



On the doctrine of ‘child witches’ (‘enfants sorciers’), fruit of a ‘mari de nuit’

[Background and purpose of the doctrine](#)

[Critical problems created by this doctrine](#)

[Some responses to this doctrine](#)

[Conclusion](#)

The doctrine of ‘child witches’ must be declined, in both forms:

- the idea that a child can be possessed by a demon from birth and must be exorcised just because his or her mother is considered to be a sorceress;
- the idea that a child is the child of his or her mother and a ‘mari de nuit’ (a demon who has made the mother pregnant during an erotic dream) and so must be eliminated in one way or another.

While the churches who teach these doctrines of enfants sorciers would like to be seen as people who believe the Bible, these doctrines are simply wrong and must be rejected: they cannot be based on the Bible and are not compatible with it.

Those who promote them cannot be given the right to be members of the Federal Synod or any of its denominations. By this, the Federal Synod reiterates and develops a standpoint already expressed in 2008 by the Administrative Council of the Protestant and Evangelical Religion during a colloquium at the Federal Parliament: “We have absolutely nothing to do with these movements and we do not have any compliance regarding these practices.”.

[Sources](#)

Background and purpose of the doctrine

Within the Federal Synod, it is not denied that oppression by or dependence on a demon exists, even when we are talking about Christians. Nevertheless, we should be very careful before we say that someone is in that situation. When we say the same thing about children, it becomes even very problematic, even though we believe that this can happen (Mt. 15:21-28 || Mk 7:24-30; Mt. 17:14-21 || Mk 9:14-29).

We are speaking then about a situation in which the child is said to exhibit extreme forms of stubbornness, to evade schooling and to have a fondness to connive with other witches to cause havoc and stifle the economic, material and spiritual progress of their own family (Mercer 2013: 600-601; Bangura 2013: 200; van der Meer 2010: 23-24; Ngong 2010). It is said that demons possess these children on their own accord or otherwise (Bangura 2013: 200). To be freed from the grip of demons, they must undergo extreme forms of exorcism performed by special people, with a financial reward. This could amount to inflicting personal harm on the ‘child witch’ so that they are forced to confess their involvement in witchcraft and be delivered from the possession of the demonic spirits. Sometimes the deliverance sessions of children accused

of being ‘child witches’ occur during holidays and outside Belgium at the parents’ origin countries. During deliverance the demon must be addressed by name and commanded to leave. The authority of the name of Jesus is used to cast out demons and release the victim from bondage. To justify both beliefs that a child could be possessed by demons for which they must undergo elaborate deliverance rituals, Mark 7:25-30; 9:17-29 and Acts 16:16-24 are cited to ground the practice.

The doctrine of the ‘enfants sorciers’ in its fullest form posits that a child has been fathered by a demon (‘mari de nuit’), so that this child is half human and half demonic (in that case also called ‘enfants démons’), which makes that it is no problem in the eyes of those who follow this doctrine to neglect and/or torture it. This fathering must be taken literally according to partisans of this doctrine: “semen on the bed”, while no human male was there, they say, with reference to Genesis 6:1-4.

Critical problems created by this doctrine

Whereas the growth of the Church in the non-Western world and its spread among diaspora faith communities in the West has been praised, this growth runs the risk of bringing non-biblical beliefs and practices into the experience of the faith and practice of church life. Even though the boisterous rise of Pentecostalism is pitched alongside the faith’s ability to address unanswered questions in ways that make sense among adherents who share a preponderance for traditional spiritual realities (Anderson 2014: 135), yet an unprecedented reappearance of primal spirituality appears to be simultaneously occurring (Cox 1996: 83). For this reason, the belief that a child could be possessed by a demon and the practice of subjecting those ‘child witches’ to laborious deliverance rituals that compromise the child’s personal safety, raises several critical problems for church life and ministry.

Exegesis

First, the doctrine that children could be possessed by demons in this way is itself not based on a careful reading of the Bible. This is a surprising development because among immigrant Pentecostals, the Bible is considered the authoritative Word of God and final arbiter in matters of faith and practice. However, one does not need to read much before one realises that in all the four Bible passages cited above (Gen. 6:1-4; Mk 7:25-30; 9:17-29; Acts 16:16-24) upon which the doctrine of ‘child witches’ is based, none of the children brought havoc that stifled the economic, material and spiritual progress of their families. In fact, one was economically beneficial to the family. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the meaning of Genesis 6:1-4, but when several interpretations exist, we may never opt for an interpretation that is contrary to the rest of Biblical teaching. Such one-sided readings of the Bible are inimical to the growth of biblical Christianity among immigrant Christian communities.

The autonomous use of violence, especially towards children, must be repudiated (Eph. 6:4).

The pastor deserves a convenient salary, but his services cannot be conditioned by finances (Mt. 10:8; II Cor. 11:7b).

When the Bible speaks about fasting in the context of exorcism (Mt. 17:21 || Mk 9:29), fasting is expected at the side of the disciples, who should not think that they would be able to cast out the demon of their own or that it would happen automatically by their words. This is, however, not the case: the believer prays humbly and does not think that he is able to command God, as the magician does (Yamauchi 1983: 174-175).

Gospel, culture, paganism

Second, the push to relate the Bible to the cultures of the people who receive the gospel, convert and become practicing Christians must be carefully reconsidered. While contextualisation does invite converts to relate the message of the gospel to their cultures, they must allow the biblical gospel to sanction cultural practices. Despite the importance of culture, one cannot say that something must be acceptable for Christians just because it is a part of culture. Culture must be purified by our understanding of Biblical teaching (Eph. 4:17-24). A holistic understanding of the gospel must determine what theological practices the faithful are to embrace after conversion. Otherwise, Christians stay partly in pagan practices and would be guilty of setting aside the Word of God because of human traditions (cf. Mk 7:8-13). Things are getting terribly wrong when demons are at the centre of every worship service and not God's grace and honour.

Family conflicts

Third, the doctrine at stake always results in conflicts between families in the churches concerned and even within families and marriages. The child in question would not be recognised as a minor who needs to be protected by adult members of the faith community. Rather, because the child is seen as a product of witchcraft, it means that the child's family could be subjected to ridicule, and the child could face physical harm. While the faith community does not believe that these actions are harmful to the child, they are ethically wrong because they fail to protect the very segment of the faith community who deserve full protection (cf. Mt. 25:40; I Thess. 5:14; Prov. 14:31).

It is unacceptable that pastors linked with our churches would be known for intimidation, physical abuse and torture against accused witches and mentally ill patients (Adinkrah 2011: 745-747; not all examples are about Christian groups) or for asking money before they want to pray.

It is especially painful to see that this doctrine has only arrived in Christian circles at the time of the exodus from the inlands of Congo due to the war circumstances, at a time that children were considered to be 'superfluous', or

without protection because their own parents were not both alive anymore (YouTube 2018: 10').

Mental health

Fourth, those churches that assume children could be possessed by demons run the risk not to have enough attention for their mental health and wellbeing. In most cases, the erratic behaviour displayed by children for which they are accused of demonic possession, could be explained by a competent practitioner when the child's mental health is carefully assessed. Pastoral practices among Christian communities must learn to distinguish what is a psychiatric issue which could be managed using appropriate therapy. The mental health of all parishioners must be taken into consideration when dealing with such issues, because God is concerned about the peace and mental health of all people who trust in Him (cf. Col. 3:15; I Thess. 5:13; Isa. 26:3).

Care must be taken that people who believe they have been delivered from demoniac slavery, do not become dependent on those who have given them pastoral assistance.

Some responses to this doctrine

The doctrine of 'child witches' is based on a too easy integrating of a cultural tradition (cf. Kalu 2008: 178). This integration cannot be founded by an exegesis of Genesis 6, as it cannot be combined with the overall teaching of the Bible. The Bible – read in its entirety, not by single texts – is and must always be the norm for the Federal Synod.

Moreover, in its effects this doctrine easily leads to actions towards children (neglect and maltreatment, even cruelty) which are unacceptable for a Christian and are forbidden by children's rights legislation. The Federal Synod wants to stay here within the boundaries of Belgian legislation, especially as in this matter there is no contradiction between Bible and legislation.

Therefore, Christian churches need to adopt the following responses.

Prayer

In first instance, God's servants should pray and encourage parents to follow a Christian way of thinking. In Matthew 28:20, we read the promise that Jesus will walk with His disciples until the end of the age. As He is the same yesterday and today and eternally (Heb. 13:8), He will also chase demons as He has done during His ministry on earth.

Children's programmes

There must be appropriate children's ministry programmes that engage with children to provide the biblical, psychological and moral support they need to grow.

Training of pastoral workers

Pastoral workers of these faith communities require training in counselling and mental health issues, so that the mental as well as the spiritual health of all parishioners (including children) will be taken into consideration when serving their needs.

Room for specialists

If these interventions fail to resolve the issue, swift referral must be made as soon as possible to social workers and law enforcement personnel so that children could be protected.

Conclusion

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