

Ghanaian Christian Understanding Of The Concept Of Enemy With Reference To Psalm 35:1 - 10: A Case Study Of Some Selected Churches Under The Neo-Prophetic Strand Of Ghanaian Christianity

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to examine the understanding of the concept of enemy in Ghanaian Christianity with reference to Psalm 35:1 - 10: A case study of some selected churches under the Neo-Prophetic Strand of Ghanaian Christianity. The qualitative research method was used in this work. The setting for this research was the Kumasi Metropolis in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study involved ten (10) churches with seventy-seven respondents; seven (7) church founders and/or leaders and seventy (70) members. Radio presentations of some preachers under this strand were also monitored and used in the research. The question that guided this research was how does the understanding of the concept of enemy by members of the Neo-Prophetic Strand of Ghanaian Christianity influence how they handle them? It was found that the Neo-Prophetic strand of Ghanaian Christianity consider the enemy to be physical, spiritual and both physical and spiritual. They believe that the enemies of Christians ranges from the world (devil), members of one's family, people outside the family and one's own self. Some think that physical enemies should be treated with common sense to avoid physical confrontation whiles the spiritual enemy with prayer and "akwankyerε" (direction) and others believe that all enemies should be treated kindly. They place much emphasis on the activities of witchcraft, traditional priests (fetish priest) "mallams" and African primal world view. They also believe that Jesus' message of loving one's enemy does not contradict with the use of the imprecatory Psalms. It was therefore recommended that further studies should be conducted to ascertain the impact of the understanding of the imprecatory psalms by Christians on their spiritual and social life.

Key Words: Enemy, "akwankyerε". (Dirrecton)

Background to the study

One emerging issue in Ghanaian Christianity is the idea of an enemy and what to do to one's enemy. A greater portion of time at prayer meetings, all night vigils and fasting programs are dedicated to pray about one's enemy or against it. As a result, many deliverance sessions and the likes are very keen on the destruction of enemies. The view of an enemy causing death, pain and financial misfortune is very prominent and hence every means available is sought to deal with one's enemy in this direction. Local gospel songs and other deliverance manuals feature several warfare and other anti-enemy drives.

An enemy is a relativist term for an entity, whether an individual or a group, that is seen as forcefully adverse or threatening.¹ The concept of an enemy has been observed to

be basic for both individuals and communities. The term "enemy" serves the social function of designating a particular entity as a threat, thereby invoking an intense emotional response to that entity.² An "enemy" may also be conceptual; used to describe impersonal phenomena such as disease, and a host of other things. In Ghanaian Christianity, "the enemy" is typically reserved to represent the human tendency to do evil, often personified as a malicious deity, such as the devil or a demon. To this effect, Emmanuel Asante³ notes that deliverance ministry is very paramount among the many Para-church ministries that are mushrooming all over the country. As well noted, deliverance is therefore a prominent feature of the church in

²Martha L. Cottam, Beth Dietz-Uhler Elena Mastors, *Introduction to Political Psychology* (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), p 54.

³Emmanuel Asante. "Deliverance and Salvation: The Theological Basis." *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*. Vol. IX:1, 1999: 26.

¹Mortimer Ostow, *Spirit, Mind, & Brain: A Psychoanalytic Examination of Spirituality and Religion* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2007), p.73.

Ghana today and the number one area one needs deliverance from is the enemy. To this effect, the enemy that prevents the attainment of such existential fulfillments must be well eradicated. Many ministers and churches, especially the Neo-Prophetic one's now inculcate this important topic in their prayer sessions, since this really attracts more people who want to deal with their enemies. This thesis sought to examine the concept of enemy among Christians in Ghana vis-à-vis the practices of the Neo-Prophetic Movement, a strand of Ghanaian Christianity

Who an Enemy Is

From the views of the respondents, it was clear that different people have different perspective of who an enemy is. However, some also share common opinion. Richard Oduro based his definition of who an enemy is on James 4:4. According to him, in Christianity anything that is of the world is an enemy to God. In this sense, all Christians have one common enemy which is the things of the world.⁴ This view was shared by all the leaders interviewed. Paul Ntiamoah on his part made it clear that the devil is the controller of the world with emphasis on Matthew 4:8-9.⁵ All the seventy (70) members also agreed that, the devil is the principal enemy to God and hence extends to Christians. According to the *Holman Bible dictionary*, in the Old Testament, the enemies of Israel often were considered the enemies of God, for Israel was God's nation (Exod 23:22).⁶ This therefore suggests that, Christians today share a common view with the people of the Old Testament in that their enemies are also the enemies of God. However, the difference lies in the fact that, the people of the OT considered their national enemies (physical enemies) while Christians today considers their enemy to be the devil.

Thirty-one (31) females and five (5) males out of the seventy (70) members stated that, one's enemies are people of their own family. They explained that for an "outsider" to harm a person, an "insider" would have contributed to it. This was supported by three (3) leaders.

All thirty-five (35) females and twenty-nine (29) males made mention that, their enemy could also be a person they have no relation to. They said these enemies could be in one's church, school, office and even in cars, markets and

recreational centers. Alexander Annor observed that, with this kind of enemy, the victims would not even know that someone has developed ill-feeling for them and in this case become very difficult to solve any problem one has with the other since they will be unaware of the hatred.⁷ In the view of Glenn Adams⁸, many Ghanaians perceive others as enemies in their everyday world. According to him, people in West African settings tend to inhabit realities of dense, interpersonal connection in which enemies, like relationships in general, are considered a fact of human existence and that Ghanaians consider a person who thought they had no enemies as foolish. This observation affirms that, the idea of an individual being the target of an enemy is well grounded in the thoughts and minds of most Ghanaian Christians under the Neo-Prophetic strand of Ghanaian Christianity.

Out of the seventy (70) members interviewed, eight (8) females and twenty-six (26) males gave one's self as an enemy. According to some respondents procrastination, laziness, pride, among other negative human habits are some of the things about one's self that can hinder the progress of an individual. From the above, it is evident that it is not always a personified malicious deity such as the devil or a demon that is considered an enemy within Christianity but also negative human habits like mismanagement, lack of self control, poor planning and loose tongue. Richard Oduro was particularly concerned with people who make their dreams and thoughts known by speaking them out without considering who they are talking to. He said that, though the devil's agents are everywhere, they are in no position to harm a person until the thoughts and ideas of the person have been revealed by that same person. He continued that, the devil capitalizes on what a person says to hinder his/her progress in life.⁹

It is worth mentioning that, even though different views were outlined as to who an enemy is, all the leaders and members affirmed that Christians do have enemies. The enemies of Christians according to respondents include the world (devil), members of one's family, people outside the family and one's own self; since negative activities of such entities can be affront to one's development.

⁴Richard Oduro, a prophet, founder and leader, interview by researcher, Glory House Outreach Ministry, Kotei, December 1, 2013.

⁵Paul Ntiamoah, an apostle, founder and leader, interview by researcher, Hope Prayer Ministries International, Oforikrom, November 10, 2013.

⁶*Holman Bible dictionary*

⁷ Alexander Annor, a prophet and leader, interview by researcher, Power in the Word Ministry, Oduom, December 8, 2013

⁸Glenn Adams, "Perceptions of enemies differ across cultures." *American Psychological Association*, Vol 36, No. 6, 2005.

⁹ Richard Oduro.

Are The Enemies Physical, Spiritual or Both?

With respect to the form in which enemies take, the position of all the leaders was that, enemies can be either physical or spiritual. Oduro gave another category of enemies which are both physical and spiritual in nature. He further explained that, spiritually, the devil is the principal enemy of God and Christians. He also made mention of the fact that, it is the satanic kingdom that has given rise to all the false forces that fight against both the spiritual and physical well-being of all Christians.¹⁰

According to Solomon Agyei, the main mission of Satan is to deny Christians of heaven and so will keep on afflicting Christians with things that will make them deny God and his promises. He gave the story of Job as an example.¹¹ This view was shared by four (4) of the leaders who are all prophets. Two (2) of the leaders, Isaac Agyekum¹² and Paul Ntiamoah¹³ however, said, the devil can bring both riches and problems to Christians in order to win them away from the truth of salvation into hellfire. All the seventy (70) members accepted the fact that there are spiritual enemies. These views expressed by the interviewees affirms Onwu's statement that, the typical African cosmology sees the universe as a multi-dimensional entity inhabited by a hierarchy of spiritual beings and forces and that the earth is seen as an arena where the spiritual beings and forces interact with man for good or evil depending on the circumstances.¹⁴

Eleven (11) out of the thirty-five (35) males interviewed did not believe in the presence of physical enemies. They believe that all enemies are spiritual though their actions manifest physically. Some quoted Ephesians 6:10-12 to back their argument. In their view, whatever happens physically had already occurred spiritually and so it is better to deal with the spiritual enemy rather than fighting the physical man. They also think that, no individual can just hate a person if that individual does not possess an evil

spirit. This view agrees with the views of the people of North American settings as reported by Adams. In his research, he observed that, people in North American settings have a sense of freedom from enemies because they inhabit realities that promote an experience of relationship as a choice— they imagine that they can *choose* not to have enemies.¹⁵

“Concerning physical enemy, so far as we live in the flesh, we would never stop attracting people who for one or two reasons hate us with or without a cause” said Oduro.¹⁶ Fifty-nine of the members interviewed shared this view. One respondent observed that, in our day to day interaction we turn to hurt people knowingly or unknowingly who also become our physical enemies. According to Agyei, physical enemies can be found everywhere and in anytime and that no matter how hard we try to live in peace with all men, we will never get everyone to love us. There will still be those who will wish our downfall;¹⁷ another respondent in paraphrasing the scripture said that Jesus himself said woe to anyone if all men love you.

In relation to enemies being both physical and spiritual, all the seven (7) leaders agreed that enemies can be both physical and spiritual. On the other hand, mixed feelings were expressed on the part of the seventy (70) members interviewed. Eleven (11) of them did not believe in the presence of physical enemies though they admitted that the spiritual enemy works through the flesh but did not accept the flesh as an enemy. Richard Oduro observed that, some of the satanic forces operate within physical beings. He made mention of witchcraft as an example and said the spirit of witchcraft operate in the physical through human beings and this make people possessed by witchcraft tends to hate Christians because their spirit will not be in harmony with each other.¹⁸ Ntiamoah made mention that, not even education could rid off the fear of witchcraft and this he said most selfish ministers capitalize to amass wealth for themselves, tarnishing the image of the ordained ministry.¹⁹ Onyinah believes that African deliverance ministers have been building a *witchdemonology* that is strongly influenced by African cosmology and the centrality of witches.²⁰ Margaret Field states that, witchcraft is rooted

¹⁰ Richard Oduro.

¹¹ Solomon Agyei, a prophet and founder and leader, interview by researcher, Light Power House International, Ayeduase, November 24, 2013.

¹² Isaac Agyekum, leader, interview by researcher, Glorious Hope Fellowship Ministry International, Atonsu, January 12, 2013.

¹³ Paul Ntiamoah, an apostle and leader, interview by researcher, Hope Prayer Ministries International, Oforikrom, November 10, 2013.

¹⁴ N. Onwu, “The Hermeneutical Model: The dilemma of the African Theologian.” *Africa Theological Journal* 14, No. 3, 1985: 152.

¹⁵ Glenn Adams, professor and lead researcher at the University of Toronto.

¹⁶ Richard Oduro.

¹⁷ Solomon Agyei.

¹⁸ Richard Oduro.

¹⁹ Paul Ntiamoah.

²⁰ OpokuOnyinah, “Contemporary Witchdemonology in Africa” *International Review of Mission* 93, Nos. 370/371, 2004: 330-345.

in the psychological reactions of Ghanaians²¹ and Parrinder opines that an enlightened religion, education, medicine and better social and racial conditions will help to dispel witchcraft beliefs.”²² However, Ntiamoah disagrees with his remedies. The researcher also of the view that, although an enlightened religion, that is Christianity has grown in Ghana, belief in witchcraft has survived and has even been revived by the Neo-Prophetic strand of Ghanaian Christianity.

According to Annor, in the demonic kingdom, witchcraft is the lowest ranked yet the most feared by most Christians. He further introduced another group of enemies who operate both physically and spiritually as fetish priest and “mallams”. He continued that, this group is powerful and higher ranked than witchcraft and also works hand in hand with the spirit of witchcraft.²³ The researcher treats this statement as an allegation since there was no concrete evidence to back this statement. However, the above statement featured prominently in the preaching of several radio preachers the researcher monitored over a period of three months and also in most of the services she participated. During prayer and deliverance sessions it was common to hear expressions like “we tie demons, spirits of witchcraft, gods and goddess and powers of mallams.”

Handling of Enemies

It is one thing to have enemies and another to handle them. In handling enemies, all the leaders expressed that, physical enemies are better handled physically and spiritual enemies spiritually. According to Boateng, physical enemies are the ones Jesus said they should be prayed for and also fed when hungry and the spiritual ones should be rebuked as scripture directs.²⁴ Oduro in his opinion said, physical enemies should be handled with common sense. By “common sense” he meant they should be managed well so as to avoid physical confrontations. He further stated that, spiritual enemies are to be confronted spiritually through prayer and what he calls “revelational knowledge” or what is popularly called

“*akwankyerε*” literally meaning direction, because spirit do not die and that issues pertaining to the spirits cannot be proved at the law court physically unless God himself want to reveal his power to humankind. In his view, the issue of witchcraft which involves both physical and spiritual must be handled using common sense, prayer and “revelational knowledge.” He added that, he will not personally pray for the conversion of a witch or wizard and will not encourage anyone to do so. He also said he will not physically assault someone he considers to be possessed by witchcraft because the weapons of a Christian’s warfare are not canal.²⁵ Donkoh shared in this view. He narrated several incidences in his early life as a prophet to buttress his view. He said a lot of Christians have got itching ears wanting to hear things about witchcraft in their families or localities which got him into several family issues. He then learnt through his experiences to use discretion since a lot of Christians today are still babies in Christ. His advice was that, such Christians need sound teachings and not prophecies.²⁶ In a sermon ministered by Ebenezer Nyiadom and also testimonies from members of his church in a service the researcher participated, they narrated several incidences where they used “*akwankyerε*”(direction) in dealing with issues of witchcraft and other spiritual enemies. The researcher noted that, there was a constant mention of “*akwankyerε*”(direction) in most of the services; however, the contents of the “*akwankyerε*”(direction) were often kept secret. The issue of witchcraft which is both a physical and spiritual enemy featured prominently when the members were interviewed confirming Margaret Field’s report that the issue of witchcraft is rooted in the psychological reactions of Ghanaians. Out of the seventy (70) respondents, thirty-seven (37) of the respondents with twenty-eight (28) of them being females though claimed to be devoted Christians said they would not treat any form of enemy whether physical, spiritual or both kindly. They did not understand why they should feed, clothe or even pray for their enemies. Quoting Matthew 5:29-30, some said it is better not to have anything to do with an enemy. They continued that, they will neither greet nor do good to their enemies. But Isaac Agyekum said, “The fact that someone hates you does not give you the right to become his enemy”. He advised, “it is better to love and pray for an enemy and also to live in peace with an enemy as Jesus directed than to curse”. This he said will help in reconciliation process and

²¹Margaret J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

²²George Parrinder, *Witchcraft: A Critical Study of the Belief in Witchcraft from the Records of Witch Hunting in Europe Yesterday and Africa Today* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 202-03.

²³Alexander Annor.

²⁴KusiBoateng, a prophet, founder and leader, interview by researcher, End Time Spiritual Movement, Gyinyase, January 5, 2014.

²⁵Richard Oduro.

²⁶OheneDonkoh, a prophet, founder and leader, interview by researcher, Holy Ghost Worship Centre, Deduako, December 22, 2013.

also aid in reconciling the person to God.²⁷ Thirty-three (33) of the members interviewed believe in the rebuking of the spiritual enemies whiles twenty-two (22) of the thirty-three (33) said they will treat their physical enemies as Jesus directed in Matthew 5:44.

From the interview it was observed that, most Christians under the Neo-Prophetic strand of Ghanaian Christianity in handling enemies use the Scriptures in the Bible out of context to be the basis of dealing with their enemies.

Understanding and Usage of Imprecatory Psalms

It is well known that a number of the Psalms contain strongly worded prayers assumed to be for the defeat of the wicked, in this context an enemy. These are known as “imprecatory Psalms”. The researcher sorted for the views of the respondent on their understanding and use of such Psalms.

All respondents affirmed having prayed using the imprecatory Psalms. Four (4) out of the seven (7) leaders interviewed said that, they had not done in-depth study into the imprecatory Psalms. Three (3) claimed they have done detailed study of these Psalms. All seven (7) leaders were of the view that, they see nothing wrong praying using these Psalms. Annor in responding to the usage of the imprecatory Psalms said these Psalms has got more to teach Christians on how to pray and not just using them against an enemy. He said these Psalms teach Christians that vengeance belong to God and not the individual, the psalmist’s sincere faith and trust in the Lord, his obedience, righteousness and acceptance of his own short comings. He further stated that, if Christians would be truthful to themselves, they would confess that sometimes praying with these Psalms to the end of a chapter become difficult because at a point, they realize they do not measure up to the righteousness of the psalmist and or their situation is different from that of the psalmist and that, the best they do is to pick up verses that speak to their problem. Despite the above, he does personally use the imprecatory Psalms and often recommends it to his members when necessary.²⁸ His view agrees with that of Walter²⁹ and Kirkpatrick³⁰ even though they disagree at a point. According to Walter and Kirkpatrick, the psalms contain songs, praise and prayer that reflect the psalmist’s

faith and are also addressed to God. They also believe that although the psalmist list personal injuries, their call for vengeance are borne of the insults committed against righteousness and it is God’s honour that has been insulted, and therefore call for divine vengeance, and not personal revenge. They also agree that, the psalms are whole units and that verses are not to be taken out of the psalms and used on their own. They continued that, the message from each psalm for Christians does not come from individual invective verses, rather from the psalm as a whole. The expressions of faith and trust that usually accompany each psalm set the tone and not the call for divine vengeance and therefore each psalm expresses absolute trust in the Lord’s justice and mercy. They however believe that, the words of Jesus should be kept foremost and his words take priority over the psalmist. They also believe that, the psalms were not written with the intention of expounding doctrine to its readers. In their view, the prayers in the psalms are not doctrinal expositions and may not be taken as explicit doctrinal instruction in the art of cursing people. Again they agree that, the songs and prayers in the psalms are addressed to God and not commands from God as to what one should do. They continued that the psalms contain the heart-cries of a number of psalmists in a variety of situations; in joyful exuberance, desperation or guilt, the psalmists present their victories and defeats, their joy and their anger to the Lord. They are beautiful examples of honest prayer, even though many of the passages appear overly vindictive to our 21st century sensibilities. They further agree that, there is no mandate in the psalms for pronouncing curses on personal enemies and that the psalms are songs and poetry and as such they contain picturesque and figurative language. A proper interpretation should come from understanding the principles behind the language, rather than a shallow imitation of the words in a personal context. Oduro contributed that, David, one of the psalmist, is a man of experience and in whatever situation he found himself, he prayed or expressed himself as such. He continued that, if a Christian could freely use any of the psalms of praise to glorify God, why can’t that same Christian pray using Psalm 35 or any other imprecatory Psalms when they feel threatened.³¹ When the question of David crying over the death of Absalom and also sparing the life of Saul even though he had the opportunity to kill him were posed, Oduro responded with a scenario where a child wanted to kill his mother by shooting her to death, however a man came to her rescue by shooting the child from behind to death, will the mother of the child thank the man or she will weep for her

²⁷ Isaac Agyakum.

²⁸ Alexander Annor.

²⁹ Kaiser Walter, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1988), p. 172

³⁰ Kirkpatrick, *The Book of the Psalms*, Cambridge: University Press, 1906), p. 113.

³¹ Richard Oduro.

son he asked and replied by saying that, the mother will weep for her deceased son and even may call for the arrest of her rescuer. He said that was the case with David and Absalom. On the case of David and Saul, he said David did not kill Saul because Saul was an anointed man of God.³² All the seventy (70) members interviewed see the imprecatory Psalms as an example of how Christians should pray.

Concerning the harmonization of the imprecatory Psalms and the message of loving one's enemy and praying for them, all the leaders said the Bible never contradicts itself and that Christians must cease the misinterpretation and misapplication of scriptures. Donkoh said, no man can feed his spiritual enemy or even clothe them and so the Bible is clear concerning the handling of enemies.³³ The researcher sees some form of contradiction on the part of respondent concerning the physical handling of enemies and the use of the imprecatory psalms in the sense that the respondents believe in treating the physical enemies well and at the same time using the imprecatory psalm in praying against them. According to Templeton, virtually all major religions have "similar ideals of love, the same goal of benefiting humanity through spiritual practice, and the same effect of making their followers into better human beings".³⁴ Holladay indicated that, the call to love one's enemies must be exercised within the context of the claims of justice; if an injustice has been done, then it needs to be made right".³⁵ Jackson³⁶ is of the view that, the Greek word used in connection with the love of enemies is *agape*. This is a love of the will whereby one chooses to treat others, even enemies, within the context of their eternal welfare. He further postulate that, loving one's enemies would be expressed by praying for them, reconciling with them (if possible), and doing good to them. The goal is that by one's good works, he may convert the enemy. However, if a person chooses to remain an "enemy" and continues to afflict a person, Paul warns in Romans 12:19 that justice will be served by God. The researcher also believe that the Bible distinguishes between physical enemies and spiritual enemies (Matt 5:44; Eph 6:10-18) and that calls for fair treatment of the former.

Conclusion

³² Richard Oduro.

³³ OheneDonkoh.

³⁴ John Templeton, *Agape Love: Tradition*, pp. 2-3.

³⁵ Holladay, *The Psalms*, pp. 311 -312.

³⁶ Jason, "Do the Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics Clash?", pp. 1559 – 2235.

In the imprecatory Psalms, the enemy was the major target of the psalmists. All songs and prayer made to God in these Psalms were geared towards dealing with this hostile individual or group. This concept of dealing harshly with the enemy is now prominent in Ghanaian Christianity and being promoted by the Neo-Prophetic churches. A greater portion of time at prayer meetings, all night vigils and fasting programs are now dedicated to pray against one's enemy. The questions one may ask is who is this enemy and how should Christians handle them in light of Jesus teaching on love one's enemy and praying for them.

It is true that all Christians have a common enemy which must be properly handled. Apostle Paul in his admonishing in Ephesians 6:10-18 describes the kind of enemy Christians have and the best way they can handle them. These kinds of enemies are not physical and therefore need to be handled spiritually by adapting to godly principles; truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, the word of God and prayer. These godly principles are able to defeat whichever enemy one may have.

It is also important to note that as human, we cannot be isolated from disagreement and conflict with our fellow humans which sometimes may be hostile. However, Christians must note that the teachings of Jesus is paramount and that Jesus always seek that Christians live in peace with fellow men which is one of the godly principles Paul taught the earlier church in Ephesians.

Finally, love covers multitude of sin and as such to be called the Son of God, Christians must show love to all. The love of Christians must therefore be more practical rather than mere words.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that

(a) The leaders of the Neo-Prophetic strand should devote much time in studying the imprecatory Psalms in order not to use scriptures out of context in justifying their actions.

(b) Christians under the Neo-Prophetic strand should personally search the scriptures instead of solely depending on what their leaders say.

(c) Christians under the Neo-Prophetic strand should devote much time into profitable economic venture which will help promote their livelihood rather than wasting all their time in praying against an enemy which may not exist.

(d) The church should have effective and constant teaching services that are aimed at equipping their members with the understanding of their doctrines.

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