies, mental disorders, such as lunacy and madness are attributed to evil spirit, affliction by witches and wizards, or charmers. In support of this, Owan strongly opines that the barest minimum characteristic features of African demonology are spiritism, fortune telling, magic, witchcraft and sorcery.³⁷ Thus, exorcists who are often regarded as magicians/miraculous healers in African medicine resort to the methods noted by Umoren. They also resort to other methods of expelling the evil

³⁵Onunwa, *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*, 82.

³⁶Anthony Iffen Umoren, *Jesus and Miracle Healing Today*, Iperu Remo: The Ambassador Publications, 1999, 106.

³⁷Owan, K. J. N., "Biblio-Theological Basis for Church Teaching on Demonology," *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 6 (1991), 49.

spirit/witch's attack usually designated as demonic attack. Onunwa notes that in Igbo subculture area

Lunacy or non-violent type may be treated by means of inhalations, repeated several times a day. Usually schizophrenics and other mental patients are given all sorts of mystical and scientific therapeutic treatments on herbs and roots. Violent lunatics are confined in chains. They are given emetics ... Through constant vomiting a lunatic can 'throw off the very elements in him that intoxicate and make him behave abnormally.'³⁸

Some exorcists are known to utter incantations believed to have compelling expulsive potency in their bid to expel evil spirit from the possessed. All these varied methods used by exorcists in the African medicine are aimed at subduing and expelling the evil spirit which is believed to be in possession of the patient.

It is noteworthy that the African concept of good health and bad health differs from that of modern World Health Organisation (WHO), which scientifically defines good health as the absence of disease or infirmity. African concept is focused on the total physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual as a result of balanced maintenance of good relationship and harmony with fellow human beings, divinities, spirits (ancestors) and nature,³⁹ or otherwise afflicted as a result of faulting in any of the web of relationship. Mental ill-health and possession by evil spirit/demon belong to the type of ill-health they classify as supernatural and mystical ill-health and believed to be caused by diabolic human beings (witches and wizards), breaking taboos, offending ancestors or disharmony with neighbours. Exorcists, therefore, sometimes resort to special combination of treatment: use of herbs and ritual, confession, consultation of oracle/diviners; they also resort to offering recommended type of sacrifice for the restoration of harmony with God, divinities, spirits, and the entire community. This is one of the effective developed ways exorcists in African Traditional Religions use in rescuing mentally afflicted patients. They are, however, rarely successful in expelling evil spirit from possessed patients.

From our cursory discussion on exorcism in traditional African medicine we have noted that healing of mentally afflicted patients include the

³⁸Onunwa, *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*, 82.

³⁹D. C. Silis, *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, vol. 5 & 6, New York: MacMillan Press, 1972, 95.

use of herbs, roots, incantations, and confinement. It also involves offering sacrifice to the aggrieved deities, evil spirits, or ancestors. The practice of medicine in traditional African societies is believed to be dispensed through God's agents; thus, exorcists do not fail to come to consult the deities believed to recommend cures for baffling illness such as demon possession resulting in lunacy. Okpoku records that the Igbo have special deity, Agwu, who is recognized as the guardian of medicine (as well as the deity responsible for afflicting people with madness/mental disorder).⁴⁰ This deity is believed to call people to become herbalists and doctors (exorcists) and all healings take place under his guardianship as Supreme Being's agent.

7. Conclusion

Some features of Biblical demonology are closely related to the African traditional religious conceptions of our time. Both accept the existence of demons/evil spirits as independent entities. Demon is seen to be inimical to man's health. They afflict man with mental ill-health when possessing him. Jesus is biblically represented as having authoritatively expelled them from the possessed. Traditionally, in Africa, there are professional healers believed to be talented with power for exorcism. The power they exercise, however, cannot be compared with that of Jesus.

The actual life of Jesus was lived in a cultural milieu which attached great importance to human life just as our traditional African society. Biblical exorcism and exorcism in traditional African medicine have common objective, that is, to restore the afflicted patient to a state of physical, mental, and spiritual integrity. Thus, immortal words of truth, so powerfully penned and filled with grace biblically reveal that Jesus is an excellent exorcist. Some professional traditional healers in African societies are seen as exorcists believed to have medical means of liberating victims of demon possession. They may resort to different traditional ways to achieve their goal – restoration of good health to their patients. Thus, Igenozza aptly observes that African religious cosmology, apart from belief in the existence of God, the divinities, and ancestors, includes the existence of harmful spirits/demons that can easily be employed/invoked to possess people. Once it has been established through divination that an evil spirit has been responsible for an undesirable condition in traditional Africa, exorcism

⁴⁰K. A. Akpoku, *West African Religion*, Accra: Feb-International Pub., 1978, 149.

usually takes place through a comprehensive approach which would often include placatory sacrifice, incantation, medication, adjuration, homeopathic, and various forms of rituals and taboos.⁴¹ These efforts geared towards restoration of the possessed to a normal frame of mind often yield good results.

Abogurin rightly notes that Jesus' miracles of exorcism were quite different from those of Africa and of the ancient world.⁴² There is no use of incantation or magical paraphernalia customarily used by African exorcists. In Jesus' exorcism there is no reported case of violent attack or struggles between Jesus and the victims. Above all, Jesus never prescribed sacrifice or rituals and no names of offended ancestors or spirits inhabiting the spirit world were invoked for assistance. It is also pertinent to note that Jesus, unlike African exorcists, did neither act as a professional healer/exorcist nor regard exorcism as a family trade for livelihood. He regarded it as an act of mercy and, therefore, graciously responded to the critical and aching needs of the possessed men, women, and children.

⁴¹A. O. Igenozu, "Exorcism in the Ministry of Jesus and Demonology in the African Context," in S. O. Abogunrin, *et al.*, *Biblical Healing in African Context*, Nigeria: Philarem Corporate Printers, 2004, 147.

⁴²Abogunrin, *et al.*, ed., *Biblical Healing in African Context*, Biblical Studies Series, no. 3, Nigeria: NABIS, Philarem Corporate Printers, 2004, 18.