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The Place of Exorcism in Contemporary Ministry

GRAHAM H. TWELFTREE

Here is a supposed case of demon-possession described by William Wilson, Professor of Psychiatry, Duke, North Carolina.

... (a) 32 year old, twice-married female was brought in because of falling spells which had been treated with all kinds of anticonvulsant medication. She was examined on the neurosurgical service and after all examinations including EEG, brain scan, and pneumoencephalogram were negative, she was transferred to the psychiatric service. Her mental status examination was unremarkable and all of the staff commented that she seemed normal until she had her first "spell". While standing at the door of the day room she was violently thrown to the floor bruising her arm severely. She was picked up and carried to her room all the while resisting violently. When the author arrived, eight persons were restraining her as she thrashed about on the bed. *Her facial expression was one of anger and hate.* Sedation resulted in sleep. During the ensuing weeks, the patient was treated psychotherapeutically and it was learned that there was considerable turmoil in her childhood home, but because she was "pretty" she was spoiled. She married the type of individual described by Jackson Smith as the first husband of a hysterical female. She was a "high liver" and after her separation and divorce, she was threatened with rejection by her parents. She remarried and her second husband was a "nice" but unexciting man. She continued to associate with her "high living" friends. When her husband demanded that she give up her friends and her parties, she started having the "spells".

The usual psychotherapeutic treatment for hysteria including interviews under sodium amytol only aggravated her spells. Seclusion in the closed section brought her assaultive and combative behaviour to an end but she would have spells in which she became mute, especially when religious matters were discussed. More dramatically, when the names Jesus or Christ were mentioned she would immediately go into a trance. On one occasion while in a coma, in desperation, a demon was exorcised and her spells ceased. She subsequently accepted Christ as her saviour and has been well since.¹

1 William P. Wilson, 'Hysteria and Demons, Depression and Oppression, Good and Evil' in John W. Montgomery (ed) *Demon Possession*, Bethel House, Minneapolis 1976, pp 225-6 (his emphasis).

I'm not an exorcist, nor even an expert in its theory. What interest I have in the subject arises largely from being a student of the New Testament and noticing the apparent importance of exorcism in the ministry of the historical Jesus and the early Church, yet the near non-existence or rejection of exorcism in the ministry of contemporary mainline denominations in the Western World. My interest is deepened, and questions also arise in my mind, as I reflect on the inadequacy and shallowness of my own ministry in the face of some pastoral problems.

The New Testament

Jesus: There is in fact plenty of reliable historical data from within as well as outside the New Testament to indicate that Jesus was, and was seen to be not only an exorcist but also an extremely successful exorcist.¹

Among the evidence for this conclusion is the selection of stories in the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus as an exorcist. For example Mark 5:1-20, perhaps one of the best known stories, reveals some of the methods of Jesus as an exorcist as well as some of the understood characteristics of demon-possession.²

The description of the man's sickness (verses 2-5) is in line with the view that demons were thought to inhabit deserted places and that the possessed could be oblivious to pain and had extraordinary strength. Verses 6-7 are examples of the initial dramatic confrontation between Jesus and the demonic which, in some form, is in all the New Testament stories and most of those outside it from the period. The demoniac seeks to ward off Jesus (v.7) by saying that he knows who Jesus is. Mark uses the words of the demon as a messianic confession. But the demoniac is probably only addressing Jesus in a way any demoniac might address any exorcist operating under the auspices of the Jewish God. From the way Mark relates the story it appears that Jesus confronts this demonic defence with a simple, well known command to the demon to leave. Jesus is acting as other exorcists did in the period. He is not successful. Instead the demoniac counter-attacks with an incantation. 'I bind you by God not to torment me!' (v.9) Jesus returns with another weapon - 'What is your name?' - and the battle is over. The demons plead for leniency and are allowed to transfer into the pigs so that they can, in turn, find a new home in the water. The man is well. There is much discussion and astonishment (verses 14-20).

Besides the stories another interesting piece of evidence is the use of Jesus' name in the incantations of other exorcists. For example, a pagan magical papyrus from just after the New Testament period has the formula:

1 See James D. G. Dunn and Graham H. Twelftree, 'Demon-Possession and Exorcism in the NT' *Churchman* 94 (1980) pp 211-15; Graham H. Twelftree 'EI DE . . . EGO EKBALLO TA DAIMONIA' in *Gospel Perspectives VI* (eds) Craig Blomberg and David Wenham, JSOT, Sheffield 1986; and *Jesus the Exorcist* (forthcoming).

2 For an historical examination of this story see Twelftree *Jesus, the Exorcist*, chapter III.

'I adjure you by . . . Jesu, . . .' (PGM IV:3019-20f.). And in Acts 19:13 the sons of Sceva attempt to perform an exorcism with the incantation - 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.' (cf. Matthew 7:22; Mark 9:38/Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18).

We could well echo the words of Harvey Cox:

'Though it frequently embarrasses us today, Jesus was viewed by his own age as a great exorcist. His power to cast out demons was central to his ministry . . . As the personification of the Kingdom he was recognised and feared by the demons he cast out . . . All this sounds extremely peculiar to modern ears. Most of us would prefer to forget that for many of his contemporaries Jesus' exorcism was in no way peripheral, but stood at the heart of his work'.¹

The Early Church: I have argued elsewhere that an investigation into the life and work of the early churches shows that the early Christians continued the practice of exorcism and that, rather than being peripheral to the ministry, exorcism was an important part of their mission.²

World Views

But has all or any of what we may find in the New Testament any relevance for the twentieth-century Church? In particular, are we to believe in demons, spiritual beings acting as emissaries of Satan? Can a rational twentieth-century Christian attribute all, some, or any illnesses to the presence of 'devils' in a person? Should the Church become involved in chasing away these devils in order to heal people?

To begin with, those who would answer 'No' to all these questions point out that the basic difficulty is that we now understand our world in a way that is, if not completely, then in many ways fundamentally different from the so-called 'mythical' world of the biblical writers.³ Their world was infested with demons; ours is not. But was the first-century cosmology so different from ours in that the belief in demons was part of their unquestioned mental furniture?

It is extremely difficult to determine what people in the New Testament period took on as unquestioned assumptions in their world-view. But it is easy to show that in some quarters the existence of demons was a matter of debate.

1 Harvey Cox, *Secular City*, SCM, London 1965, p 149.

2 Twelftree *Christ Triumphant*, especially chapter IV where the methodology of the early Church - which helps us bridge the gap between a twentieth-century methodology and that of the first century Jesus - is discussed.

3 See R. Bultmann in, eg, 'NT and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the NT Proclamation' (1941) in *The New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, selected, edited, and translated by Schubert M. Ogden, SCM, London 1985, pp 1-43 and Dennis Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible*, SPCK, London 1976.

From among many possible examples here is a passage written by Lucian of Samosata (c120-c180 AD). The passage, with a strangely modern ring, comes in the context of a discussion of healing where one of the characters says:

'Do you really think that certain incantations put a stop to this sort of thing . . .?' They laughed at my remark and clearly held me convicted of great stupidity . . . (Then a little farther on there is a discussion about demons). You act ridiculously . . . to doubt everything. For my part, I should like to ask you what you say to those who free possessed men from their terrors by exorcising spirits so manifestly' (*The Lover of Lies* para 16).¹

We may observe then – perhaps with some surprise – that at least on this point, the distance between the first- and twentieth-century world-views is not as great as some would have us believe.

Further, we also may note from the Gospel traditions that a distinction was often made between, on the one hand, sickness and healing and, on the other hand, demon-possession and exorcism (see, eg, Mark 1:34; 3:10-11; 6:13). Thus while people in the ancient world, including the New Testament writers attributed some ailments to 'spirits' they were not, by their world-view, bound to do so.

Our next question to help us decide on our attitude to demon-possession and exorcism is this: 'Is the prevailing scientific and secular consciousness of our society adequate to describe and interpret our knowledge and experience of our world?'

In *A Rumour of Angels*, a brief but important book, Peter Berger pointed out that under the pressure of contemporary secularization the Church has surrendered the supernatural. Yet Berger is able to cite a number of statistics, including some from a study in England in which nearly 50% of the respondents had consulted a fortune-teller, one in six believed in ghosts and one in fifteen had claimed to have seen one. He says:

'There continue to be quite massive manifestations of that sense of the uncanny that modern rationalism calls "superstition" . . . For whatever reasons, sizeable numbers of the specimen "modern man" have not lost a propensity for awe, for the uncanny, for all those possibilities that are legislated against by the canons of secularized rationality.'²

We can conclude then that while the Church in secularizing Western Society may have surrendered the supernatural a sizeable proportion of the population of the world has not done so.

A few years ago, through a National Opinion Polls Ltd survey two questions were put to people in Britain. One was – 'Have you ever been aware

1 For further examples see F. G. Downing, 'Our Access to other Cultures, Past and Present (or The Myth of the Culture Gap)' *Modern Churchman* 21(1977-8) pp 30-33.

2 Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1970, p 39.

of or influenced by a presence or a power . . . ?' To this question 36% of the sample of people gave a positive response. The other question was – 'Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?' To this question the positive response was 31%. Follow-up interviews revealed that some of this experience was thought to be of evil powers. This means that we could predict that over one third of the British population believe they have had some kind of religious experience that is outside the prevailing scientific and secular descriptions of our society and consciousness.¹

Clearly – to answer the question at hand – the contemporary secular scientific world view, devoid of the supernatural, which has mesmerized the Church, is not adequate to describe and interpret the breadth of human experience. The distance between the first- and twentieth-century is not as great as we might believe (or hope!); the people of the New Testament era did not always unthinkingly accept the supernatural nor that demons caused all trouble or sickness. Nor is the contemporary world so devoid of such experience that we can dispense with the supernatural, including the notion of evil spiritual beings.

Nevertheless it must be admitted that there is a 'cultural distance' between us and the New Testament world which makes it difficult to know if exorcism is to be part of our contemporary ministry. How are we to bridge this gap of understanding between the first and the twentieth centuries?

One attempt has been a direct appeal to the Bible as the sole input in the debate. For example, Leon Morris says, 'When the Gospels give us good evidence that it (demon possession) did take place it is best to accept this.'² However, an appeal to Scripture and Scripture alone, does not take into account the probability that what was once described as demon-possession may now, at least in some cases, be otherwise described.

Another attempt at bridging the cultural gap has been the programme to *demythologize* the first-century categories. For example, John Macquarrie wished to maintain the category of the 'demonic' in his theology for 'the sense of helplessness in the face of some movements or situations for which no one seems directly responsible and which no one seems able to control.'³ A question-mark must remain against such a limiting of the demonic. Is there nothing demonic about sickness of body and mind? If there is, as I would argue, then our task is not, or not only, to demythologize but to *remythologize* the New Testament categories of the demonic.

A third area which, for some, bridges the cultural chasm between the demonology of the first-century and the scientific world of the twentieth

1 From David Hay, *Exploring Inner Space*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1982, pp 118-9.

2 Leon Morris 'Demon' in *New Bible Dictionary*, second edition, IVP, Leicester 1982, p 278; further see Twelftree *Christ Triumphant*, p 147.

3 John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, SCM, London 1977, p 262.

century is the area of general medicine, psychology and psychiatry. The argument is that advances in modern medicine make it unnecessary to resort to such categories as 'demons', 'possession' and 'exorcism'.

For example, conditions such as epilepsy can be attributed to, among other things, alterations in the blood calcium (tetany).¹ Also the psychiatrist P. M. Yap has been able to explain some cases of 'possession' in terms of modern psychology as psychogenic-psychosis, that is an illness involving high psychic activity caused by some external shock or trauma.² This is a large cautionary note for those who too quickly attribute ailments and disorders to evil spirits.

However - 'An important unexplained residue remains, for which there is yet no psychological explanation, and which continues to leave the question as to whether certain happenings transcend nature.'³ This conclusion is supported by Kenneth McAll, a consultant psychiatrist, who says that of all the patients he sees four percent need some form of ministry of exorcism.⁴ This 'unexplained residue' is also a factor evident in some research done by anthropologists. In an anthropological study of spirit possession and shamanism I. M. Lewis writes:

'... where spirit possession is a regular explanation of disease, ... (this) ... does not necessarily mean that the people concerned are unable to differentiate between them and other forms of possession ... Insanity (or epilepsy) is usually clearly distinguished from other possession states.'⁵

Indeed, he says earlier:

'whether in the seances of suburbia, or in more rarefied surroundings, those mystical experiences which resist plausible rational interpretation are seen, even sometimes by cynics, as pointing to the possibility that occult forces exist.'⁶

While from this we cannot go on to conclude that there are no medical, psychological or rational explanations for the anthropologists' and sociologists' observations of an unexplained residue, it still does suggest that the question remains open. Also I am not arguing for a 'devil of the

1 Further see Twelftree *Christ Triumphant*, p 152-3.

2 P. M. Yap, 'The Culture-Bound Reactive Syndromes' in W. Cardill and Tsung-yi Lin (eds.), *Mental Health Research in Asia and the Pacific*, East-West Center, Honolulu 1969, pp 33-55. Cf. G. Obeyesekere 'The Idiom of Demonic Possession' *Social Science and Medicine* 4 (1970), pp 97-111.

3 K. Koch, *Christian Counselling and Occultism*, 1972, ET, Ev. Verlag, Berghausen, 1972, pp 218-9. See also Peder Borgen 'Miracles of Healing in New Testament: Some Observations', *Studia Theologica* 35 (1981), pp 91-106.

4 R. Kenneth McAll, 'The Ministry of Deliverance' *Expository Times* 86 (1974-5), p 297.

5 I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1971, pp 183-4.

6 *Ibid.*, p 19.

gaps¹ for it is also *most probable that even where diseases may be considered to have a natural or regular explanation the demonic dimension need not be ruled out.*

So we bridge the cultural gap of understanding between the first- and twentieth-centuries through an intelligent, questioning, ongoing interaction between what we see affirmed in the biblical material and our understanding of our world; not through a demythologizing but a remythologizing of the biblical categories.

Chaos and Theodicy

The practice of exorcism depends on the belief in some form of evil spiritual being interfering with human life and health which can however be expelled from the sufferer. But before we can proceed further and give positive reasons for positing the existence of evil spiritual beings there are two points to which we need briefly to divert our attention.

One is to note an aspect of the nature of evil. Eric Mascall describes the diabolic enterprise as fundamentally futile and incoherent. '... the demonic effort is one of sheer self-assertion, and in particular of self-assertion against God. It is not surprising, therefore, that the powers of darkness show themselves as a turbulent multitude of mutually conflicting egoisms.'²

So, not only will evil be experienced as inconsistent and incoherent, but it will also, therefore, be difficult to identify. Our discussions and results will always be in the shadow of this observation.

The other preliminary point – a potential stumbling block in our path of investigation – is the idea that if demons exist, God can be viewed as the creator of evil and as sustaining fallen, irredeemable, beings and allowing them to spoil the human world. Indeed it is generally agreed that ultimate responsibility for the existence of evil must be placed with God. The alternative is an ultimate dualism which Christianity has rejected. However the way in which God is held to be responsible is of considerable importance.

We could argue that with the creation of a realm of higher spiritual beings with moral responsibility and freedom, it would not be surprising that with their higher knowledge and freedom they, like us, rebelled against their creator, becoming God's antagonists rather than protagonists. Therefore, importantly, their origin is seen to be not in God's incompetence but in his love in creating free responsible beings. To show that God is not sustaining evil it is sufficient to point to the incarnation.

So far I have been trying to show that statements like – 'the army of spirits . . . has been . . . banished by the magic wand of science'³ – may not be fully correct. We have also noted the incoherent and chaotic nature of

1 See Michael Perry's review of *Christ Triumphant*, in *Expository Times* 95 (1985), pp 22-3.

2 E. L. Mascall, *The Christian Universe*, DLT, London 1966, p 125.

3 Frazer quoted by Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p 238.

evil and that the suggestion of the existence of evil spiritual beings does not lead to an inconsistent theodicy.

Before dealing specifically with exorcism we need now to see if we can go further and make a case for the existence of demons and their 'possession' of people. It must be said however that we are not trying to suggest a regression to the colourful demonology and cosmology of the Middle Ages or earlier. We want to see if a case can be made for a place in our world-picture for some form of unseen emissaries of evil.

Demons and Possession?

A place to begin is with John Macquarrie suggesting that creation involves a series of beings that occur in a kind of hierarchy, some beings standing closer than others to man - the paradigm of creaturely being.¹ To follow Macquarrie,

'There is, however, no reason why we should suppose that the series must terminate with man, . . . The panorama of creation must be far more breathtaking than we can guess in our corner of the cosmos, for there must be many higher orders of beings whose service is joined with ours under God.'²

Macquarrie does not use his argument to discuss demons or evil spirits because, he says, they 'have been eliminated through the secularization of our understanding of nature . . .'³ Nevertheless the suggestions of Macquarrie provide one fruitful way of exploring the possibility of the existence of some form of super-, or perhaps better, sub-natural evil spiritual beings.

We can advance our case by turning to an argument from religious experience. When discussing religious experience philosophers have sometimes claimed that it points to nothing beyond itself, yet when discussing experiences of other kinds they would not adopt this attitude.⁴

Several contemporary philosophers, including Richard Swinburne, argue in relation to the existence of God, that unless there is demonstration that very probably God does not exist, those who have religious experiences purportedly of God ought to believe them to be genuine. And even those who have not had any such experiences are faced with the great weight of testimony of personal experiences purportedly of God that they must agree to the considerable probability of his existence. In short, ' . . . Religious perceptual claims deserve to be taken as seriously as perceptual claims of any other kind.'⁵

1 Ibid., p 223.

2 Ibid., pp 233-4.

3 Ibid., p 238.

4 See Richard Swinburne, 'The Evidential Value of Religious Experience', in A. R. Peacocke (ed.), *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Oriel, Stockfield 1981.

5 Ibid., p 195.

With this argument in mind, and turning to the existence of evil spiritual beings, I would suggest that the material evidence collected by, for example, Koch, Richards, Montgomery and Perry¹ contain evidence of perceptions made by reliable persons in reliable circumstances of experiences which we must take into account as evidence as we consider the existence of some form of evil spiritual beings. Further, these reports not only advance the case for the existence of demons but also that such beings are able to take control of people.

Further to our case we can explore the notion of correspondence. Graham Dow, I think, correctly suggests that there is a correspondence between descriptions of present-day allegedly demonic phenomena and the descriptions of the New Testament.² For example there is a correspondence between the present and New Testament accounts of demonic possession in the reported superhuman abilities by the sufferer, which completely disappear after the healing.

Dow gives a second level of correspondence in that the New Testament writers, like our contemporaries, 'show the ability to ascribe similar disorders on some occasions to demonic realities and on others not.'³ Then, thirdly, Dow suggests another level of correspondence between the phenomena and the explanation offered – between the diagnosis and the cure, so that in many instances to suggest the activity of a demon is the most satisfactory model for understanding the reality present.⁴

The evidence offered for the existence of evil spiritual beings and possession does not mean that we can define 'demons', 'evil spirits' or 'possession' more precisely than to say that they are some form of evil agency often manifesting personal characteristics in control of human lives.

As an important aside we need to note that regardless of what we have said so far some people believe that they are 'possessed' by demons. Also, some people seem to define the demonic in terms of aspects of evil for which they ought, but refuse, to take responsibility.⁵

To conclude this whole point: the inability of the prevailing secular world-view to explain adequately the complex range of human experience of evil, along with the positive arguments for the existence of demons or evil spirits, leads us to conclude that it remains legitimate and meaningful for twentieth-century people to use such categories as 'demons', 'posses-

1 Koch, see n. 3 on p 138 above; John Richards, *But Deliver us from Evil*, Seabury, New York 1974; Montgomery see n. 1 on p 133 above; Michael Perry (ed.) *Deliverance: Psychic Disturbances and Occult Involvement*, SPCK, London 1987 especially chapters 9-10.

2 Graham Dow, 'The Case for the Existence of Demons', *Churchman* 94 (1980) pp 199-208.

3 *Ibid.*, p 200.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Note Perry (ed.), *op. cit.*, chapter 8.

sion' and therefore 'exorcism', even if less frequently and with somewhat different content to those who used them in the first-century. In fact, I would suggest that, without some form of 'demonology' twentieth-century people are unable to describe adequately their experience of evil and the subtle faces of human suffering nor, in turn, able to deal effectively with some expressions of evil.

A Demonology?

Even though a comprehensive and tidy demonology is neither possible nor necessary the New Testament has some important contributions to make to our thinking.

In contrast to some of the writers in the ancient world the New Testament writers are remarkably restrained in their interest in demons and demonology except where it relates to soteriology. Rather, the focus of attention is on God's salvation in Jesus.

The contemporary Church would do well to follow this example. The often quoted passage of C. S. Lewis from his preface to *The Screwtape Letters* bears repeating here.

'There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.'

In other words we should pay as little attention to the demonic as is pastorally possible. As we have already noted New Testament writers (along with their contemporaries) did not see evil spiritual beings as the cause of all evil and sickness. Even though in the context of the Jesus story all sickness was considered evil – in that it was over against God and the object of his saving action – it was not necessarily attributed to demons or even sin.

*Possession and oppression:*¹ Sometimes much is made of a distinction between demonic 'possession' and demonic 'oppression'. The difference to follow one writer, is that the 'possessed' are *controlled* by a demon, while the 'oppressed' are merely *distorted* by a demon. In turn this gives rise to two different forms of healing. On the one hand those who are 'oppressed' by a demon are prayed for so that they may be 'delivered'. On the other hand the 'possessed' need the ministry of exorcism.² So far as I can see the New Testament writers do not make these distinctions. While, in the New Testament, all sickness is understood as being evil and, further, some is seen to be the direct result of the activity of Satan (see Luke 13:16) the issue in relation to exorcism – the removal of an evil spiritual being – is not whether a person is possessed or oppressed but whether or not a demon

1 Further see Twelftree *Christ Triumphant*, pp 177-8.

2 See C. Neil-Smith, *The Exorcist and the Possessed*, James Pike, St. Ives 1974, p 148.

is involved in the cause of the illness. If a demon is involved then exorcism is the appropriate form of healing. In other words it seems unnecessary to make distinctions between forms of healing other than either, in the name of Jesus, to address a demon and direct it to leave or to ask God to bring about healing.

In Mark 9:29 Jesus says 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer'. The distinction between demons here may be between this 'dumb and deaf' spirit (9:25) and others. The assumption may be that the dumb and deaf spirit will not respond to being addressed and the exorcist turns to prayer.

Exorcisms?

Matthew and Dennis Linn offer a timely warning: 'Perhaps no prayer ministry can do as much harm and as much good as prayer for deliverance from the influence of evil spirits. The mistakes make headlines such as about a young woman in Germany who starved herself to death during exorcism prayer'.¹ We will address the questions of technique shortly. For the present the important questions are: When is an exorcism necessary? How do we identify the presence of some evil spiritual being and, in turn, the need for an exorcism? Writers like Koch, MacNutt, Richards and Perry² have produced helpful comments and guidelines which can be consulted and do not need repeating here.

All the balanced approaches of which I know strongly and rightly advise the closest co-operation with the various branches of the medical profession. In practice this may mean asking a person to seek traditional medical help during the period that Christian ministers are seeing them.³

The New Testament gives us hints as to how the demonic may show itself. We can also cite contemporary stories which illustrate these hints.

First, in the Synoptic Gospels we see that a change of character or behaviour, preternatural strength and indifference to pain are mentioned as signals of demonic possession. For example, the story in Mark 5 of the Gadarene demoniac relates such features. Michael Perry writes of Susan. 'The priest prayed with Susan, who suddenly went into a trance, hissed, and curled off the chair across the room like a snake'.⁴ The story from William Wilson, cited at the beginning of this paper, also illustrates well these kinds of changes as pointers to the demonic being involved in suffering.

Secondly, in the exorcism stories in the Gospels one of the distinctive features is the disturbance caused by the patient when confronted by Jesus.

1 Matthew and Dennis Linn 'Deliverance in the Tradition of Our Father: A Case Study' in Matthew and Dennis Linn (eds.) *Deliverance Prayer*, Paulist, New York 1981, p 22.

2 Koch, op. cit., see n. 3 on p 138 above; Francis MacNutt *Healing*, Ave Maria, Notre Dame 1974; Richards and Perry see n. 1 on p 141 above.

3 Further see Linn and Linn (eds.), *Deliverance Prayers*, especially chapter 10.

4 Perry (ed.), op. cit., p 88.

For example in 9:20 Mark says 'when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy and fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.' In a story reported by Michael Harper, there are the lines '... the moment the name of Jesus was mentioned, he went into another coma, his legs shot from under him, and he lay spread-eagled and inert on the floor.'¹ In a detailed case-study Matthew and Dennis Linn give the following description.

'... as I asked Jesus' light to flood into Georgia's eyes, all the contortions and voices started again. They persisted even as we commanded them to be quiet and to leave peacefully. Finally, we decided to command spirits one by one to leave. We had Georgia in the name of Jesus renounce the first spirit, gluttony. But the contortions started and prevented Georgia from either saying the name of the spirit or the name of Jesus Christ.'²

Michael Perry cites cases which have obvious points of contact with the story of Jesus' confrontation with the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum. For example: 'When the priest entered the room, the patient (without knowing of his visit) knew his name and where he was from and that he was an exorcist.' And in another story

'The exorcist was called in by relatives of the possessed woman... Immediately the exorcist entered the room, she started calling out details of his past life which he thought he had forgotten and were relevant to a wild youth...'³

So, in line with a New Testament perspective then, one of the important diagnostic signs of the need for exorcism is the disturbance caused in the sufferer at the name of, or by confrontation with, Jesus.

Thirdly, the New Testament story of the Gadarene demoniac suggests, and contemporary experience confirms, that one possible way of diagnosing a person's suffering being caused by an evil spirit is a strange or 'second' voice said to be produced by the evil entity.

Vivienne Stacey, a member of the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship and, for some years, principal of the United Bible Training Centre at Gujranwala, Pakistan, tells the story of a fourteen year old school girl. This story will illustrate for us the strange speech said to be associated with the demonic.

'The girl was not fully herself. Her speech was somewhat slurred but she was able to comprehend what was said to her. I asked her a few questions and then requested her to read a few verses from 1 John chapter 1. When she came to verse 7: "but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin," her speech slurred even more and she read like a six year old child. She had particular dif-

1 Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare*, Logos, Plainfield 1970 p 4.

2 Linn and Linn in *Deliverance Prayers*, p 24.

3 Perry (ed.), op. cit., pp 88 and 89, his emphasis.

ficulty in reading about the blood of Jesus and there was a kind of involuntary jerk when she came to this phrase. After several efforts she finished reading the verse. She was gradually being taken over by other forces and nearly unconscious. I decided to speak to the demons. To test them I said: "You are five". I have already been told she had four demons. Immediately in a voice totally different from the girl's the answer came back: 'We are four'. I then commanded the demons to give their names which they did. One was called Matthew, another was Pharaoh, another Parkash and the fourth was Kanta. These names generally belong to members of three distinct religious groups - Christian or Jewish, ancient Egyptian and Hindu.¹

Fourthly, *inner discernment*: This point is least obvious but most important. The subtle incoherence and devious nature of the demonic alerts us to the importance of the Christian involved in exorcism being able to discern inwardly God's prompting concerning the possible demonic dimension of an illness.

Another factor reveals the importance of this discernment. If an exorcism is performed for a person and their condition is not improved, 'the person may', as MacNutt warns, 'fall under a pall of condemnation believing that you (the exorcist) have seen demonic activity in him which has not been driven out and which still remains.'²

Thus we come to the issue of the credentials of the exorcist - here, the ability to discern the need for exorcism. For Luke this would come from the Holy Spirit; the prime credential of Christian workers, for him, is that they are people filled with the Spirit. And, with Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 in mind, we can probably say that Paul would agree that *discernment of the presence of the demonic and the need for exorcism is a facility given by the Holy Spirit*.

To sum up: we can list the hints that the New Testament gives on the problem of whether or not in a case of sickness exorcism is required (and, from the New Testament, as well as the extracts from stories we have cited, we would not expect every symptom or signal of the demonic to be apparent in every case of sickness).

1. A sufferer may exhibit physical symptoms such as changes in character and behaviour, preternatural strength and indifference to pain.

2. Initially the sufferer will probably respond adversely to a confrontation with Jesus or things to do with him.

3. A change in the sufferer's voice may be involved and

4. (given the involvement of the medical profession) spiritual discernment given by the Holy Spirit is essential in discovering the demonic dimension to illness.

1 Vivienne Stacey, *Christ Supreme Over Satan*, Masihi Isha'at Khana, Lahore 1986, p 19.

2 MacNutt, *op. cit.*, p 218.

Technique

The need for exorcism is often discovered through, and takes place in, the course of normal counselling. Therefore one's approach to counselling becomes an important part of the approach to and technique of exorcism. After very careful watching and listening, then probing gently to fill in gaps in the person's story, questions begin to emerge. Is this an emotional problem? Is there a problem in relationships? Is there a spiritual issue evident? Are mental problems to be suspected? Has the person had anything whatsoever to do with the satanic or occult? And, as one is listening with one ear to the person and the other to the Lord, does it seem that the demonic is involved? If so the issue will need to be raised and confronted squarely.¹

It was by no means a new idea, but the New Testament writers brought into sharp focus and developed the conviction that is fundamental to their notion of exorcism: that *exorcism is a confrontation between the divine and the demonic* – between Jesus and the demonic – in which the demonic is defeated.

Thus if the contemporary Church is to carry out exorcism successfully, the exorcist needs to make sure that the demons are confronted not by words, nor the exorcist, nor even the Church, but Jesus. From a New Testament perspective, MacNutt has no warrant for suggesting that a priest's form of exorcism should begin – 'In the name of Jesus Christ *and his Church* . . .' (my emphasis).² The incantation, or words or prayer of the exorcist are important, not because they are directly performative, nor because of any 'power' in themselves to evict the demons but because they help bring about a confrontation between Jesus and the demon. Similarly, the use of the Lord's Prayer as a prayer of exorcism is not only a misuse of the prayer but it fails to bring about a confrontation between Jesus and the demonic. The same criticism could also be made of those who suggest that the sacraments should be used in the defeat of evil. For, this also is to misunderstand the locus of authority and power for an exorcism. It is Jesus who, through his Spirit, confronts the demonic and defeats it, not the sacraments nor even our prayers.

John White suggests that as Satanists and those involved in the occult place a great emphasis on ritual: 'A ritualistic approach to overcoming demons seems to have the inherent weakness of playing the devils' game by the devils' rules . . . To depend on ritual for the exercise of power is to depend on magic. It undermines dependence on God.'³

Because of the deceitful and dangerous character of the demonic, exorcists in antiquity, including Jesus, took precautions so that the demons should do no further harm to the sufferer. In Mark 9:25 Jesus is reported as

1 Cf. John White, 'Problems and Procedures in Exorcism' in Montgomery (ed.), *Demon Possession*, pp 281-99.

2 MacNutt, *Healing*, p 224.

3 White in Montgomery (ed.), *Demon Possession*, p 296.

saying - '... come out of him, and never enter him again.' Thus the form of exorcism suggested by Michael Harper is appropriate:

'I command you to go where the Lord Jesus Christ sends you, and never to return to this person. I place you under the authority of Him who is "far above all".'¹

One of the noticeable, though not unique, aspects of the technique of Jesus and the early Church was that it was extremely brief and simple. The form of an exorcism was brief and simple for Jesus because of his sense of power-authority over the demons; for the early Church it was because of where they saw the operative power of the exorcism to lie. A long or verbose prayer might have been thought to be an inadvertent admission of a lack of insight as to the identity or nature of the demon or a sense of inadequacy or spiritual powerlessness on the part of the exorcist or even his authority to call upon the particular power-authority.

In Mark 9:29 there is the direction - 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.' In the context of the story of the disciples' inability to cast out a demon from a boy, the kind of demon in mind is probably a particularly difficult one to exorcise because it is dumb and deaf. Mark has Jesus say that prayer is to be used in these difficult cases. Presumably Mark means that the exorcist is to pray that Jesus(?) will evict the offending spiritual entity. If in exorcisms the spiritual credibility of the exorcist is involved, I wonder then if this direction is in order that, in difficult cases, the profile of the exorcist is even less significant, and that of the divine power-authority (Jesus) greater?

In the light of what has been said so far we can suggest a possible form of exorcism:

'By the power and authority of Jesus Christ I bind you, evil spirit, and command you to leave this person without harming them or returning and I hand you over to Jesus Christ.'²

In order that there be no doubt that the demonic is being confronted by Jesus this command might be preceded by a brief prayer asking Jesus to come, by his Spirit, in love and power to cast out the offending evil. In any case the principle of simplicity and open trust in the power of Jesus ought to prevail and pervade this aspect of our ministry.

The Exorcist

Exorcism depends on Jesus and his power. Therefore the fundamental qualification of the exorcist is a humble, fearless confidence in Jesus' presence and power. We need to proceed in intelligent simple trust. 'It is better,' says Koch, 'to exercise faith from the very start and be prepared to let God disappoint you . . . than to fail to exercise faith and thereby disappoint God.'³ Or, as White says, 'Perhaps the only prerequisite to our over-

1 Harper, op. cit., p 151.

2 See Twelftree, *Christ Triumphant*, p 187.

3 Quoted by White in Montgomery (ed.), *Demon Possession*, p 296.

coming the powers of darkness is that we fear God and God alone.¹

Even though the success of Christian exorcism depends on Jesus' coming into the situation, the human is involved in this aspect of divine salvation, as it often is. Therefore, as Luke wants to make clear, the identity or charismatic capability of the exorcist is important. From Luke's perspective this importance is in two directions. In one direction the exorcist needs to be authorized by the Holy Spirit. So having discerned that an exorcism is needed we would need to feel led by God that we ought to be involved in the person's healing. In another direction the exorcist, or someone involved in the situation, needs to have been given the gift to discern the nature of the spiritual entity to be confronted. For, knowing the identity and nature of the demons means that they can, despite their evasive habits be directly confronted and commanded to leave.

Despite the risks involved in this and many other forms of ministry we cannot go on to reserve this type of ministry for a select or particular group within the Church. So far as we can tell, New Testament writers know nothing of a class of professional Christian exorcists specializing in casting out demons. In Matthew, for example, it was probably the itinerant charismatics attached to and under the authority of the Church who included exorcism in their wider ministry (7:15-23). So far as we can tell exorcism was, for Paul (as Luke portrays it), part of his wider ministry (Acts 16:16-8).

If what authorizes an exorcist is not ecclesiastical appointment but the gifting of the Holy Spirit (Luke), belonging to the local Church family (Matthew) and being one of the leaders of that community (James 5:15), then exorcism is potentially within the capability of a wider range of Christians than the one minister or priest.

After-Care

A matter that arises out of the Bishop of Exeter's Report is the suggestion that on a priest's direction the evil spirit that has been evicted can be replaced by the Good Holy Spirit.² This notion is quite foreign to any of the New Testament writers. While an exorcist may call on Jesus to remove the demons the coming of the Holy Spirit into the life of a person does not take place on command. It is God who gives his Spirit to those who turn to him.

Nevertheless, on the matter of after-care, the parable of the seven other returning evil spirits is important for us (Matthew 12:43/Luke 24:6). This parable like the whole of the Beelzebub controversy pericope (Matthew 12:24-9/Mark 3:22-7/Luke 11:15-22) implies an important understanding on the part of Jesus and the Evangelists. That is, the coming of the Kingdom of God involves two integrated aspects of a whole. The coming of the

1 Ibid., p 298.

2 Dom Robert Petitpierre (ed.), *Exorcism: The Report of a Commission Convened by the Bishop of Exeter*, SPCK, London 1972.

Kingdom involves both the destruction of evil as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit. Thus exorcism is only part of a whole ministry. On exorcising an evil spirit from a person there needs to follow such counselling that, if at all possible, the person can respond to the coming of the Kingdom of God and receive the Holy Spirit. We can readily agree with Trevor Ling who says that:

'If exorcism is not the positive work of the Holy Spirit driving out and replacing the power of the demon, the result will be worse than the original condition'.¹

Conclusions

Father Francis MacNutt speaks for a growing number of Christians when he says:

'... in spite of my fear of losing a somewhat respectable image, the past three years have made me realize that there were some people I simply could not help merely by praying for inner healing. Prayer for deliverance sometimes was called for. Some people who came to me knew this and were quite calm and rational in describing truly extraordinary manifestations of apparently demonic attacks'.²

Later he says:

'... My initial avoidance of the deliverance ministry came from a fear of moving into an area that savours of superstition and primitive religion. Some of my closest friends find it easy to accept healing as a beautiful ministry of God's love, but to them any emphasis on the demonic seems like a retreat from reason into the realm of superstition'.³

But if a contemporary Church is to bring healing to the whole person, and be able to confront the great variety of manifestations of evil in human life, then it must be prepared to become involved in the ministry of exorcism. Exorcism – rare as it may be – has its rightful place as part of the whole ministry given to the Church to push back the frontiers of evil.

A Church and individual Christians are needed that not only recognize the broad and deceptive scope of the demonic in the world, but also are able to exercise a full and balanced ministry that includes exorcism – a bringing of Christ and his wholeness to the most deceptive and grotesque expression of evil. Thus Christians are needed who are confident in God's victory in Christ, of his protection and power available to those sharing in his ongoing declaration of the Kingdom of God and concurrent defeat of evil.

However, as we have already said, because of the distorting and deceitful nature of evil the contemporary Church ought to pay no more attention to the demonic, nor be involved in the ministry of exorcism any more than is pastorally absolutely necessary.

1 Trevor Ling, *The Significance of Satan*, SPCK, London 1961, p 19.

2 MacNutt, *Healing*, p 209.

3 *Ibid.*, p 211.

We have seen that the operative power necessary for Christian exorcism involves a function of the charismatic credibility of the exorcist, Jesus (the divine power-authority), and the precise confrontation between the divine and the demonic brought about by an appropriate prayer or command based on the insight given to the exorcist by the Holy Spirit as to the identity of the offending spiritual enemy. The credentials of the exorcist are important but do not narrow the field of potential exorcists to say, priests or ministers. Rather the field is opened to any Christian in the body of Christ so appointed and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

Seeing we have mentioned the potential dangers involved in the battle with the demonic – Mark likens it to a storm – we must stress the power and protection that is available to those whose ministry arises out of being chosen and empowered by the Spirit of Christ. We can echo Paul's confidence:

'... in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in the heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:37-9).

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