

## Slavery, witchcraft and fear

***Breaking Free from Witchcraft – Exposing the Bondage to Demons – Prayer Points to Break the Chains of Satanism.*** These are some book titles in our Christian bookshops that remind us of spiritual forms of slavery that hold us hostage today. Thousands of new deliverance ministries witness in Zambia to bondages to witchcraft and demons. The need for liberation from the slavery to evil forces seems enormous. Many people testify to the inner freedom and the new start which they found after undergoing sound deliverance services.

Yet, while the number of new churches and deliverance ministries has been multiplying steadily over the last decades, sometimes coming with the promise of a fast-track to divine blessings and prosperity, demons and witchcraft are in no way diminishing. The opposite seems true. Demonic entities are increasing. This is strange. One should think that the demons surely must be useful to some of us; else they would hardly hang around given that they are beaten, cast out and insulted so often by so many churches. Is it not also pastors, prophets, and churches who profit?

“Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years.” This provocative statement is found in the *Satanic Bible* of the Church of Satan, founded in America at the end of the 1960s. Fear brings business!

While the practice of witchcraft seems to lead people straight into bondage and slavery, the fear of witchcraft and of demons is doing the same thing. Yes, I repeat, **the fear of witchcraft brings as much slavery and bondage as the practice of it.** And many “men and women of God” are guilty of increasing this fear.

### **Martha**

Martha was a difficult child. Many people say that orphans are difficult and for Martha it was certainly true. After the death of her parents she never really settled with her foster-parents, however well they tried. From childhood on she was compared negatively with her step-brothers and sisters. She was the odd one out, never grateful for what she got. After all, considering that she could have been on the streets without the charity of her foster-family, why was she always so demanding?

Martha performed poorly at school. Paying her school fees was another drain on her family’s scarce resources. They did that out of charity, “but what a waste!” Martha experienced the truth of this. Whenever the time for exams came, she became dumb. Her voice just disappeared. She could not speak for days and sometimes weeks. “She has a spiritual problem”, was said of her. And she came to believe it herself. It was a way for her to understand why she was odd and always out of place.

Even when she had a voice she felt voiceless. Maybe the fact of literally losing her voice at exam time was a subtle cry for help. But it was understood in the wrong way and she came into the wrong hands.

Her guardians brought her to a prophet, a “man of God” on the Copperbelt. “She has a spiritual problem”, the family said. Martha agreed. She was prayed over, and fell down into a trance. She cannot remember what she said when she was lying there on the cold church floor for half an hour or so, being stared at by the people in the congregation who were excited by her confessions and convulsions that confirmed their suspicions and beliefs and prayed over by several sweating men who were casting out demons left and right with a loud voice. She later said that “It felt like being raped while people were watching.” Her family said that she confessed she was a Satanist and that “she wanted to sacrifice them.” The pastor confirmed she needed deliverance and prayers. He ordered the family to bring all her clothes which were burnt during another prayer service. Then he ordered her to hand over her cell phone to be burnt as well: “It is full of demons”. Martha refused. “You burnt already my clothes but did not buy me new ones. Who will give me a new phone”? That was the turning point in her life. To cling on to her phone in defiance was her way of taking back her life against the conspiracy of the pastor, church, and family. It was costly. In retaliation for not giving up her phone, her family threw her out in the street the same day. With no money or suitcase. Needless to say that there was no help either from the pastor or the church.

In Lusaka Martha found friends who helped her. She continued to look for prayers; her friends prayed with her, but they also told her that it was not her who needed deliverance but her family and the pastor! These friends helped Martha to find back her voice. Her own voice, which she had been denied ever since her parents died. For this she had to stop blaming her situation on demons, or on herself, or on her foster-family. Much of her life had been about being blamed or dishing out blame. She always saw herself as a victim. Now she had to learn how to become a person capable of self esteem and of living for a purpose.

Martha managed to pick herself up. At present she has a decent job, has found a husband and is the proud mother of her first child. The “prayers of deliverance” were hypnotically hammering into her body that there was something bad inside herself that needed to come out. But the chains fell off only when she started to believe in the power of good inside herself. What she really needed was support to find her own voice in life, the strength to shape her own destiny and someone who believed in her.

## **Mary**

Martha is not the only example. Mary too consulted a Christian prophet because of failure in life. No business. No proper husband. "God has revealed to me that there is witchcraft in your family which has entered through your grandfather's line. You must free yourself from this bondage, else you will never prosper," the pastor said. From that moment Mary started to hate her grandfather. "I knew that he was a witch!" She avoided him and spoke ill of him. Worse still, she transferred the feeling of hatred even onto her own son, fearing that she may have transmitted to him the powers of witchcraft, unknowingly.

How the story of Mary ended is for another time. I mention it here because there are hundreds of stories similar to the one of Martha, Mary and her grandfather. Many people are being blamed for things they hardly understand. Others have internalised blame: after being abused or raped, sometimes by their own family members, the world of Satanism became a welcome escape route that placed an acceptable storyline on their weird and painful experiences which they could not put into words. The language of witchcraft, demons and generational curses explains well our negative experiences and failures, but let us not fool ourselves: it also splits up our families. "Divide and rule" was a Roman maxim that has always benefitted the slave traders.

## **Slavery and witchcraft**

The institution of slavery robbed Africa of many millions of able and creative people over hundreds of years. It was organised from outside and profited outsiders. But there was also a direct connection between slavery and witchcraft beliefs and practices: convicted and suspected witches, if not killed in the poison ordeals, were sold into slavery. The institution of slavery made it possible to get rid of undesirable people in society and even to gain a marginal profit by the sell-off. The images of witchcraft up to today resemble that of slavery: victims of witchcraft are being controlled, used and sacrificed by the witches and have their life-blood drained by witches, leaving them without a mind and willpower of their own.

## **Ritual crime**

Fears of witchcraft today are validated by the shocking reality of ritual crimes. Some people are desperate and they are ready to sacrifice and kill when promised money in a dire situation. In my own ministry I have met such people. Just a few, thank God. But I fear that such crimes will not disappear, when our ways of talking and even of praying witness daily to the powers of witchcraft, breeding both fear and fascination. While most become scared and prone to avoid anyone who only vaguely resembles a witch, the remaining few may actually want to try it out themselves! The story of Adam and Eve shows that the forbidden fruit is always the most tempting!

Slavery has been abolished. To break the chains of witchcraft and demons, however, seems still a long way off. All the same, one thing is clear: fear always breeds slavery or bondage and witchcraft affects especially those who are most afraid of it. Witchcraft has many facets and evades easy answers. But it is strange when in a Christian nation the Christians continue to run away from the witches instead of witches fleeing the Christians.

**How to help:** Some ways are effective in breaking the powers of witchcraft: (1) do not avoid the suspected witch, but engage with the person. (2) Don't make the inner world of one person (a dream, a vision, a divination) a focal point for public action. (3) Address clearly threatening or questionable behaviour of the outer world. (4) Unite the afflicted family. Speak openly about outstanding issues, before suspicions breed rumours. (5) Develop a personal and creative way of dealing with the threatening witchcraft symbols.

The “**Fingers of Thomas**” (a support group whose name refers to the doubting and inquiring apostle in the Gospels) employ these steps when helping both victims of witchcraft and victims of witchcraft accusations. They also give workshops in schools and churches about procedures to reduce fear and panic. For more information about their methods, see [www.fenza.org/fingers-of-thomas](http://www.fenza.org/fingers-of-thomas). The “Fingers of Thomas” are a research group of FENZA, the Faith & Encounter Centre, Zambia.

Father Bernhard Udelhoven is based at St. Lawrence Catholic Church, Lusaka, Kamwala-South/Misisi. He works with FENZA, and has been engaged together with the “Fingers of Thomas” in research on Satanism for many years.

Fenza is organizing a conference on Contemporary forms of Slavery on Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> September. For information [director@fenza.org](mailto:director@fenza.org) 0979595084