

THE MANIFEST DARKNESS:
EXORCISM AND POSSESSION IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

by

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(Under the Direction of William Power)

ABSTRACT

The thesis of this paper is as follows: The belief in demonic possession is historically integral to the Christian faith, and the corresponding practice of exorcism is experiencing a modern resurgence. I will address the theology of possession and the practice of exorcism within the context of Christianity, with particular focus on Catholic exorcism and Protestant deliverance. The foundation for this study is developed through a discussion of theodicy and the evolution of adversarial personalities within the Christian tradition. Following this, an examination of the practice of exorcism, its role within the religious experience, its therapeutic benefits and hindrances, its primary controversies, and a few sample cases, will further develop the thesis.

INDEX WORDS: Exorcism, Possession, Satan, Theodicy, Christianity, Demonology, Department of Religion, Jamie H. Parsons, Masters of Arts, The University of Georgia

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1 INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND PURPOSE..... | 1 |
| 2 THEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF ADVERSARIAL PERSONALITIES | 5 |
| Theodicy | 5 |
| The Role of Satan in the Christian World..... | 17 |
| 3 FOUNDATIONS OF EXORCISM AND DEMONIC POSSESSION | 20 |
| Demons in the New Testament | 20 |
| The Practice of Exorcism..... | 24 |
| Exorcism of Objects and Places..... | 25 |
| Exorcism of People | 26 |
| Symptomology | 28 |
| The Ritual of Exorcism..... | 30 |
| 4 DELIVERANCE MINISTRY | 35 |
| Comparing Catholic and Protestant Exorcism Ministries..... | 35 |
| History of Protestant Exorcism..... | 39 |
| Protestant and Possessed in 1574..... | 43 |
| Exorcist as Shaman, Exorcism as Therapy | 47 |
| 5 MODERN EXORCISM..... | 52 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Controversies and Crimes | 52 |
| Exorcists Online..... | 59 |
| Representative Cases | 62 |
| Mount Rainier, 1949 | 64 |
| Florida, 1991 | 68 |
| Deliverance and Mass Exorcism..... | 71 |
| Conclusion | 72 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 74 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND PURPOSE

And when he has stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many."¹

Whether one believes that evil exists as a personified, physical reality, capable of infesting the hearts, bodies, and souls of any who crosses its path, or as an abstraction, a vague and treacherous philosophical idea reflective only of the darkness which naturally resides within all people, one cannot deny the power of these words: "My name is Legion; for we are many."

This statement taps into a deep and very human fear of the monstrous. Many children grow up afraid of the monsters under the bed, in the closet, in the dark itself. These fears are primal; they echo the uncertainty of life, wherein our understanding of the world is truly, starkly limited, and we are incapable of defending ourselves against those things which we do not

¹ Mark 5:2-5:9

understand, and cannot see. These ancient demons—Legion; Satan; Beelzebub; Asmodeus, and so on—attack human beings in the most brutal way: by taking away humanity and turning the victim into no more than a vessel for Evil.

Demonic possession and its cure, the practice of exorcism, is an oft neglected aspect of theological discourse. Most often seen as a relic of a superstitious past, perhaps even slightly embarrassing to those who can cite such beliefs in the genetics of their religion, the idea of demonic possession is commonly believed to have wasted away in popular belief, and been replaced by the less intangible disciplines of medicine, neurology, psychology, and their kin.

However, there is no denying the reality of these beliefs. They are firmly entrenched in Christian tradition, both Catholic and Protestant.² They are hopelessly and permanently intertwined with more dignified theology; in many ways, demonology, possession, and exorcism comprise the dark underbelly of a respectable Christianity. Additionally, in recent years a resurgence in such beliefs can be seen, particularly among Catholics and more conservative Protestant groups.

The study of demonic possession and exorcism is not an obscure or elusive evaluation of some distant theology. This is a real-world issue, with real-world consequences. A 2007 Harris poll, which sampled 2,455 Americans, found that 62 percent believed in the existence of Satan, compared to 42 percent who wholly accepted the Darwinian theory of evolution.³ It found that belief in the Devil was much higher amongst “born-again” Christians, and slightly lower among other Protestants or Catholics. Whether these beliefs are in the forefronts of the believer’s minds

² Throughout this paper, I refer very generally to “Catholic” and “Protestant” Christianity. This is merely a convenience which reflects the doublet-nature of exorcism, and should not suggest that all of the many varieties and subtypes of each, or the other strains of Christianity, such as Eastern Orthodox or Coptic, are somehow less important.

³ W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2009), 3. Ed Stoddard, “Poll Finds More Americans Believe in Devil Than Darwin” *Reuters*, November 29, 2007, accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/11/29/us-usa-religion-beliefs-idUSN2922875820071129>

or are simply the standard answer given based on a religious heritage, is difficult to tell. However, it is certain that belief in Satan is widespread, particularly among fundamentalist Christians. As a result, his presence can be felt by believers and non-believers alike, and that presence may take the form of demonic possession, which translates into heavy controversy. That controversy is based on more than just the assumption by non-believers that the belief is superstitious; rather, it involves the vitriolic dispute over the necessity and forms of exorcism.

Exorcism has arguably helped many people, but also it can have tragic consequences. Horrific, painful deaths have occurred during exorcisms; they have occurred with frequency in recent years, and they occur all over the world, in nearly every denomination. Satan was cast very early in Christian history as a battlefield foe, and that attitude of a warlike fight very often translates directly into the actions of an exorcism. This is not a subject for casual discussion. People are dying, and a critical evaluation of the factors surrounding their deaths is necessary.

The thesis of this paper is as follows: The belief in demonic possession is historically integral to the Christian faith, and the corresponding practice of exorcism is experiencing a modern resurgence. I will address the theology of possession and the practice of exorcism within the context of Christianity, specifically Catholic and Protestant, and show how the understanding of these beliefs and practices is important in modern society. Chapter Two begins with a discussion of theodicy, the issue which has given Satan his armor against expulsion. Then, I will show how he has become the Devil as he is known today, through a tour of his development, from his first appearances as a minor character in the Old Testament, to his starring roles in modern films. Chapter Three will address the basics of the practice of exorcism, as well as the New Testament foundations of that practice. Chapter Four will focus on Protestant exorcism: the ministry of deliverance. Chapter Five will conclude with a discussion of the modern practice of

exorcism, and will highlight several controversies and crimes associated with exorcism which have appeared in the media, and finally will highlight a few sample cases.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF ADVERSARIAL PERSONALITIES

Theodicy

The phenomena of demonic possession and exorcism do not exist in a vacuum. They originate from a complex network of beliefs associated with the satanic, and at its core is theodicy, the problem of evil. The problem of evil has plagued the minds of human beings since the dawn of conscious thought, but it is only in the strict monotheism of the Abrahamic religions that the issue becomes treacherous, both in terms of betrayal and in theological danger. How does one reconcile one God, alone and almighty, who is at once omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent, with the existence of evil in the world? This issue is a frequent subject of discussion among philosophers of religion and apologists; likewise, its inherent difficulty has resulted in its regular use among critics of monotheistic religion.⁴

There are two different types of evil which are often cited in theological analysis: natural evils and moral evils. Natural evils are those which humans seemingly have no control over, such as tornadoes, cancers, and miscarriages. Moral evils are those which are caused by the actions of humans, such as murder and rape, all the way down to the most venial of sins.

The question of why God allows natural evils tends to get less attention than that of moral evil. Why does God allow individuals to commit atrocities? Why did he not create man such that he would not feel such compulsions? Why does he not prevent them once they are in danger of occurring? Because, any interference between God and the actions of humanity constitutes a denial of free will. Since free will is a cornerstone of the Christian faith, taking away the ability

⁴ James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, (New Jersey: Pearson, 2009), 254.

of people to choose sin, commit sin, or even think of sinning, would fundamentally damage the theological structure of Creation.

However, at the same time, by granting humanity free will, giving the capability to do evil, and permitting sin, could it not then be argued that evil originates with God? This is another sticking point in theodicy. From where does evil originate, ultimately? It cannot be said that it originates with God, for he is omnibenevolent. Yet, to say that it originates elsewhere is to grant power to something other than God. Augustine argued for *privatio boni*: evil is simply an absence of good.⁵ If one moves away from God, one removes oneself from the good. Origen made a similar argument.⁶ Leibniz argued that evil is necessary so that the greater good may come about:

...God could not prevent sin without acting unreasonably...although God wills by his 'antecedent' will that men sin not, He permits them to sin by His 'consequent' or 'final' will for 'superior reasons.' The 'consequent'... 'tends towards the production of as many goods as can be put together, whose combination thereby becomes determined and includes also the permission of some evils and the exclusion of some goods, as the best possible plan of the universe demands.'⁷

Many theodicies have emerged since the youth of Abrahamic faith; Augustine's *privatio boni* and the Greater Good of Leibniz are prime examples.⁸ The issues with many of these theodicies include their complexity and basis in faith; as with many other aspects of religion, they are unlikely to satisfy a determined critic. It can also be argued that the average person, particularly in the early days of Christianity, would not have been well-versed in the theological

⁵ George F. Thomas, *Philosophy and Religious Belief* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 226.

⁶ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 202.

⁷ George F. Thomas, *Philosophy and Religious Belief*, 230.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 226-232.

arguments of the Church Fathers or in Rabbinical discourse. How much easier it would have been for the clergy to assign the difficulties of the problem of evil to a stalking, sin-enticing, terror-inspiring Figure of Evil, than to discuss at length the vagaries and twisting pathways of theology! This figure, in all his dark and terrible drama, has spellbound the minds of the people and gripped their hearts with an unrelenting fear to a depth which the other theodicies can never hope to achieve. Never mind that his existence damages the house of cards which is the problem of evil; Satan is an enthralling personality, at once a scapegoat for man's worst inclinations and weaknesses, as well as an example of the inevitability of a Fall.⁹

The problem of evil is mainly a monotheistic issue. A religion which contains deities of evil enjoys a balance which Christianity does not; evil of all types is simply blamed on the evil Gods. The evil Gods of non-Judaic traditions formed the basis for the demonology of Christianity. Belief in specific entities which could directly act on the lives of human beings was widespread for most of recorded history prior to Christianity, and was popular during the Hellenistic period. Leaching of these beliefs into the early ministry was only natural, and Jesus was not unique as an exorcist, except perhaps in that his abilities were deemed miraculous rather than magical.

The Biblical texts do not make it clear either from where Satan or the demons came or where their powers originate, or what their greater purpose is here on Earth. This has led to a great deal of speculation and interpretation, from the very earliest days of Christianity, up to

⁹ A parallel can be drawn between the Fall in the Garden and the Fall of Lucifer. Both falls are indirectly related to desire to rebel against God; even if the First Couple were tempted by the serpent, they made the free will choice to act against his prohibitions. Likewise, Lucifer was tempted by his own desire for power, fuelled by pride. Pride, ultimately, is the source of both Falls. Also noteworthy is a detail regarding the serpent: it is only a serpent, not Satan. It was not until much later that the serpent was equated with a specific personality of Evil. See: Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 131; Edward Langton, *Satan, A Portrait* (London: Skeffington & Son, Ltd, 1945), 20.; Bernard Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1952), 35. James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 278-279.

modern commentary. Certainly, he did not arrive fully formed. There are only three references to him in the Hebrew Bible, and none of those refers to a distinct personality. He does not appear as Satan, a specific embodiment of Evil, until the New Testament. What do appear are numerous references to demons and lesser “satans,” and, perhaps more importantly, the myths of the fallen angels, which were later assimilated into the satanic legacy.¹⁰ Essentially, three categories of adversarial personalities can be identified in the Hebrew literature: Satan as the adversary; the myths of the fallen angels, from which an extensive demonology can be extracted; and other demons, such as Leviathan, Azazel, and Belial, who appear occasionally as solitary personifications of evil independent of their own mythologies. Additionally, many aspects of the early satanic legacy can be traced to pre-Judaic beliefs and personalities of evil.¹¹

By the late Second Temple Period, theodicy had become a crisis; it was necessary to resolve the issues of human suffering in the face of the soul-shattering evils which were perpetrated against the devout. One such method was apocalyptic and eschatological literature; another was the development of the satanic.¹² Despite the dangers a figure of Evil presented to monotheistic theology, the idea gripped hold, and became an integral part of the Christianity which would emerge out of Judaism over the next several centuries.

The idea of a vindictive, hostile, militaristic Satan resulted from the persecutions and martyrdoms which were widespread before the conversion of Constantine in the early 4th century, and the subsequent conversion of his empire to Christianity.¹³ These traits were perhaps only minor shifts from the fallen angel mythology and the vaguely militaristic construction of the angelic hierarchies which were present in the Old Testament and the extra-canonical literature, as

¹⁰ Peggy Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: Satan in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 15.

¹¹ For an extensive discussion of these influences, see: Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

¹² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 175.

¹³ Carolyn Eng Looi Tan, "Humanity's Devil." *Evangelical Review of Theology* (2010): 138.

well as the aggressive and relentless Satan of the New Testament, but they had far-reaching consequences for the elaboration of Satan as a battlefield enemy.

This idea of Satan as a militant, warlike leader was quickly and thoroughly integrated into many of the theodicies which developed during those early centuries of Christianity. Although later theologians, such as Augustine and Aquinas, may be the darlings of Church theology, it seems that it was the earlier thinkers who had a more profound impact on the idea of Satan. It was they who molded him into the The Old Enemy, and who created the enduring core of his personality.

Among the early martyrs was Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who died in Rome in 107 CE.¹⁴ On his journey to Rome after his conviction, he addressed seven letters to Churches throughout the Near East, and from these an understanding of early Christian beliefs in Satan can be gleaned.

Ignatius was a borderline gnostic, and his worldview placed materiality firmly in the realm of Satan. The ever-present threat of martyrdom was reflected in his fear of the material world; Ignatius believed that Satan was a real, personal threat to every individual Christian, and that the trials of this world were a tool by which Satan sought to corrupt the faithful.¹⁵

Perhaps the largest threats Ignatius perceived were those of the schismatics and the heretics, those individuals and groups who, in his view, were out to destroy the community of God either through their violence or through their corrupting philosophies.¹⁶ These individuals were not the misguided or honorable heathens whom Dante would later trap in Purgatory; they were evil, and Satan was their Lord. Martyrdom at the hands of these agents of Satan was the ultimate sacrifice by which Ignatius hoped to reach God; his blood would seal his pact of love in

¹⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 4.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Christ: “I am God’s wheat, to be ground by the beasts, so that I may be offered as pure bread of Christ.”¹⁷ Ignatius’ wish was granted, and it is presumed that he was killed in a flurry of celebratory games in Rome.

In the early 2nd century the Epistle of Barnabas was written by an anonymous author, and it furthered the idea that the Earth was a battleground between the forces of good and evil.¹⁸ However, the strongly anti-Jewish rhetoric which saturates much of this work lends a polemical tone which is much more direct than is found in some of the other Apostolic works; his emphasis on Jewish doctrine and thought has led some to argue that this author was a converted rabbi.¹⁹

The worldview expressed by Barnabas was one of a clearly divided world in which the armies of darkness were ranged in opposition against the armies of light.²⁰ While the tone of Ignatius is rousing, it is often resigned; the acceptance of martyrdom and the conquest of evil through surrender are recurring themes. Barnabas on the other hand, is more assertive; he calls for individuals to recognize that they are either on one side of the battle or the other. To him, it is very much an attitude of “with us, or against us.”

A very important theme in the development of theodicy emerges in this work: the human soul as battleground. Ignatius had placed the fight against Satan in the hearts and minds of individuals; Barnabas recognized that the soul was key to the corruption of the individual. Therefore, Satan would perceive it as the ultimate prize, and use every means in his arsenal to capture it. For Barnabas, the primary weapon was temptation. Although obsession and possession (demonic attack from without and invasion of the physical body for the purpose of

¹⁷ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 43.

¹⁸ Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “*Biblical Literature*.”

¹⁹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 38.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 39.

attack from within) were widely accepted possibilities at this time,²¹ Barnabas seems to have realized that neither of these attacks could ultimately conquer a soul. For this to occur, the heart of the individual would have to consciously and willfully turn away from God; therefore, Satan sought to accomplish this through temptation. This idea that individuals have the power either to yield to or to conquer the Devil within their own souls is perhaps a reflection of the Jewish conception of the good and evil inclinations.²²

Like both Ignatius and Barnabas, Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna (d. 155) emphasized the earthly battle against the forces of Satan. In the early 2nd century, a correspondence between Pliny, governor of Bithynia, and Emperor Trajan clarified the law surrounding the legality of Christianity. Christians were not to be hunted down and executed, but rather if they happened to be accused and they refused to recant, they should be punished. However, their sentence would be eradicated should they recant their “atheistic” beliefs and praise the gods and Emperor.²³ Despite this mitigated policy of Christian persecution, execution and harassment still occurred regularly, and the mood of fear was well established within the Christian community. Polycarp himself was executed at age 86 when he refused to recant his beliefs before a judge.²⁴

His theodicy appears to be an elaboration upon and clarification of that of Ignatius—though Polycarp was much younger, the two men did know each other—and that of Barnabas. Martyrdom, persecution, and the evil designs of the heretics were at the forefront of his worldview. Torture and execution were weapons of the devil, but rather than emphasizing the external consequences of these acts on the Christian community, he focused on the internal battle that the victim underwent. Torture could influence a good Christian to reject God, and the

²¹ Ibid, 40.

²² Ibid, 41.

²³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 40.

²⁴ Ibid, 44.

temptation to do so was firmly in the territory of the Devil.²⁵ Therefore, he acknowledged the soul as the ultimate prize of Satan, and the individual's responsibility to fight against him with the whole of his being.

He further developed this idea of the soul as battlefield by reasoning that if Satan could tempt the soul, so too could it be strengthened by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ Therefore, the *yetzerim* of rabbinical thought are further elaborated upon and absorbed into early Christian theology; the good and evil inclinations are personified, respectively, by Satan and the Holy Spirit, and each individual becomes a soldier of Christ from his or her material body—which could perish in the flames of the tyrants—to the deepest parts of his or her spiritual self: the soul.²⁷

Following on the heels of the Apostolic Fathers was Justin Martyr, one of the first Apologists. He was a converted pagan who nurtured a deep dislike of his former religion, and he spent a great deal of time refuting pagan and gnostic ideas. However, he retained his predilection for classical philosophy, and much of his theology reflects philosophical methods.²⁸ While Ignatius had spoken explicitly against pagans who seemed to present logical and valuable ideas, Justin was more forgiving and argued that these virtuous philosophers were hated by the demons, thereby releasing their thought for use by Christians.²⁹ Justin's hatred of paganism is reflected in his notion that all of the myths which seemed to have influenced Scripture were in fact placed by demons into the minds of the pagans; since the demons are aware of future events, they were able to discredit Christian doctrine in a pre-emptive strike.³⁰

²⁵ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ For extensive discussions of the *yetzerim*, see Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Two Rabbinic Inclinations? Rethinking a Scholarly Dogma." *Journal For The Study Of Judaism: In The Persian Hellenistic & Roman Period* 39, no. 4/5 (2008): 513-539; or Johann Cook, "The Origin of the Tradition." *Journal For The Study Of Judaism: In The Persian Hellenistic & Roman Period* 38, no. 1 (2007): 80-91.

²⁸ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 75.

²⁹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

Justin incorporated the myths of the fallen Watcher angels into his diabolology (the theology of the demonic), which included three distinct categories of adversarial personalities: Satan alone, the fallen angels, and the demons, who seem to be the children spawned by the fallen angels when they engaged in intercourse with human women.³¹ Justin leans far away from a dualistic mythology; all of these personalities are inferior to God, and their evil is a result of sins that they chose to commit of their own free will.³² Satan himself appears to be just another fallen angel, although his sin is far antecedent to the sins of the other angels; he assumes a position of primacy in evil by being the first to rebel against God's good will.

Although Justin held that Satan was defeated by the Passion of Christ, he maintained that Satan was still permitted to enact evil in the world, despite being under punishment. Although Christians were not actively sought out during Justin's time, prosecution and execution were still common. Like the Apostolic Fathers before him, he felt he was living during the last days, and that the parousia was imminent. It was this event, the Second Coming, that would bring about Satan's ultimate defeat and usher in the new age. Also like the Apostolic Fathers, he argued that persecution, torture, and martyrdom were tools of the devil. It was the duty of the Christian to surrender to death at the hands of the heathens, for only then could the good Christian prove his conquest of Satan.³³

The theology of Irenaeus followed shortly after that of Justin Martyr. He was an active participant in the late-second century Christian community, both with his writing and through his position as Bishop of Lyon. He was a student of Polycarp, and therefore his theological heritage can be traced back to the first theologian discussed here, Ignatius.³⁴ Theology at this time was

³¹ Bernard Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 82.

³² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 66.

³³ *Ibid*, 69.

³⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 68.

still very young; many devout Christians spent their lives attempting to elucidate and systematize the doctrine of this new religion. Irenaeus was fortunate to have roughly a century of Christian theological thought come before him; he was able to stabilize that thought to a degree which had not yet been achieved.³⁵

Although Irenaeus was the theological grandchild of Ignatius, he rejected the gnostic idea that the world is inherently evil and a product of Satan.³⁶ Rather, he further developed the notion that Satan, along with the other fallen angels, was born good and later became evil as a result of his own free will choice to sin. Here the Devil develops a distinct personality as the Tempter; like Justin, Ignatius emphasized Satan's desire to turn the hearts of mankind away from God: "the Devil deceives our minds, darkens our hearts, and tries to persuade us to worship him rather than the true God."³⁷ Satan's animosity towards humanity is based on jealousy. He envies the favor God placed on humans by creating them in his own image; this act placed the material universe under the authority of Adam rather than the angels.³⁸ Since the angels have divine primacy over humans, this was a slight which Satan could not forgive.

Though he was far from the first to do so, Irenaeus' diabolical structure places Satan in the Garden with Adam and Eve.³⁹ There, either as the serpent or through the manipulation of the serpent, he succeeds in tempting the first couple to sin, thereby polluting all future generations of humanity; the only defense against him is Christ. Here, Satan is firmly fixed as the jealous tempter, united with the myth of the fallen angels. Now, he is fully recognizable as the Satan of modern Christianity.

³⁵ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 80.

³⁶ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 80.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 81.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ Elaine Pagels, "The Social History of Satan, Part Three, John of Patmos and Ignatius of Antioch: Contrasting Visions of "God's people." *Harvard Theological Review* (2006): 488.

However important these early theologies were, the necessity for a personality of evil was distasteful because it echoed pagan dualisms. Some early theologians, like Augustine and Origen, managed to create elaborate systems wherein God was absolved of responsibility for evil and Satan became extraneous. For example, Origen argued that evil was non-being, and that it strengthened the farther one moved away from God. Augustine took this argument further, and showed that evil was not a thing in and of itself, but rather a privation, a lack of good. Disease, for example, is merely an absence of health; likewise hate exists because love is lacking.⁴⁰ This privation theory should be taken in context with his evaluation of free will and the completeness of the universe. Free will is a good granted by God. It is not inherently evil in any way, although humans, as well as angels, may use it to do evil. God permits this corruption of his good gift in order to lend plenitude to his creation. Perfection requires comparison against something less than perfect in order to be recognized as perfect; therefore the evils of the world, when viewed in comparison to the ultimate perfection of God, can be understood to be lacking in degrees of goodness.

This argument is necessarily complex, and it is not difficult to see why it did not appeal to the masses. Satan may have been a threat to Christian theology, but he was not going to give up his position of power quite so easily. Over the course of a millenium, satanic theology developed into a form recognizable today. The general movement of much of the thought regarding Satan leading up to the time of the Scholastics was toward solidification of the concepts that had been developed by earlier thinkers.

Also important during this period was the development of the practice of exorcism. Finding its roots in Scripture, the tradition of exorcism was well established in the Church early

⁴⁰ George F. Thomas, *Philosophy and Religious Belief*, 227.

on; there was a formal order of ordained exorcists in the early Church, but soon their duties were taken over by the priesthood.⁴¹ Exorcism of possessed individuals occurred, but far more common were the routine exorcisms of ritual items such as salt, holy water, and incense, as well as the exorcism of the catechumen during baptism.⁴² Most were simple affairs which did not draw undue attention to the event, but some were far more involved, as in this liturgical piece from a later period quoted by Jeffrey Burton Russell:

I accost you damned and most impure spirit, cause of malice, essence of crimes, origin of sins, you who revel in deceit, sacrilege, adultery, and murder! I adjure you in Christ's name that, in whatsoever part of the body you are hiding you declare yourself, that you flee the body that you are occupying and from which we drive you with spiritual whips and invisible torments. I demand that you leave this body, which has been cleansed by the Lord. Let it be enough for you that in earlier ages you dominated almost the entire world through your action on the hearts of human beings...⁴³

While the early theologians gave the Devil access to human souls, they were really just elaborating upon and justifying what was written in the New Testament accounts of Christ as exorcist. Therefore, although it was believed at that time that Satan and his demonic forces could enter into the physical body, it was also believed that he was weak in the face of Christ. Drawing on scriptural references, Christ was seen to be the key which could free the possessed and the oppressed. That key remains in the hands of the faithful today.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Age*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984): 124.

⁴² *Ibid*, 125; Henry Asgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁴³ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, 126.

The Role of Satan in the Christian World

The development of the idea of Satan can be described as logarithmic: rapid growth in the first 400 years after Christ, then tapering off. He continues to develop today, but toward the end of the medieval period he became more solid and consistently recognizable, with less dramatic variation. Satan and the demons were now understood as independent, individualized forces of evil, with distinct personalities, physical traits, and abilities, and they were primed for the explosion of literature and artistic representation which occurred in the late Middle Ages and in the early modern period.

The great bastion which Christianity had become by the Middle Ages did not allow for great deviations in thought; musings that wandered too far from the fold were deemed heretical.⁴⁴ As a result, there was little development in the satanic idea throughout this period. Then came the Reformation. This great ecclesiastic earthquake shook the very foundations of Christian tradition; the Protestant Reformation sought to return Christians to their New Testament roots, and the Catholic Reformation sought to dig the cancer of corruption out from its very core. The door to innovation was thrown wide open, despite the fear of the Inquisition. The Devil surged back to power, the Protestants finding his presence in the New Testament to be irrefutable proof of his real-world danger, and the Catholics finding evidence of his machinations in these heretical new upstarts, the Protestants. The Protestants called the Pope the Antichrist. The Catholics insisted that the Protestants were possessed by Devils.⁴⁵ Throughout this dark period, Satan became the standard-bearer of each opposing force; and throughout this period, his power cracked the whips upon the religious battlefield.

⁴⁴ Gerald Messadié, *A History of the Devil* (New York: Kodansha International, 1997), 277.

⁴⁵ Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 253, 258; Anonymous, *The Morning-Star out of the North...* (London : Printed for B.H., 1680).; Anonymous, *Babel and Bethel, or, The Pope in His Colours* (Harvard University Library: Microfilm, Reel position: Wing/1560:62, 1680).

Over the next several hundred years, the presence of the Devil rose and fell with the religious and secular fashions of the times. Perhaps his greatest moment of power occurred during the Inquisition, but it was also the Inquisition that burned his throne. The disgust many people felt as a result of the extensive tortures and executions, as well as the practical abuses which occurred, caused many to question the entire construct of religious evil.⁴⁶

The Devil experienced another surge in popularity, this time primarily secular, with the Romantic movement, which began around the late eighteenth century and peaked during the nineteenth.⁴⁷ This splintered into a number of others, such as Victorian occultism, Decadence, and Naturalism; and in the end it expired as most flights of fancy do. It was replaced by the cold hardness of the new sciences, psychology, and political philosophies, which were still in their fresh youth when Romanticism was aging and wasting away. Christianity survived through all of the hardships of the previous centuries, but technology and Industrialism dealt a heavy blow from which it never fully recovered.

There was little room for the mysterious, the hidden, and the dark, in this new movement which exalted experimentation and evidence above all things. While God survived and religiosity was maintained, Satan was sidelined. Few aside from the hard-core philosophers, psychologists, and scientists would dare say that Satan did not exist, but he was largely ignored as a relic of a superstitious past. The nature of evil turned away from a distinct metaphysical Adversary and toward the hidden darkness within humanity itself, and the great atrocities of the twentieth century only served to bolster this position. Atheism, nihilism, and materialism were

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, 293.

⁴⁷ The exaltation of the Devil as a Romantic Hero with wisdom as great as any other religious figure is perhaps best summarized by Blake's concept of the poets and the Devil's party: "In the eternal conflict between belief and denial, Blake said, true poets are always of the Devil's party... The poet's most important service to religion may be to insist, as Milton did, that the artist's divine vocation brought with it a religious magisterium at least equal in dignity to that of any prelate or presbyter." Robert M. Ryan, "*Christianity and Romanticism: A Reply*." *Christianity and Literature* (1999): 88.

rampant, as the problem of evil slammed head-on into the Holocaust, nuclear devastation, genocides, horrific dictatorships, and every other massive atrocity instituted by human hands. How could a God who was omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent allow such evils to occur? This question combined with the growing tendency to refer to scientific evidence in nearly every situation and dismiss those things which could not be experimentally replicated dealt a near-fatal blow to the old Satan of the theologians and the religious. Even those who retained their religiosity tended to speak now of Satan in a metaphorical sense, as a way of consciously personifying the evil which exists within every Christian soul.

Of course, there still were many individuals and congregations who professed belief in the Devil as a real adversary, but they became a minority in a world that had simultaneously glorified and sterilized him. Films like *The Exorcist* and *The Rite* spark interest among the religious, and cause others to reflect on the nature of evil, sometimes with drastic consequences. But for many today, he is now no more than a relic of a superstitious past, a character in a film, or an abstract archetype, and the widespread, integral presence of Satan in the day-to-day life of the general population is long gone. However, the manifestation of the Devil is cyclic. Throughout his history, he has come, and he has gone, but always he finds a way to re-emerge. The Harris poll underscores that his re-emergence is occurring now, during the early twenty-first century. This is partly due to the Devil's sudden celebrity as a main character in so many popular films and books, and partly due to much deeper religious and secular crises. And a share of his modern homecoming is manifesting in the ancient disease of demonic possession.

CHAPTER 3

FOUNDATIONS OF EXORCISM AND DEMONIC POSSESSION

Demons in the New Testament

Theodicy and the history of Satan are critical to an understanding of demonic possession and exorcism. The last chapter showed that many of the earliest theologians integrated the concept of physical invasion by a demonic personality without hesitation. This idea was in no way new or foreign; it was common in neighboring cultures and religions, and appeared frequently in the documents that would later comprise the New Testament.

Demonic possession and exorcism were not novel concepts during the New Testament period. Holy men and pagan practitioners of magical practices were well known to perform works which were said to control demons.⁴⁸ The term “demon,” in fact, did not come to be associated with evil entities specifically until the time of Xenocrates in the Hellenistic Period. It comes from the Greek *daimon*, which has sometimes been translated by scholars as “apportioner;” however others have noted that the verb root means “to divide.”⁴⁹ Originally, it was not suggestive of division in the sense of creating a divide in terms of adversarial conflict; rather, the word referred to those deities or spirits which acted as intermediaries between the Gods and humanity. It was an ambiguous term that did not indicate malevolence.⁵⁰ However,

⁴⁸ Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 263.

⁴⁹ Lars Albinus, “The Greek *daimon* Between Mythos and Logos.” In *Die Daimonen/Demons*, ed. by Armin Lange et al. (Tubingen, 2003), 426.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 428

Xenocrates made the distinction between good spirits and demons, and by the end of that era the negative connotations were firmly in place.⁵¹

Jesus' exorcism ministry is well attested throughout the New Testament. Further examples beyond the Mark 5:2-9 passage which opened this thesis abound: Paul exorcises a spirit of divination from a slave girl in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:16-18); Jesus exorcises a young boy taken by seizures, healing him (Luke 9:37-43); exorcised demons will return with reinforcements if the individual has not mended her ways and is strong in faith (Matthew 12:43-45); and several others. The sense of physical evil is present and immediate in the New Testament. Demonic possessions and their exorcisms do not come across as strange and unknown occurrences; rather, they fit easily with the other miraculous healings and ministries of Jesus and his disciples.

A common modern objection to the New Testament focus on devilry is that this belief was simply the product of a "primitive" worldview. Jeffrey Burton Russell asserts the extreme danger of adopting this chronocentric perception:

The fallacy of chronocentrism is dangerous for all scholars, but for scholars of a Christian persuasion it is particularly odd to maintain that Jesus and the apostles were primitive people who were not as enlightened as we. Since belief in the Devil permeates the New Testament, it follows that if belief in the Devil is rejected, any other belief expressed by the New Testament—including belief in the incarnation and the resurrection—is subject to the same treatment...⁵²

This is an idea echoed in the 1972 Anglican document *Exorcism; The Report of a Commission Convened by the Bishop of Exeter*, commonly referred to simply as the "Exeter

⁵¹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity*, 142.

⁵² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 263.

Report.” This report was compiled in response to the sudden resurgence in public interest in the concept of exorcism, as well as the occult and concerns over Satanic activity in England, which occurred during the New Age revival of the 1960s.⁵³ Published the year before the release of the horror film “The Exorcist,” which is often cited as partially responsible for the shift in public perception of demonic activity from either mere superstition or fascinating curiosity (and, commonly, legitimate religious fear) to an entertaining character, the issuance of *The Exeter Report* shows that focus on the topic was already in full swing before release of the film, at least in England. In reference to the New Testament accounts of exorcism and demonic possession, L. Malia explains that the Exeter Report is quite clear:

It was expected that the Messiah when he came would show that he possessed the power of an exorcist" (p. 11 [Exeter Report]). The report on exorcism in the New Testament which follows includes many well-known examples from Jesus' life and ministry, as well as examples from the Acts of the Apostles, and notes the importance of exorcism in the New Testament as a powerful means of evangelization. Should we dismiss such accounts as the product of a primitive understanding of the world...or as metaphorical language? Should we gloss over them as proof of the power of suggestion to treat psychosomatic illness? If the answer to any of the above is "yes," he says, then we are left in serious doubt as to the reliability of the witness of the gospels.⁵⁴

The tendency to cherry-pick ideas and beliefs from Biblical works is quite common, and here Russell and the editors of *The Exeter Report* aptly demonstrate why this is theologically treacherous. At the same time, it is quite dangerous to take as fact and law every sentence of the

⁵³ Linda Malia, "A Fresh Look at a Remarkable Document: Exorcism: The Report of a Commission Convened by the Bishop of Exeter." *Anglican Theological Review* (2000): 65-88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Bible; were one to do so, this would quickly put one on the wrong side of both the law and common morality.⁵⁵ That being said, it is quite clear that the demonic activity of the New Testament is not a fluke or a metaphor; it is persistent and consistent, and it serves a greater theological purpose.

Theories on the origin and nature of the demons and Satan changed with the times. In the early years of Christianity, when Christians were still being actively persecuted by the dominant powers and religions of the time, the persistent terror which was simply a fact of Christian life translated directly into the blooming theologies, and into theodicy in particular. The human soul was a battlefield, and the forces of evil were in full combat with the forces of good. Demons and Satan were real entities with real power to destroy the faithful; their aim was to crush the faith of the people and ultimately bring down the house of God.

This theory dominated until Christianity began to take control over the empire. Once that occurred, theodicy adopted a much more sterile nature; Augustine's *privatio boni*, mentioned earlier, is a prime example of this new attitude. He and the theologians after him tended to take a somewhat abstract position in terms of the logic of theodicy, but at the same time they developed very elaborate demonological systems which were based partially on the New Testament, partially on the extra-canonical sources (particularly the Enochic works), and partially on their own philosophical conclusions. However, by the medieval period, the formula was set: The Devil was created good, but fell through pride; likewise, the demons were fallen angels. Satan is a tempter who seeks to bend the hearts of the faithful away from God. He uses heresy, magic, and sexual indiscretion to achieve his goals.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ One of the more well-known examples is Exodus 22:18: You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.

⁵⁶ For broad treatments of this subject, see: Bamberger, *Fallen Angels: Soldiers of Satan's Realm*; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan, The Early Christian Tradition*, and *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*; On pride specifically, though he cites Russell: Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987), 245.

The key to the previous statement is “bend the hearts of the faithful.” Exorcism has never been about grand rites and demonstrations of the power of the Church or priest, although it has certainly been used as such. Rather, solely through the faith of the afflicted and the faith of the exorcist is the victim released from his or her satanic bondage. The power comes not from the participants themselves, but rather Christ flows through them, and from the calling of his divine name, the demon is exorcised.

If one is to take at face value the proclamations of the New Testament—and for the purposes of laying the foundation of the theology, this is necessary—then Satan and demons are real threats, ready to invade the bodies and minds of the people, Jesus Christ was the consummate exorcist, and he granted the ability to exorcize to *all* Christians of faith.⁵⁷ However, it must be noted that all scholars are not in agreement on this note. Some insist that Jesus was not in fact an exorcist, and that, like the “Morning Star, Son of Dawn” passage in Isaiah 14, the “Legion” passage quoted at the beginning of this paper is merely veiled political propoganda.⁵⁸

The Practice of Exorcism

Generally, when one thinks of exorcism and possession, one immediately goes to the spinning heads and demonic shrieking made so popular by Hollywood movies. However, aside from this extremely sensationalistic aspect of exorcism, there are several subtypes that have historically been both innocuous and common; such as the rite of baptism, the cleansing of holy water, or the consecration of holy ground, among others.

⁵⁷ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999) 43-44; Mk 3:14-15; Mk 6:7, 13; Mt 10:1; Mt10:7-8; Lk 9:1; Lk 10:17-18; Jn 3:10; Jn 3:8; Jn 5:18;Mt 7:22-23; Mk 16-17; Acts 5:16; Acts 8:6-7; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:11-12; Lk 11:19.

⁵⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. (1996); Pieter F. Craffert, "Crossan's Historical Jesus as Healer, Exorcist and Miracle Worker." *Religion & Theology* 10 no. 3-4 (January 1, 2003): 258-259.

In order to understand how exorcism applies to the subtypes, let us first address the meaning of the word itself. It is derived from the Greek *exousia*, which translates as “to swear or bind by oath.”⁵⁹ This ties in with the previous discussion of the power of the name of God, and how that name is the primary weapon in the exorcist’s arsenal against a possessing demon. Note also that the word does not have any connotations towards either good or evil; it is neutral. Additionally, a minor semantic note that often comes up is the confusion over the exorcised; it is the demon, not the afflicted, who is exorcised. This does make a subtle difference in the power of the possessor. If it is the victim that needs to be exorcised, then the suggestion is that the possessor has somehow damaged the soul of the victim. However, by specifying that it is the *demon* who is exorcised, it is suggested that the victim has merely been temporarily invaded, and with the proper treatment, can be healed. This is the goal of every exorcism: to cleanse the victim and restore her to a life free from evil and strong in faith.

The following discussion is concerned primarily with Catholic exorcism, although many of the details apply to Protestant ideas and practices as well. In general, there are three main types of exorcism: that of objects; places; and people. Exorcism of individuals also contains two main subtypes: the simple exorcism, which occurs in baptism, and the solemn rite of exorcism, which is the ritual reserved for exorcists.⁶⁰

Exorcism of Objects and Places

Exorcism of objects can include the consecration of holy water, oil, and salt, for example, as well as of animals.⁶¹ Since Christian tradition does not assign a soul to animals, there is little threat of animal possession, since they have no soul for the Devil to turn away from God. Likewise, the

⁵⁹ Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “*Exorcism*.”

⁶⁰ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 44.

⁶¹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 29

utilization of exorcism for the purpose of consecrating holy objects seems to be less critical for the holiness of the object, but still a necessary step.⁶² Perhaps the assumption is that the demonic could pollute such objects, and use them as a conduit to the faithful, or simply damage their efficacy in the normal course of their use.

Exorcism of places can include the consecration of holy ground as well as the cleansing of physical areas which are contaminated in some way, such as by hauntings.⁶³ Usually, in such cases, the priest will look for evidence of some type of “unchristian” activity at the site; such as pagan worship, occult happenings, or even, for the most conservative, activities like yoga or meditation. Many of the requirements and much of the procedure for exorcising a place are the same as for exorcising a person.⁶⁴

Exorcism of People

Before going into a discussion of the details of exorcism as it pertains to people, let me first make a disclaimer. Much of this material is considered paranormal; meaning, it is firmly outside the realm of normal human experience.⁶⁵ As such, it is unusual, often bizarre, and sometimes revolting. I make no claims as to the truth or falsehood of the accounts and beliefs of those who have had direct experience with the phenomena of demonic possession and exorcism, only that they believe it to be true, and as a result these beliefs have a long standing tradition and position within Christianity.

⁶² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, 125.

⁶³ Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 105-106.

⁶⁴ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 125; Fortea, *Interview with an Exorcist*, 71

⁶⁵ But often, well within religious experience, as shown in a recent study: Joseph O. Baker, and Scott Draper. "Diverse supernatural portfolios: certitude, exclusivity, and the curvilinear relationship between religiosity and paranormal beliefs." *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* 49:3 (September 1, 2010): 413-424.

Father Gabriele Amorth was the Vatican's chief exorcist from 1989 until he retired in 2000. He is widely considered the foremost Catholic expert on demonic possession and exorcism in the world, and he has been very outspoken regarding the lack of attention the issue has received over the last several decades. He has written two books, *An Exorcist Tells his Story* and *An Exorcist: More Stories*, which, aside from the numerous anecdotes of cases he has handled, also include a wealth of information regarding the procedure and theology with which exorcism is associated. Far from saying, as some do, that cases are exaggerated, he insists that people do not understand the gravity of the situation. He has even been quoted as stating that *The Exorcist* is his favorite film: "Of course, the special effects are exaggerated. But it is a good film, and substantially exact, based on a respectable novel which mirrored a true story."⁶⁶ *The Exorcist* will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

There are five types of demonic attacks which Father Amorth cites: demonic possession, demonic oppression, demonic obsession, demonic infestation, and demonic subjugation. Demonic oppression involves cases in which the Devil has in some way attacked an individual but has not possessed them. Oppression can cause illness, problems with work or home, financial difficulties, and so on.⁶⁷ Cases in which people believe they have been cursed can be attributed to this category. Demonic obsession causes obsessive negative, dark, and violent thoughts against oneself or others. Demonic infestation was discussed earlier, and involves the possession of physical places, resulting in hauntings, especially of the violent, poltergeist type of activity. Demonic subjugation results from a voluntary and willful decision to submit to the Devil, as in Satanism.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Gyles Brandreth, "An Interview with the Church's Leading Exorcist," *The Sunday Telegraph*, October 29, 2000, 5.

⁶⁷ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 33-35.

Possession itself is not a hard and fast category in which, if a person fits x out of y symptoms, he can be deemed possessed. Rather, it is an extensive triangulation of medical reports, psychiatric and psychological reports, along with the paranormal symptoms and religious distress which lay the foundation for suspicion of possession.⁶⁹ Father Amorth is careful to point out that even in the most clear-cut cases, it is only during the exorcism itself that one can be sure that the individual is possessed.⁷⁰ This makes the performance of exorcism fraught with danger, not just for the victim, but also for the exorcist. If one performs an exorcism, then one is left open to the possibility of prosecution if the victim is injured or killed. This occurred with the priests who attempted to exorcise Anneliese Michel in the mid-seventies; she died during the prolonged series of exorcisms, and the priests were prosecuted and convicted of negligent manslaughter. The 2005 film *Exorcism of Emily Rose* is loosely based on Anneliese's story; supposedly, the audio recordings played in the film are the actual recordings from her exorcism.⁷¹

Essentially, the possessed person is placing his or her mental, spiritual, and physical well-being in the hands of the exorcist. This may be part of the reason why so few priests are willing to pursue the possibility of exorcism; with common knowledge of mental illness, most are inclined to send someone complaining of possession to a mental health professional.

Symptomology

Not surprisingly, symptoms of demonic possession are many and varied. As with physical illness, symptoms do not define the condition. Rather, it is a confluence of one or several symptoms with more general issues of a spiritual nature. In addition to this symptomology,

⁶⁹ Although not all exorcists conform to this ideal, as will be shown later in this paper.

⁷⁰ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist: More Stories* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 75.

⁷¹ Eric Hansen, "What's In God's Name?!", *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2005.

responsible exorcists require medical and psychological evaluations before performing an exorcism, to protect not just the victim, but the exorcist as well.⁷² Normally, it is only after physical causes have been ruled out that an exorcism will be considered.

Probably the most cited and universal—if one can even use that term in this subject—symptom is a revulsion to religious symbols, and religiosity in general. Crosses, holy water, communion, churches, priests, prayers, and other hallmarks of faith can all incite feelings like dread, sickness, hate, or disgust. Specifically, these feelings will be unusual; the individual will usually not have felt this revulsion before, will not be able to assign a reason for it, and will not be able to control it. Following revulsion to religious objects is the tendency to blaspheme and commit other insults which are out of character.⁷³ Malachi Martin, who was a prominent (if sometimes questionable) demonologist and former priest, cites a list of other symptoms:

The inexplicable stench; freezing temperature; telepathic powers about purely religious or moral matters; a peculiarly unlined or completely smooth or stretched skin, or unusual distortion of the face, or other physical and behavioral transformations; ‘possessed gravity’ (the possessed person becomes completely immovable, or those around the possessed are weighted down with a suffocating pressure); levitation...; violent smashing of furniture, constant opening and slamming of doors, and tearing of fabric in the vicinity of the possessed, without a hand being laid on them.⁷⁴

⁷² Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1976), 13.

⁷³ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 78.

⁷⁴ Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil*, 13.

Others add to the list: gain and loss of consciousness, hallucinations, amnesia, rolling of the eyes upwards or downwards, twitching of the face and hands, and rigidity of the body.⁷⁵ Father Fortea cites the following as the most frequent symptoms of possession [emphases his]:

The person suddenly understands *foreign (or even 'dead') languages he has never studied*. Regardless of the person's age or intelligence, he will obey orders given in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and other languages, even when used simultaneously. Sometimes the possessed will speak to those present in these unknown languages, though this is less common... The possessed displays *abnormal physical strength*, sometimes over the course of several hours. Sometimes the person is even able to perform acts that are usually impossible, such as lifting several people at once... The person demonstrates a *knowledge of hidden things*.⁷⁶

A common notation among exorcists is that the possessed individual does not go about all day under attack; rather, these are acute episodes, and after they pass, the individual is able to resume his or her normal life—at least, until the next episode. However, all seem to agree that despite this, the possession will inevitably cripple the individual, and a strong and complete change—usually of a religious and moral nature—must be made to the life of the individual for him or her to be wholly cured.

The Ritual of Exorcism

Christians have been performing exorcisms since the time of Jesus, but it was not until the fifteenth century that the Catholic Church attempted to make the ritual consistent. The medieval

⁷⁵ Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea, *Interview With an Exorcist: An Insider's Look at the Devil, Demonic Possession, and the Path to Deliverance* (Pennsylvania: Ascension Press, 2006), 73.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 87.

period was rich with extensive demonological beliefs, and this was reflected in the exorcisms; some even included prayers in a supposed demonic language, composed by Satan himself:

“Take the head of the possessed person in your left hand and place your right thumb in the possessed person’s mouth, saying the following words in both ears:
ABRE MONTE ABRYA ABREMONTE CONSACRAMENTARIA SYPAR
YPAR YTUMBA OPOTE ALACENT ALAPHIE. Then hold him firmly and say these conjurations: I conjure you, evil spirits, by the terrible name of God
Aglá....”⁷⁷

Hardly a prayer expected of the Church, but this illustrates how varied the practice of exorcism was prior to the codification of the ritual in 1614.

The Roman Ritual, which contains the Church’s official rite of exorcism, remained unchanged until 1999.⁷⁸ Many traditionally-inclined exorcists, including Father Amorth, were extremely unhappy with the changes that were made. Overall, they felt that the impact of the original was lost in the new edition; essentially, that the original was not broken, and yet they attempted to fix it, thus breaking it. These changes included sterilizing the figure of Satan to fit with a more modern vision of him and publishing the rite in the common languages rather than in Latin.⁷⁹

Still, the Rite of Exorcism remains largely unchanged, and is the only standard for Catholics; although simple prayer and other types of faithful devotions, such as fasting, can result in deliverance. Additionally, a successful exorcism rarely occurs on the first attempt; usually it will take several rites, sometimes over the course of years, before the afflicted can be

⁷⁷ Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “*Exorcism*.”

⁷⁸ Henry Samuel, “How to Become an Exorcist,” *The Telegraph*, March 30, 2011.

⁷⁹ Stefano Maria Paci, “Vatican Exorcist Amorth Speaks on Satan’s Smoke,” *Spero News*, March 16, 2006, accessed February 10, 2012. <http://www.speroforum.com/site/article.asp?id=2879>

completely free. It depends largely on the degree of infestation; deep-seated and more powerful demons will take much longer to root out and expel.⁸⁰

The rite begins with a list of 21 instructions for the priest. I will not list them all here, but give a general outline: 1-4 are instructions regarding the procedure for deciding to exorcise, and include the admonition to secure the permission of the bishop, specifications for the type of priest who should perform the exorcism, and instructions for interviewing the victim. 5-10 are general descriptions of the behavior of evil spirits, such as the tendency to hide from the priest, revelation of occult spells, and deception. 11-17 are specific instructions regarding the method of exorcism, such as the admonition to perform the exorcism with command and authority, to perform it in a church or other holy place, if possible, which questions to ask the demons, and to avoid speeches and vainglorious attitude. Number 18 is interesting because it specifically tells the priest not to give medicine to the victim, and to leave this to the medical doctors; likewise, 19 advises the priest to have a female assistant for the exorcism of a woman, to avoid any scandal. 20 advises the exorcist to locate any evil spells or documents. The last, 21, tells the newly liberated to avoid sin and live a faithful life.⁸¹

The exorcism itself contains ten sections. It is designed as a call-and-response ritual, usually between the exorcist and his assistant. The sections are as follows: preliminary instructions, invocations, summoning of evil spirit, gospel readings, laying of hands on the possessed, exorcism addresses to evil spirit, further instructions and prayers, profession of faith, Psalm readings, and concluding prayer of thanks.

⁸⁰ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 49.

⁸¹ Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil*, 460-462.

The general mood of the ritual is commanding, with frequent calls to God and instructions to make the sign of the cross. The longest portion by far is section six, the addresses to the demon itself. An excerpt is as follows [+ indicates the sign of the cross]:

I exorcise you, Most Unclean Spirit! Invading Enemy! All Spirits! Every one of you! In the name of Our Lord Jesus + Christ: Be uprooted and expelled from this Creature of God. + He who commands you is he who ordered you to be thrown down from the highest Heaven into the depths of Hell. He who commands you is he who dominated the sea, the wind, and the storms. Hear, therefore, and fear, Satan! Enemy of the Faith!...⁸²

What occurs during the course of the ritual is the inspiration for numerous stories and horror films. Exorcists insist that all of the symptoms listed previously, including more bizarre ones such as vomiting of glass and nails, the appearance of toads in the bedsheets, and aberrant sexual behaviors can manifest during an exorcism. Conversely, many demons will simply refuse to show themselves or speak; the common fear that a demon present will list everyone's sins is apparently extremely rare, although Father Amorth cites a case where that did occur, as does Malachi Martin.⁸³

It seems that the majority of exorcisms are somewhat solemn affairs, and do not recall the extremes promoted by Hollywood. They are generally protracted, requiring repeated attempts in a gradual reduction of infestation, rather the sudden and dramatic banishment of Satan himself. The exorcists themselves tend to be calm men of sound mind, not prone to superstition, strong in faith, and above all, humble. Humility is vitally important, and the reason for this is simple: the

⁸² Ibid, 465.

⁸³ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 94; Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil*, 31-32.

exorcist is no more than a conduit; he has no special powers.⁸⁴ Vanity in this case would be a sin that would seriously undercut the efficacy of what the priest is trying to achieve.

Within the Catholic tradition, any priest can perform an exorcism, but trained exorcists are hard to come by. For many decades, it was near impossible to locate one anywhere except Rome; but, since 2007, Pope Benedict XVI has decreed that every diocese will now have a trained exorcist ready to serve the community.⁸⁵ Additionally, it is made clear in the gospels that God granted the gift of exorcism to the entire community of the faithful; therefore, any person of faith is capable of performing an exorcism effectively. Father Amorth wholeheartedly agrees with this statement, but adds that a priest is given an additional power to exorcise that is not granted to the laity. So, although a layperson or priest of another denomination or faith may perform an exorcism, an ordained Catholic priest would be more effective, in the Catholic perception.⁸⁶

Thus far, I have mainly addressed exorcism and possession as it occurs in the Catholic tradition. As we shall see in the following chapter, it is also common in Protestant traditions, particularly among more conservative denominations. Protestant exorcisms, as a general rule, are much less rigid and formulaic than their Catholic counterparts, since there is far less ecclesiastic oversight, if any. Protestant theologies and methodologies with regard to possession and exorcism are no less important and complex than the Catholic.

⁸⁴ David Kiely and Christina McKenna, *The Dark Sacrament: True Stories of Modern-Day Demon Possession and Exorcism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), xxix.

⁸⁵ Nick Pisa, "Vatican to Create More Exorcists to Tackle 'Evil,'" *The Telegraph*, December 29, 2007.

⁸⁶ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 153.

CHAPTER 4

DELIVERANCE MINISTRY

Comparing Catholic and Protestant Exorcism Ministries

A Catholic exorcism is a form of high ritual. Its efficacy is connected to its very specific, organized, and traditional nature. Variation does not exist. Exorcism within this tradition is rigid and formulaic; there is no room for creative expansion or expression. In fact, if an exorcising priest were to deviate significantly from the ritual in order to satisfy his or the victim's creative whims, regardless of the intention, the exorcism would be rendered not only ineffective, but possibly also dangerous. This is because the exorcist would have no way of knowing if the variation was a legitimate inspiration whose source was Godly, or its opposite, a devilish trick designed to corrupt the process and deepen the demon's hold on the victim.

Therefore, the rigidity of the Roman Ritual serves as a kind of safeguard. If the exorcist remains within the given parameters, performs the ritual to its specifications, and is true in his own faith, then the ritual should be a success. Deviation would only open the exorcist to the possibility of failure. Additionally, one of the requirements of the Catholic exorcism is that it must be performed by a priest, not a lay person. It is a sacred piece of liturgical architecture that must be performed not only by someone who is a person of deep and consecrated faith, but also by someone who understands the profound theological implications and subtleties of the process. As mentioned, only in recent years has the rite been made available in the language of the participants; in the past, it was only practiced in Latin.

The issue of language is an excellent point to begin delineating the differences between Catholic and Protestant exorcisms. One of the reasons Catholic exorcisms were performed in Latin was that the priest was interacting with the demon, not with the victim. Since the demon understands Latin, there is no need to speak the language of the victim. In fact, speaking the language of the possessed individual was considered detrimental to the exorcism process. Speaking only Latin—and assuming the victim does not understand—allows the priest to more accurately gauge the validity of a possession.⁸⁷ If a victim who does not speak Latin suddenly begins understanding and responding to the priest, then the priest can draw the conclusion that he is dealing with a demon.

Protestant exorcisms are performed in the language of the participants. Latin (and other languages) may be used, but if they are it is only in passing. If a Catholic exorcism is rigid and formulaic, a Protestant exorcism is creative, and reflects a high degree of active exchange between the exorcist and the possessed. Here the focus is on “deliverance,” which is a term most often encountered within charismatic Protestant groups, but which is becoming more common and widespread within the more mainstream denominations and congregations.⁸⁸

Practically, the meaning is the same, but deliverance is a much more general term than exorcism, and reflects the more inclusive nature of Protestant exorcism. The word itself has a long history within Christianity, perhaps due to its inclusion in the penultimate final lines of the Lord’s Prayer:

⁸⁷ Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea, *Interview With an Exorcist: An Insider’s Look at the Devil, Demonic Possession, and the Path to Deliverance*, 77-78.

⁸⁸ The term “exorcism” is often unwelcome in these settings. R. S. DePalatis, *An exploration of different responses to a deliverance ministry procedure: Possession trance and dissociation in a protestant Christian expulsion ritual setting*. Capella University. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (2006). 230 p.

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.⁸⁹

To be “delivered” from evil, by any means necessary, is the basic idea behind Protestant exorcism.

However, it should be emphasized that Protestantism is a very general term, an umbrella under which many different traditions fall, and not all of these traditions believe either that exorcism should be a part of the Christian practice, or that Satan is a physical threat to the faithful.⁹⁰ Some go so far as to debate the semantics of the term “possession,” arguing that it indicates ownership, when in fact the Devil has no claim over a Christian soul.⁹¹ However, this is a minor issue and neglects the usage of the term “possession,” which in common practice does not indicate ownership so much as invasion. Other arguments are more theological in nature. For

⁸⁹ Matt 6:9-13

⁹⁰ Steven Carter, “Demon Possession and the Christian,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3/1 (2000): 20.

⁹¹ Agnieszka Tennant, “Many Christians Say They are in Need of Deliverance but Some may be Giving Demons More Than Their Due,” *Christianity Today* 45:11 (September 3, 2001): 46-48.

example, a 2010 article by Dr. Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, addresses this issue. In it, he discusses the old argument that the New Testament does not contain a specific “rite” of exorcism, or an ordained order of exorcists. The name of Jesus and the authority of the Gospel are the Christian’s weapons in spiritual warfare; these alone are sufficient. Therefore, Evangelicals have no need for a rite of exorcism, and their practice of spreading the word of God is one of the most potent weapons against the Devil. He goes on to discuss the impossibility of physical possession:

Furthermore, there is absolutely no New Testament evidence that a believer in Christ can be possessed by demons. Tormented and tempted? Sure. But never possessed. Once we are united with Christ by faith and given the gift of the indwelling Spirit, there is no way a demon can possess us. As the Apostle John reminds us, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” [1 John 4:4]...So, we should respect the power of the Devil and his demons, but never fear them. We do not need a rite of exorcism, only the name of Jesus. We are not given a priesthood of exorcists — for *every* believer is armed with the full promise of the Gospel, united with Christ by faith, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.⁹²

Dr. Mohler is making the distinction that those who are possessed in the New Testament are non-believers. However valid his argument may be, it is a subtle distinction and an opinion that is not necessarily noticed or shared by every Evangelical Christian.

⁹² R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “On Exorcism and Exorcists: An Evangelical View,” *Albertmohler.com*, November 15, 2010, accessed February 10, 2012. <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/11/15/on-exorcism-and-exorcists-an-evangelical-view/>.

History of Protestant Exorcism

This tendency to refer to the finest details of the New Testament, while discarding later traditions and theological machinations, is a Protestant convention which originated during the Reformation. The ritualism of Catholic exorcism was rejected in favor of a more Puritan approach during this time. The Protestants drew parallels between magic, witchcraft, and Catholic ritual, specifically calling out the consecration of the host, baptism, and exorcism as examples of devilish corruption within the Church. The miraculous was rejected as superstition.⁹³ In 1651 Thomas Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*, in which he denounced many traditions of the Catholic faith, here quoted by Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971):

For did not the Catholic priest conjure the devil out of the holy water, salt and oil, and then proceed to make the infant himself ‘subject to many charms’? And ‘at the church door the priest blows thrice in the child’s face, and says: *Go out of him unclean spirit and give place to the Holy Ghost the comforter*’: after which came exorcisms and “some other incantations.”⁹⁴

Throwing exorcism and “some other incantations” together in the same heap clearly shows Hobbes’ disapproval of the miraculous nature of the exorcism rite. By combining a previously holy ritual with something commonly believed to be the simple work of witches and devils, he is underlining both what he believed to be the Catholic corruption of the true Christian faith and the heresy of performing magic and calling it the work of Jesus Christ. Hobbes also argued that demons did not exist in a real sense, that the exorcisms performed by Jesus in the New Testament were general admonitions and no different than his exhortations against other

⁹³ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World*, 91.

⁹⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 55.

inanimate, consciousness objects.⁹⁵ Exorcism as the Catholics practiced it was considered no more than another pagan magic trick and, as such, was a tool of Satan himself. This belief is still carried in many Protestant communities today.

The rejection of the ritual of exorcism left early Protestants in a peculiar position: how to deal with possession when its primary surgical instrument, exorcism, was discarded. Possessions remained a problem, and some authors have noted an apparent increase in their occurrence amongst Puritans and other early conservative Protestant groups. One of the psychological arguments is that the more restrictive a community, the more likely its adherents will find ways to break free from that restriction.⁹⁶ Demonic possession offers an opportunity for a repressed individual to act out all of his or her most base, wanton desires, and not accept any of the blame for him or herself. Therefore, the increase should be unsurprising within communities that are very conservative in belief and community values.

Since demonic activity was not completely rejected, it was necessary to retain against it some practical defenses. In some cases, a Catholic formula against the demonic was reworked to remove those aspects which to the Protestants echoed magic charms and superstition. For example, the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* contained a blessing for baptismal water which was an adaptation of the Catholic *Missale Mixtum*. The original Catholic version called for an exorcism and exsufflation of the water. Exsufflation, the blowing of air onto the object to be consecrated, was a way to blow the demons out of the object and was a common practice in Catholic ritual, as were minor rites of exorcism.⁹⁷ The reworked Anglican rite removes the

⁹⁵ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Towards the Death of Satan: The Growth and Decline of Christian Demonology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 86.

⁹⁶ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 479.

⁹⁷ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, 126-127.

official language of the priest against the demons (“I exorcise you”) and replaces it with entreaties to God:

O most merciful God, our Savior Jesu Christ...

Grant that all carnal affections may die in them, and that all things belonging to the spirit may live and grow in them. Amen.

Grant to all them which at this fountain forsake the devil and all his works that they may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against him, the world, and the flesh. Amen.⁹⁸

By replacing the orders against the demons with exhortations towards God, the Anglican ritual refuses to acknowledge the power of the demons as separate from God himself. In practical terms, by speaking to God directly, the priest removes the formulaic ritualism upon which the Catholics rely. In short, a Catholic priest performing a rite of exorcism is dealing directly with a demon and the power of God flows through him in order to exorcise the demon. By removing this direct aspect, as in the example of the consecration of the baptismal font, the priest is acknowledging that he has no special position within the proceedings. He is merely an intercessor, speaking on behalf of the people to God, who may or may not “grant” his requests. However, it should not be suggested that a Catholic priest is claiming some kind of superpower; on the contrary, one of the acknowledged characteristics of successful Catholic exorcists is their humble nature. They fully understand that they are no more than a conduit, through which the power of Christ may work.⁹⁹

To return again briefly to the Lord’s Prayer, one of the most well-known prayers in the whole of Christianity, I believe it is a safe assumption that the majority of Christians do not think

⁹⁸ Henry Asgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama*, 255-256.

⁹⁹ David Kiely and Christina McKenna, *The Dark Sacrament: True Stories of Modern-Day Demon Possession and Exorcism*, xxix.

of it as a form of exorcism. However, among some more conservative circles of Christianity, it is indeed considered to be one of the many weapons that may be used against Satan. Here again an example is seen of an entreaty to God to intercede against Satan on behalf of the faithful, as elucidated by James Kallas in his discussion of the Lord's Prayer:

The entire prayer of Jesus is demonologically oriented, based on the conviction that this present world is not under God's rule but Satan's sway. The prayer asks that the rule of God come soon, and when it does, that the elect be sustained and cared for during the time of the devil's counterattack, that they be *delivered* out of the hand of the evil one.¹⁰⁰

Both Catholic and Protestant priests are essentially doing the same thing: that is, entreating God for help on behalf of the faithful. However, Catholics believe that by following a prescribed set of patterns that has proven effective over centuries their chances of success in freeing the possessed are greatest. Protestants on the other hand, believe that with faith and prayer, God will deliver the faithful, or, that the faithful are already delivered. However, this is not to say that the Protestants place no importance on tradition or formula. Specific groups will often have their own methods that can be quite rigid, but this does not even begin to approach the level of unyielding tradition which the Catholics have applied to their rites over periods of centuries.

The weapons which replaced the rite of exorcism among the early Protestants were primarily fasting and prayer, followed by the triumphant casting out of the demons in the name of Jesus Christ. The holy name was used as a spiritual bludgeon; the demons, who were weak to the power of Good, were beaten with it until they fled the invaded faithful. The name gains a talismanic power in its expansive use for the treatment of all manner of spiritual ailments, including: salvation, justification, healing, preaching, church discipline, worship, prayer, holy

¹⁰⁰ James Kallas, *The Real Satan*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 89. Emphasis mine.

gifts, persecution, and of course exorcism.¹⁰¹ However, it should be noted that the usage of the term “talisman” would likely be regarded as objectionable, as it hearkens back to pagan magical practices and the very accusations the Protestants made against the Catholics.¹⁰²

Protestant and Possessed in 1574

One of the earliest and most complete accounts of a Protestant exorcism was that of Robert Brigges in 1574, whose dispossession was handled by none other than John Foxe, one of the early Protestant Reformers. Brigges’ case is unique in that it was recorded largely by Brigges himself, in his own words, rather than by observers or analysts after the fact.¹⁰³ Additionally, Brigges was, although not a member of the noble class, certainly well off and a gentleman; this is quite unlike the majority of possession cases which occurred at this time, which primarily affected the lower classes, the young, and those in poverty.¹⁰⁴ It is an excellent example of how the issue of exorcism and possession acted as a wedge to drive the rift between Catholicism and Protestantism further apart. Exorcisms were one of the many ways that religious authorities on each side of the battle sought to prove their worth.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, if God were not on their side, then their exorcisms would prove ineffective, much like the Old Testament Elijah and the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 20-40). Therefore, each side emphasized the aspects of their exorcisms that were unique to their own camp. For the Catholics, that was the necessity of ordained priests and the arcane and mysterious ritualism of the exorcism rite; for the Protestants, it was the name of Christ and the redemptive power of prayer.

¹⁰¹ Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare*, 73.

¹⁰² Ibid, 74.

¹⁰³ Kathleen Sands, *An Elizabethan Lawyer’s Possession by the Devil: The Story of Robert Brigges* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰⁵ George F. Thomas, *Philosophy and Religious Belief*, 492.

Although it is uncertain, Brigges is believed to have been raised Catholic.¹⁰⁶ Following a rousing sermon, he decided to convert to Protestantism, a momentously personal event which spurred a flurry of demonic activity within his life. This calm and learned man suddenly began attempting suicide—he made three failed attempts—contemplating murder, and arguing theological discourse in a rapid-fire fashion at length with Satan himself.¹⁰⁷

Brigges' case is not at all unusual in its details. He is assaulted with tales of heresy and sin; he is tempted by beautiful demonesses; he, his family and friends are threatened; his physical senses are attacked and he is blinded. The Devil in this instance is particularly fond of utilizing rationale and rhetoric against Brigges, perhaps due to his education and intellect. Powerless to help himself and seeing his hard-built life crashing down around him, he sought the help of John Foxe, whom he idealized as an impeccable Christian.

Foxe utilized what would become a common Protestant method of exorcism: community prayer and support combined with the power of the Word: the name of Jesus Christ. The significance of using the name of Christ as a weapon against the demonic has already been briefly discussed. Its usage in this context is significant however, because if it is not the first recorded instance of its use in a Protestant setting in such a specific and narrow manner, it is certainly one of the first; additionally, John Foxe was firmly anti-Catholic, and his method of exorcism reflects a complete rejection of Catholic ritualistic methods, and helps to set the patterns for the anti-exorcisms: the depossessions and deliverances of later centuries.

Foxe arrived when Brigges was at his worst: catatonic and deprived of all his senses. First he assembles the bystanders and exhorts them to extend forgiveness to their enemies and repent of their sins. Then, the group kneeling while he stands, he leads them in a loud and charismatic

¹⁰⁶ Sands, Kathleen. "John Foxe: Exorcist." *History Today* 51: 2 (February 2001): 37.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 38.

prayer for the restoration of Briggs' health, which occurs immediately. Kathleen Sands' extensive study of the Briggs manuscripts provides a succinct summary of the importance of the Word at this moment:

By making a first and separate prayer for the restoration of Briggs' speech alone, Foxe emphasized the significance of the word, adjuring the demon to depart Briggs' body in the name of Christ Jesus. This adjuration demonstrated the power of the five-letter "weapon" that Briggs and Stephens [another possessed victim to whom Foxe attended] had lost ("J-E-S-U-S"), for at the moment Foxe pronounced Jesus' name, Briggs recovered his speech and cried out, "Christ Jesus, magnified and blessed be thy name, at whose name the devil ceaseth to molest thy creature. Blessed and glorified be thy name, who by the humble prayer of thy penitent servants and by the pronouncing of thy most glorious name, Jesus, the devil departeth." The word is the way of God: "he hath promised me by his word I shall have a way out"—a way out of sin and into grace, a way out of death and into life."¹⁰⁸

This usage of the name of Christ as a weapon against the demonic goes beyond the many testaments contained within the gospels of Jesus' abilities as an exorcist. Prior to his ministry, the world lived in unbroken thrall to Satan. The pagan exorcists did their work through the agency of the Devil.¹⁰⁹ If their attempts to free a possessed person were effective, they were only effective in appearance.

With the advent of the ministry of Jesus, suddenly the demons were no longer free to assault humanity at their pleasure. Jesus was able to truly cast them out and to free the afflicted

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰⁹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, 70.

from their torment.¹¹⁰ Theologically this was a turning point, and the symbolism of Jesus as not only the consummate exorcist, but also as the first true exorcist, cannot be denied. Therefore, an exorcist who calls upon the name of Christ to exorcise a demon from a possessed individual, is linking himself to the absolute beginning, the genesis of the first legitimate healing ministry. Aside from any apparent miraculous abilities which may result from the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, the exorcist is symbolically and ritualistically drawing the participants back to that critical moment when the demons were chained beneath the power of the believer. This is an idea echoed by religious anthropologist Simon Coleman, who relates miraculous Gifts of the Spirit—i.e., speaking in tongues, spiritual ecstasy, visions of Christ—to attempts, whether conscious or unconscious, to connect directly to significant events within the tradition,¹¹¹ such as exorcisms, in this case.

Protestant exorcisms can be as simple as an invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, through which the demons are “bound” under the dominion of God.¹¹² Compare this to a Catholic exorcism, with its extensive preparation and detailed ritual (although preliminary blessings are comparable to Protestant prayers). A Catholic exorcism draws upon this critical moment as well; however, the focus is on the entire ritual, and the ritual itself becomes, as a whole, talismanic. With the non-traditional Protestant ritual, the name itself is the critical ingredient, and combined with repentance, faith, and prayer it becomes a complete ritual.¹¹³ Everything else is superfluous.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World*, 42.

¹¹¹ Simon Coleman, “Ta(l)king Possession: Exchanging Words and Worlds Among Charismatic Christians,” in *Summoning the Spirits: Possession and Invocation in Contemporary Religion*, ed. Andrew Dawson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 126.

¹¹² Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare*, 114.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 112.

Coleman also points out that Pentecostal groups—within which exorcism ministries are more common—believe that the Holy Spirit resides within the person as well as working through the person. He cites the admonition from Corinthians 6:19 as the source of this belief:¹¹⁴ “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” If this is the theological reasoning behind the spiritual gifts, then it may also be viewed that demonic possession is possible, and would indeed be sought after by the satanic element. If a demon can turn the temple of the Holy Spirit into his own house, then he is corrupting not only the individual but also the temple. This corruption extends beyond the physical and far into the spiritual, where such things as human boundaries and walls seem less relevant. Corrupting the house of God in one person may go beyond the damage done in that one person.

Exorcist as Shaman, Exorcism as Therapy

Among the horrific accounts of spiritual and physical pain, fear, and death, it can be easy to forget the very basic nature of exorcism: healing ministry. Exorcism is about healing—healing the spiritual pains of a person, and through that, also healing the physical mind, body, and environment. Coleman passingly drew a (perhaps unwelcome) parallel between shamanism and charismatic Christianity; although this was far from the focus of his article, it is intriguing nonetheless.¹¹⁵ A shaman, as he defines it, is “a figure who gains power through travelling and making contact and communicating with the spirit-world.”¹¹⁶ This is quite different from Mircea Eliade’s definition, that a shaman is one whose magico-religious community centers upon him,

¹¹⁴ Simon Coleman, “Ta(l)king Possession: Exchanging Words and Worlds Among Charismatic Christians,” 127.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and who experiences controlled spiritual ecstasy.¹¹⁷ Still others argue that there is no one acceptable definition of shamanism. Keeping in mind these varied and disagreeing definitions of the word, if it can be accepted for discussion here that a shaman is one who is the center of his magico-religious community and who is well-versed and educated in the practice of communicating with non-human entities, then certainly, an exorcist can be considered a type of shaman.

Of course, this distinction bears little meaning within the community itself, because the term “shaman” hearkens back to a pagan past with which charismatic Christians would not like to be associated. However, the term is useful because it points out a few key features of exorcists and the exorcism ministry: first, the exorcist is unique among his religious peers. He is uniquely educated in the specifics of demonology, a largely overlooked aspect of Christianity. Second, he becomes the focus of the possessed person and often that person’s entire community as well. He is the healer, the one person who can help free the victim from his or her strange and painful bondage. Third, he has the willingness—not *ability*, as the ability resides with God; he is only the conduit—to engage in interaction with otherworldly entities. This places him among the dwellers of the liminal regions; demons and angels, despite their reality to the Christian, are simply not part of everyday physical experience. By taking the role of exorcist, the exorcist assumes responsibility for the social isolation with which it comes. Within many communities, the isolation may be a form of honor and celebrity, but it is isolation nonetheless. Fourth, although trance on the part of the exorcist—with the possessed it is a hallmark—is not a feature, the experience of performing an exorcism is certainly charismatic. It is dramatic, and when reading the many accounts of performed exorcisms, one quickly notes the intense and otherworldly nature of the proceedings. To use Eliade’s terms, the performance of exorcism

¹¹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. “*Shamanism*.”

makes the physical, spiritual, and emotional space *sacred*, which is especially interesting because of the *profane* poison at the focus of the proceedings.

In the above paragraph, point two specifies: “He [the exorcist] is the healer, the one person who can help free the victim from his or her strange and painful bondage.” This point bears repeating because it is the launching point for an entirely different mode of inquiry into the phenomena of spirit possession and exorcism. A great deal has been said within the scholarly and medical literature relating demonic possession with illness; seizure disorders, such as epilepsy, and any of a plethora of mental diseases being the most usual proposed culprits. An extensive evaluation of the possible physical and psychological bases of possession is beyond the scope of this study, but also it is not entirely relevant here, for two connected reasons. First, although one can find an occasional denial of the reality of non-spiritual culprits in possession cases, the vast majority of believers in demonic possession acknowledge that many cases are no more than physical or mental illnesses.¹¹⁸ There is little doubt that many cases which in the past may have been mistaken for demonic attacks were in fact the dramatic symptoms of a physical or mental disorder. Even the official Catholic rite of exorcism cautions the exorcist directly to eliminate all medical factors before considering the possibility of demonic possession.

Second, there is simply no way to prove scientifically that the victims are not in fact demonically possessed. Science cannot prove or disprove the existence of God; likewise, it cannot for the demonic. The idea may seem unrealistic or even absurd and superstitious; however, disproof is not forthcoming. To take a small step back from this idea, one can assume that the possessed individual (usually) believes him or herself to be demonically possessed. Often, it is the approach of the psychological or psychiatric communities to treat this belief—or

¹¹⁸ See Fr. Fortea, for example: Fortea, *Interview With an Exorcist: An Insider’s Look at the Devil, Demonic Possession, and the Path to Deliverance*, 33-34, or M. Scott Peck, *Glimpses of the Devil: A Psychiatrist’s Personal Accounts of Possession, Exorcism, and Redemption*, (New York: Free Press, 2005).

delusion, as they would call it, with therapy or medication. However, given the often very isolated nature of possession cases—a person who functions normally in every other aspect of life, possession episodes excepted, for example—would it not be possible that the exorcist acts as therapist, healing the afflicted? Whether he is indeed casting out demons, or is only causing the victim to believe his or her demons have been exorcised, is the result not the same? Granted that I am not a psychologist, it seems to me that treating mental illness would be most effective when the culture of the patient is taken into account. An exorcist is acting within the culture of the patient to treat a disease whose origin is regarded as spiritual rather than mental or physical. The exorcist is the healer within the community; he acts as doctor, therapist, and spiritual bodyguard. An example of this occurred in 1993, when a Phoenix psychologist and ordained Evangelical Lutheran Church in America minister lost his clinical license for performing an exorcism on a boy believed to be a victim of Satanic abuse. It was the second time he had performed an exorcism under the auspices of medicine. Although the 1993 exorcism was successful by his terms and the terms of the patient, he was censured and later “forced to resign from pastoring his former church because of his pro-exorcism stance.”¹¹⁹ Clearly, exorcists are not always regarded in a positive light, even within their own communities. This is an aspect of liminalism; with reverence often comes fear and rejection.¹²⁰

The dangers of treating demonic possession with exorcism are not to be disregarded. The controversy surrounding what many people regard as a medieval and non-scientific practice is, unfortunately, well founded. Injuries and trauma occur during exorcisms. Deaths occur. Children and the weak are often in the most danger during a practical exorcism, as the event by its very nature is highly stressful. When caution is neglected and irresponsible individuals charge ahead,

¹¹⁹ Perucci Ferraiuolo, "Exorcism Costs Counselor License." *Christianity Today* 37, no. 14 (November 22, 1993).

¹²⁰ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 95, 128.

people can die. Too frequently newspapers are splashed with headlines regarding murders and manslaughters resulting from botched exorcisms. Just a couple of weeks before writing this, three young children in South Korea were killed by their father, who was a minister, during a series of exorcisms.¹²¹ The entire concept surrounding exorcism is fraught with high emotion; people are confronted with what they believe is a life or death situation. Further, that life or death is not simply physical life or death, but also ownership of the eternal soul. It is spiritual as well, and is a miniaturized version of the great, ongoing battle between God and Satan. The stakes are high, and the need to defend oneself extends to a moral duty to defend the City of God. When so much is on the line, danger looms.

¹²¹ The crime occurred in February, 2012. Lee Sun-young, "Pastor's Kids Were Beaten, Starved: Police" *Korea Herald*, February 13, 2012, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20120212000357>.

CHAPTER 5

MODERN EXORCISM

Controversies and Crimes

The last chapter concluded with a brief introduction to the controversies surrounding exorcism and possession. The topic has not always been controversial; rather, in the youth of Christianity exorcism was a legitimate and commonplace treatment for a variety of illnesses, many of which were thought to be caused by demons. Of course, in modern times the views are quite different, and range through a spectrum from “every illness is caused by demons” to “every illness is caused by physical factors only.” It seems clear that the more fundamentalist a person’s beliefs, the more likely he or she is to fall near the “demon” end of the spectrum. However, as with all human theories, there is much variation and exception.

Likewise, with all controversies there are two sides to the story. With exorcism, if for a moment one were to neglect the possible spiritual factors, then there is the argument that exorcism is potentially psychologically therapeutic. If an exorcism results in the healing of an individual, can it really be argued that the methods are archaic or superstitious? Are these methods more barbaric than using psychotherapy or hypnosis on patients? Or perhaps they are more unsettling than hallucinogens or shock therapy? Healing is healing after all, and different therapies may be appropriate for different persons and situations.

Why would exorcism be an attractive option? Aside from the spiritual implications for the religious person, the much more mundane psychological aspects should also be evaluated. Michael Cuneo, author of *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, tells in

an interview some of the reasons why the prospect of demonic possession may attract the attention of an individual dealing with personal problems:

We live in a therapy-mad culture...Everyone, it seems, has been looking for some kind of an instant fix to problems. Exorcism fits in very nicely because it is a kind of therapy that promises to be immediately and dramatically effective. And for many people, by the way, this in fact is the case. Demon expulsion may be therapeutically beneficial, at least in the short term. There's no question about that. It's a relatively inexpensive therapy that can be taken with dispatch.

Exorcism is, for the most part, morally exculpatory. It lets us off the hook.¹²²

Elaborating on his meaning, Dr. Cuneo goes on to describe how demonic possession shifts blame off of the patient and onto the demon. The societal scorn resulting from sexual infidelity, animosity, or even murder can be mitigated by having someone else with whom to share blame, and examples of this can be traced back to the Middle Ages.¹²³ Any moral crime wherein the individual may suffer some kind of shame or be the subject of blame may benefit from having an external scapegoat. Incidentally, the term “scapegoat” has its origins in history, when ancient Hebrews would send a goat into the desert for Azazel.¹²⁴ Like the ancient goat, the demon who is now the focus of condemnation becomes the target for blame and animosity, sparing the victim the responsibility for accepting the consequences of their actions. I would argue that in some cases demonic possession actually increases the individual’s standing within their group. There

¹²² Agnieszka Tennant, “Exorcism Therapy,” *Christianity Today*, September 3, 2001, accessed February 1 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/september3/2.49.html>.

¹²³ Elmo Nauman, Jr., *Exorcism Through the Ages* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1974), 76.

¹²⁴ Miguel A. De la Torre and Albert Hernandez, *The Quest for the Historical Satan* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 59-60.

is some belief that only the most pious are attacked by the Devil,¹²⁵ therefore if an individual falls victim to the demonic, it is sometimes seen as a mark of holiness. In addition, an individual who undergoes an exorcism often becomes the center of their community, temporarily, and their success story may continue to give a boost to their standing within their group.

In a sense, having a demonic scapegoat gives the patient an alibi that in some ways absolves them from their crime. “The Devil made me do it” is a common refrain among the guilty, and may or may not be meant literally by the speaker. Additionally, one may or may not be aware that he or she is shifting blame. One may truly believe that one is possessed, and their actions while “possessed” may be simply a manifestation of psychological repressions.

The counter to this argument is that these therapies were and are conducted by medically qualified professionals: medical doctors, psychologists, and trained and certified therapists. Exorcists, ideally, are trained spiritual counselors, but rarely are they more than that. In some traditions, exorcists and ministers have no formal training at all; in many cases lay people are performing exorcisms, often with disastrous results.

Sadly, it is not difficult to find current examples of these disasters. News article abound of injuries, abuses, and deaths resulting from botched exorcisms. It seems that most often the victims are children. Parents, in attempts to exorcise their children’s demons, perform horrific acts resulting in the children’s murder. There are many current examples from all over the world, including Japan, Bolivia, and Romania, of abuses and deaths related to exorcism, but here I will highlight four recent American cases, quoting news reports:

¹²⁵ Father Amorth describes the satanic attacks against Padre Pio: Andrea Monda, “The Devil and Padre Pio” *CatholicCulture.org*, accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=1021>.

November 2009, Ft. Wayne, Indiana:

Latisha Lawson, 31, forced her two-year-old son Jezaih to drink a vile mixture of olive oil and vinegar as part of a ritual to drive the devil from his body. As he choked on the liquid she held her hand over his mouth to stop him vomiting and crushed his neck. Jurors heard Lawson had wanted to drive a demon named as "Marzon" from her son's body. She had become convinced that her son was possessed and blamed herself because she did not profess her love for God while she was pregnant. Lawson and another woman, who also believed her children were possessed, fed the mixture to four children at their home in Fort Wayne, Indiana.¹²⁶

June 2009, Gwinnett County, Georgia:

A judge dismissed charges Thursday against a Gwinnett County woman accused of performing an exorcism on her teenage son... '(She was) trying to explain to us that we were sent to her by God as angels to help her this evening. That this was the third day, and it was supposed to be the worst day, and that her son was possessed by Satan,' said Sgt. Stephen Weed with the Lilburn Police Department. Police said it was part of an exorcism, where the boy was handcuffed for hours at a time. 'Along with handcuffing, the victim, over the course of three days (he) went without food and water for a period of 12 hours from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.,' said Weed. As for the claims of an exorcism, the judge said, "I'm going to have a hard

¹²⁶ Paul Thompson, "Woman 'Killed Son in Botched Exorcism,'" *The Telegraph*, May 29, 2011, accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/8545301/Woman-killed-son-in-botched-exorcism.html>.

time believing you're going to get anybody to say in Gwinnett County, Georgia, that Satan doesn't exist...¹²⁷

February 2008, Odessa, Texas:

Jan David Clark, 60, of Odessa, was arrested Friday after authorities went to his home and found his wife's body wrapped in a sheet with a cross and sword on top of it on the floor of the master bathroom. Jan David Clark told investigators he had his wife pinned on the floor of the bathroom when she died. Clark said he was trying to exorcise demons from her body when they entered him and caused her to die, probable-cause documents say.¹²⁸

August 2003, Milwaukee, Wisconsin:

The forensic pathologist who autopsied an 8-year-old autistic child hours after he was killed during an exorcism told jurors Wednesday the boy died from asphyxiation due to intense pressure on his chest... Minister Ray Hemphill, 47, who prayed and sang over Terrance Cottrell's chest as parishioners held [the child] down Aug. 22, 2003, stands trial for felony physical child abuse. If convicted, he faces up to five years in prison. Terrance, like most autistic children, hated to be touched and had few words to express his needs, according to previous testimony. His mother and two female parishioners helped restrain him as he lay on his back on the floor of the strip-mall based Faith Temple of the Apostolic Faith Church, where Hemphill administered the boy's 12th such 'prayer service,' as the defense calls it. Hemphill told investigators he had no formal

¹²⁷ "Charges Dropped in Gwinnett Exorcism," *wsbtv.com*, June 25, 2009, accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.wsbtv.com/news/news/charges-dropped-in-gwinnett-exorcism/nJW8b/>.

¹²⁸ "Autopsy Shows Suffocation in Exorcism Death," *ReligionNewsBlog*, February 4, 2008, accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/20533/susan-kay-clark>.

theological training and had received his calling from God. He also said that his brother, the reverend of the independent church, had ordained him.¹²⁹

Popular cinema entertains the public with movies devoted to the horror of demonic possession and exorcism. Released in 2005, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* is a Hollywood horror film based on the real-life exorcism of Anneliese Michel, a young German woman.¹³⁰ Audiences were treated to scenes of impossible contortions,¹³¹ terrifying voices, and physical deformation. Despite being based on true events—as sensationalized as they may have been, given Hollywood—they exist as a plastic veneer of entertainment. The viewer can remove him or herself from the blatant horror of the wars, crimes, and ills of the Evening News, if only for an hour and a half. However, the four cases cited above are not entertainment. They are part of the news, part of the problem, part of the reality from which people seek to be removed. These are real crimes and real tragedies that occurred in very recent memory within the immediate space of the United States. They and similar incidents occur with disturbing frequency, and dismissing them as one-offs or simply the products of disturbed minds is to ignore the reality of an entire culture based on the concept of Good versus Evil.

To return to the other side of the argument, that for the potential healing benefits of exorcism, it can be argued that the news is undeniably skewed towards the tragic, for two reasons. First, happy stories do not bring in the ratings. Second, it is highly unlikely that a victim of possession who has been cured by an exorcism would wind up in the news at all. There is a great deal of stigma within the broader public regarding possession. I would argue that although an individual who has undergone an exorcism may feel free within his own religious community

¹²⁹ Lisa Sweetingham, “Medical Examiner: Autistic Boy Suffocated During Exorcism” *CourtTV.com*, July 1, 2004, accessed February 1, 2012, http://news.findlaw.com/court_tv/s/20040707/07jul2004175303.html.

¹³⁰ Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 170.

¹³¹ Interestingly, Jennifer Carpenter, the actress who played Emily Rose, actually did perform the contortions: http://movies.radiofree.com/interviews/theexorc_jennifer_carpenter.shtml.

to speak openly about their experience, he may not be so open with strangers or those whom they do not trust.

However, within the community there may be more openness, and religious groups that emphasize proselytization may focus on demonic possession and the need for exorcism in gaining converts. Additionally, the internet has been something of a God-send for many practitioners of exorcism. A simple Google search for “exorcism and healing” returns countless relevant links. One of the first, an article in *St. Francis Magazine* entitled “The Practice of Exorcism and Healing,” points out the relationship between physical healing and spiritual:

Illness may have many causes. It is significant that Luke, the physician, recognized Satan’s hand in some illness and understood that healing could be miraculously given when Satan was rebuked, as in the case of Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38-39). Some illnesses are not so straightforward – there may be a satanic element, but medicine and surgery may be required. Thus, everything should be done with prayer, for the Lord God is our healer.¹³²

This is a pattern among most modern exorcists. Rarely are the medical or psychological aspects denied, and often, as in the article cited above, there is a recommendation for a unified medico-spiritual approach. If illness has its source in the demonic, as suggested above, there is no theological reason to deny the patient medical treatment. Although some may be inclined to point out the omnipotence of God and the apparent weakness of modern medicine in rhetorical comparison, simply put, God has nothing to prove, and to deny a patient every opportunity for healing at his or her disposal is both dangerous and unfair.

¹³² Vivienne Stacey, “The Practice of Exorcism and Healing,” *St. Francis Magazine*, 3 Vol III (2007): 7.

Exorcists Online

The internet as proselytization tool is extremely effective. Never in religious history has religion had so wide an audience as it has had since the internet became an integral part of day to day life. Every preacher with a sermon now has a virtual pulpit that is potentially larger than the largest mega-churches. He can reach people all over the world, simultaneously, and language as a barrier is becoming weaker.

Exorcism ministries with an internet presence have websites that range from slick and elaborate resembling corporate styles, to single pages with flashing, eye-piercing logos and cartoonish, animated GIFs of knights stabbing the air. Some are merely informational, some preach, and some scream about the end of days. One of the most well-known exorcism evangelists with a prominent online presence is Bob Larson, a self-styled fundamentalist who travels around the United States performing exorcisms.¹³³

A look at the front page of his site quickly reveals his style of ministry: charismatic, evangelistic, and not at all shy about proclaiming the existence of widespread demonic infestation. The viewer is immediately greeted by a prominent banner showing a picture of Larson thrusting a silver crucifix into the forefront, in the style of cinematic exorcists. “Bob Larson DWJD Spiritual Freedom Church” appears next to his image. Interestingly, “DWJD” (Do What Jesus Did) is a registered trademark, and in order to join and become a “core team member,” individuals must pay an annual donation of \$99 minimum to receive “core team member benefits.” Sadly, charging for his deliverance services is a pattern seen throughout his site.

The core of his ministry is his seminars and one-on-one sessions. Featured prominently on the front page of his site is a logo, again with Larson and his crucifix, with the caption: “Got

¹³³ “Bob Larson DWJD Spiritual Freedom Church,” accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.boblaron.org/>.

Demon? Click Here to Take the Demon Test.” Clicking the logo will take the visitor to another site, demontest.com, which does not detail the demon test specifically, but rather encourages the visitor to participate in his other services as well. Once clicking the “Start The Test” link, the visitor is taken to a second page which again sings the praises of Bob Larson and the demon test, in language like: “Break family curses at the ROOT!” and “Get free, stay free, live free!”¹³⁴

Like DWJD, “Demon Test” is trademarked, and unsurprisingly, there is a \$9.95 fee to take the online test. Larson made a recent appearance on *Anderson Cooper 360°*, during which he was confronted with the fees associated with his ministry and spiritual services. During the show he did not provide an adequate response, but he responded in writing a defense on his blog after the fact:

At one point he [Anderson Cooper] tried to paint me as homophobic (surprise, surprise) but when that failed he complained that it cost \$9.95 to go to demontest.com, our web site, and take the test that shows the likelihood of demonic possession. When I tried to explain that we have internet management costs to build and maintain the site, Cooper admitted that he scored high on the test! Interesting. Cooper’s brother committed suicide right in front of him by jumping to his death from a tall building. But worst of all, Anderson Cooper stacked all the other guests against us, including a priest who called our ministry “voodoo magic.” He also brought on an Assemblies of God missionary who doesn’t believe Christians can have demons and whose daughter was reportedly abused more than 10 years ago in an exorcism gone bad. (As if somehow her unfortunate experience was typical of what we do.) Worse yet, he turned his stage

¹³⁴ “A Few Words About Your Demon Test,” *demontest.com*, accessed February 5, 2012, <http://www.demontest.com/startTest.htm>.

over to a self-styled Baptist preacher with a vendetta against all deliverance ministries. The man mocked our ministry (to the cheers of the audience, egged on by Cooper) and accused me of taking five offerings a night in our seminars, a patently false lie.¹³⁵

It might be tempting to simply dismiss Larson as a scam-artist, however his ministry is extremely popular and he has a powerful voice. His YouTube channel contains a plethora of videos of his exorcisms, and has received over 360,000 views, and his appearance on Anderson Cooper is a testament to his popularity.

Unfortunately, one does not need to look far to find exorcists who are, without doubt, scam artists. In Ft. Lauderdale in 2011, three women were arrested for running an extensive “sorcery” scam which included exorcisms. The women would convince their clients to turn over money and valuable items which needed to be exorcised of evil spirits. In one incident, the women took a Rolex watch for use in ridding their clients of demons, but they never returned the watch. They were accused of netting \$59,000 over two years in the scam.¹³⁶ Although these women were performing exorcisms, they billed themselves as “fortune tellers” and not “exorcists.” In 2008 in Italy, a Catholic priest was investigated for an extensive fraud operation in which he allegedly had his associates pretend to be possessed during large staged shows. He would then “exorcise” their demons, and proceed to persuade others in the crowd to also undergo exorcisms. It is unclear if he charged outright for his services or if he merely encouraged

¹³⁵ Bob Larson, “Bob’s Response to the Anderson Cooper Show,” *Bob’s Blog: Spiritual Freedom Church*, February 29, 2012, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://boblaron.org/blog/2012/02/bob%E2%80%99s-response-to-the-anderson-cooper-show/>.

¹³⁶ Edecio Martinez, “Polly, Bridgette and Olivia Evans Arrested in \$59,000 Fla. Sorcery Scam,” *cbsnews.com*, May 10, 2011, accessed February 1, 2012, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-20061388-504083.html.

donations, but in either case his bank account was found to be bloated with over 6.5 million dollars.¹³⁷

Despite the prevalence of fraudulent practitioners of exorcism, it should be noted that the vast majority of ministers and priests perform the rite as a public service, free of charge, and with the best of intentions. One only needs to peruse the many accounts of former victims of possession, their family members, and their exorcists to confirm this. Exorcism is a painful affair after all, and it seems that legitimate exorcisms—i.e. those performed for the purposes of healing under the auspices of religious authority—are often quite traumatic and difficult for the exorcists as well.¹³⁸

Representative Cases

I have so far refrained from including more than passing references to the more sensational anecdotes which are, admittedly, fairly common. The reason I chose not to do so is because it is very simple to fall into a fictive mindset when reading the rather tragic accounts; they are so far beyond what we experience as “reality” on a day-to-day basis that the mind has difficulty thinking of them objectively. The temptation to dismiss them as superstition or mental illness is founded on a logical worldview based on science, evidence, and modernism. However, religion has always existed outside that realm. This does not mean that they cannot coexist peacefully, because they can. One has to remember that every scientific discovery is based initially on questions and mysteries, and every discovery births new questions.

I am not advocating for the truth or falsehood of demonic possession, merely for the open-minded analysis of the phenomenon as it exists for the people who experience it. Within

¹³⁷ Matt Bachl, “Priest Investigated Over \$6.5m Exorcism Scam” *ninemsn*, April 4, 2008, accessed February 2, 2012, <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/world/442091/priest-investigated-over-6-5m-exorcism-scam>.

¹³⁸ Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil*, 31.

the context of Christian theology, the belief is well-founded, secure in its position, and becoming more and more common, despite the objections of more liberal priests and practitioners in favour of modernizing Christianity. Outside the security of Hollywood illusion, it is an unsavoury topic; but one that should not be ignored. Up to this point, I have avoided discussing at length the more dramatic aspects of exorcism and possession. However, it would be neglectful to avoid them entirely, as they are without a doubt the most obvious and devastating features of some possessions. While many possessions may be relegated merely to the realm of obsessive thoughts¹³⁹ or culturally improper behavior, severe cases do involve events that are best described as beyond common Western, American, or Judeo-Christian experience.

This distinction regarding ethnocentric experience is important because it points out the differences in the role of possession within cultures.¹⁴⁰ Possession is by no means universally derided; many religions focus on possession as the pinnacle of divine interaction.¹⁴¹ There is no theological room in Christianity to allow for positive possession; therefore it is always a negative. However, it is worth pointing out that some “gifts of the Spirit” which are often regarded with much deference within some Christian communities, exhibit features which are similar to demonic possession. For example, speaking in tongues is highly regarded within some communities (Pentecostals, for example, are well known for this¹⁴²) but it is also a feature of demonic possession; some authors have discussed this issue in more detail.¹⁴³

At this point it may be helpful to review briefly the most commonly cited symptoms of demonic possession, and to reiterate that this paper does not seek to prove or disprove the factual

¹³⁹ Although this is more properly referred to as demonic “obsession” rather than “possession.”

¹⁴⁰ Erika Bourguignon, *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1973), 14.

¹⁴¹ Melville Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, (US: Doubleday and Company, 1971), 142-143.

¹⁴² Simon Coleman, “Ta(l)king Possession: Exchanging Words and Worlds Among Charismatic Christians,” 127.

¹⁴³ For example: Albert William Sadler, “Glossolalia and Possession: An Appeal to the Episcopal Study Commission.” *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* 4:1 (1964): 85-86.

nature of these events. What can be stated as an unequivocal fact is that many victims, exorcists, and witnesses believe whole-heartedly in the reality of these events; therefore, an evaluation of Christian possession and exorcism requires a commentary on these sensitive areas.

The Roman Ritual of Exorcism cites several specific signs of possession, as we indicated earlier:

...when the subject speaks unknown languages with many words or understands unknown languages; when he clearly knows about things that are distant or hidden; when he shows a physical strength far above his age or normal condition.

These manifestations together with others of the same kind are major indications.¹⁴⁴

Others symptoms include revulsion to holy objects or subjects of a religious nature, foul smells, telepathy regarding religious and moral matters, unexplained drops in temperature, distortions to the skin, face, body, or behavior, sudden immobility or immovability, levitation, and physical manifestations such as door slamming or breaking of furniture.¹⁴⁵ An entire battery of mental and physical symptoms, such as hallucinations, amnesia, and dizziness, can be added to the list.¹⁴⁶

Mount Rainier, 1949

In order to begin a survey of a few modern representative cases, it is perhaps most appropriate to start with what is arguably the most famous case of exorcism. Portrayed in the 1973 film, *The Exorcist*, based on the book written by William Peter Blatty (1971), the fictional portrayal departed significantly from the real case. Michael Cuneo discusses the *Exorcist* case at length in the opening chapter of his book *American Exorcism*. He points out that the case was

¹⁴⁴ Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil*, 460

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea, *Interview With an Exorcist: An Insider's Look at the Devil, Demonic Possession, and the Path to Deliverance*, 73.

sensationalized and that some of its most basic details were changed. For example, in the original case, the afflicted child was a boy who lived in Mount Rainier, but Blatty made the character a girl living in an upscale neighborhood in Georgetown. The incidences of green vomit, violent and blasphemous masturbation, and grotesquely spinning heads were literary additions.

However, that is not to say that the original Mount Rainier case was without drama:

For some time prior to the exorcism,... the unidentified boy had been tormented by a battery of bizarre phenomena: There were scratchings and rappings on his bedroom walls, pieces of fruit and other objects were sent flying in his presence, and his bed mysteriously gyrated across the floor while he tried to sleep.¹⁴⁷

According to Cuneo, the family initially requested the help of a Protestant minister, but the situation only worsened, and so they sought help from the Jesuit community. The priests who initially handled the case were not exorcists, and they ensured that the child underwent a battery of medical and psychiatric evaluations and was placed under 24-hour observation. However, the situation continued to deteriorate:

When a natural cure wasn't found for his affliction,...and the bizarre symptoms threatened to rage completely out of control, it was decided to pursue a more drastic course of action. A Jesuit priest in his fifties was assigned to the case, and over the next several weeks...he performed more than twenty exorcisms on the boy. In all but the last of these, [according to an article in the *Post*] 'the boy broke into a violent tantrum of screaming, cursing and voicing of Latin phrases—a language he had never studied—whenever the priest reached those climactic points of the 27-page [exorcism] ritual in which commanded the demon to depart.' It was the last of the exorcisms, after two nerve-jangling months, that

¹⁴⁷ Michael Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 5.

finally did the trick. Following its completion, the strange symptoms disappeared entirely, and the boy was restored to full health.¹⁴⁸

A meticulous diary written by one of the attending exorcists and obtained by Blatty while he was researching *The Exorcist* goes into further detail regarding the paranormal occurrences during the exorcisms:

It told of mysterious inflammations—or “brandings”—that spontaneously materialized on the fourteen-year-old boy’s skin at various points throughout the ordeal. The brandings sometimes appeared as actual words, such as SPITE, and sometimes as pictorial representations, including...a hideous satanic visage. It told of furniture shaking and crashing in the boy’s presence and of one especially memorable incident in which a hospital nightstand levitated rapidly from floor to ceiling.¹⁴⁹

Cuneo notes that these incidents were “witnessed by a physics professor from Washington University, who later remarked that ‘there is much we have yet to discover concerning the nature of electromagnetism.’”¹⁵⁰

The *Exorcist* case is important not because it is unusual as possessions go, but because it is the case that is most familiar to the wider American public. Although *The Exeter Report* showed that fear of Satan was already on the rise in England, in America exorcisms had fallen into a deep sleep post-World War II, and even the Pentecostals tried to dampen their more charismatic deliverances.¹⁵¹ The launch of *The Exorcist* in movie theaters all over America released repressed fears of the unknown amongst the populace. Living in a time when fear was

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America*, 112.

concentrated on the potential for nuclear annihilation, and with World War II still in fairly recent memory, the Devil had largely been forgotten and replaced with more immediate, real-world anxieties. Then, with *The Exorcist*, a long history of satanic belief surged to the surface, and many people found themselves unable to cope with the sudden revival of religious, soulful terror within themselves.

This resurgence in satanic awareness caused thousands of people to suddenly fear that they themselves or someone they cared about was possessed. Although the movie was solidly Catholic in its focus, it was not only Catholics who were affected. Protestants, Jews, and agnostics were also profoundly influenced.¹⁵² Father Tom Bermingham, one of the minor actors from the film and researchers of Blatty's book, suddenly found himself the focus of hundreds of phone calls from individuals seeking relief from their newfound possessions.¹⁵³ Exorcism and possession burst into the mainstream, and suddenly the Devil was everywhere.

Cuneo suggests that the fervor sparked by *The Exorcist* probably would have run its course had the former Jesuit priest-turned-author Malachi Martin not published his book *Hostage to the Devil*.¹⁵⁴ Sensationalist and directed at the lay public, the book details, according to the front cover: "The Possession and Exorcism of Five Contemporary Americans." The specification of "contemporary" is important because it highlights the immediate nature of the public's hunger for material on the subject. The implication is this: this is not the story of Brigges or the historic nuns of Loudon; these are modern Americans, just like you.¹⁵⁵

Martin's book is entertaining but difficult to read for scholarly purposes. It details five cases of, at the time it was published in 1976, modern demonic possessions and their exorcisms.

¹⁵² Additionally, it is likely that others of non-Judeo Christian faiths were also affected.

¹⁵³ Michael Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁵⁵ For the Loudun nuns, see: Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 233-264.

Although his theological credentials prior to his release from his priestly vows are impressive, his career after the church hinged on his fame as a demon-hunter. Poole notes that his refusal to give sources or names within his book makes his claims suspect.¹⁵⁶ Although the reluctance of possession victims to release their stories to the general public is understandable, given the fantastical, novelistic, and very specific nature of Martin's stories, I am inclined to agree with Poole. Even the first promotional quote on the back cover, given by the *New York Daily News*, refers to the work as "interpretive reporting." However, there is no escaping the influence *Hostage to the Devil* had on the public. It, like *The Exorcist*, became part of the developing American *zeitgeist*. It became a bestseller, and even today it is one of the books most frequently cited in reference for modern exorcism.

Florida, 1991

While deliverance became commonplace amongst Protestants, Catholics remained silent. Many priests disavowed belief in external evil, and did their best to appeal to increasingly "modern" congregants. Cuneo notes his surprise that the Church, at a time when they were suffering from the winnowing of their flocks, refused to capitalize on the media lust for anything related to exorcism, the Devil, or Satanism.¹⁵⁷ However, in 1990 that changed. The archbishop of New York spoke out regarding the reality of evil, the dangers of possession, and the prevalence of Satanism, perhaps as a consequence of the Satanic Panic of the late 1980s. This was followed in 1991 by the full televising of an officially sanctioned Catholic exorcism on the popular television show, *20/20*, hosted by Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America*, 171.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 61.

Readily available online,¹⁵⁹ the episode is just as sensational as *The Exorcist* was. It begins with the warning: “This video contains sensitive and possibly disturbing scenes, and should not be viewed by the squeamish.” It follows with an elaborate montage of demonic images, churches, and solemn priests over a dense cacophony of operatic music, clearly intended to shock and reel in the viewer. Walters addresses the already touched upon question: “Why is the Church allowing this? Father James Le Bar told us that many people don’t share the Church’s belief that the Devil is real. The Church hopes that this may change some minds.”¹⁶⁰ Cuneo confirmed this position when he interviewed Le Bar in 1996.¹⁶¹

The exorcism proceeds as expected, with an extensive period of pre-exorcism interviewing and several initial attempts to “draw out the demon,” that is, to bring the demon to the forefront so that the exorcist may deal with it directly. When they fail to elicit a response from the demon, the video cuts to a brief interview with one of the attending priests, who explains: ‘the Devil plays a great game of deception and will not reveal itself or themselves for quite a period of time.’¹⁶² Shortly after this, the interview takes a turn, and suddenly Gina begins retching. Soon she is arguing with the priests, thrashing violently, screaming, babbling in nonsensical language, and speaking in different voices. It is often claimed that possessed individuals will speak in voices not their own; however, in this case the voices do not seem to be out of the normal range of a teenage girl.

At this point, the actual exorcism begins. The priest begins reading the *Rite of Exorcism*. Interestingly, the *Rite* is performed in English, although in 1991 it was only officially recognized

¹⁵⁹ The full video is, at the time of this writing, available on youtube.com in four separate parts. Part 1 can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn9GaVqeAEs&feature=relmfu>.

¹⁶⁰ 4:00, “ABC’s 20/20 Showing a Real Exorcism - 1991 - part 2 of 4” *youtube.com*, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTiGtIIMFSI&feature=relmfu>.

¹⁶¹ Michael Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, 64.

¹⁶² 6:50, “ABC’s 20/20 Showing a Real Exorcism - 1991 - part 2 of 4”

in Latin—a procedural adjustment no doubt made for the benefit of English-speaking audiences. Throughout, Gina—or, as those present would correct, the demon—screams, makes obscene gestures, fights, speaks in strange languages, and flips from one demonic personality to the next with no warning. She mocks the priest and cries that she doesn't want to burn, and viciously tells all present that more wars are coming. The narration indicates that the exorcism proceeds for several hours. Eventually the exorcist reaches the climactic end to the *Rite*, and commands the demons to leave Gina. She looks relieved, relaxes, and the exorcism ends. However, that evening she complained of hearing more voices, and the priest went to her house and exorcised it as well.

In the end, the priest and her family decided that she needed further, more specialized treatment at a children's mental hospital. After two months, *20/20* returned to interview her. Although medicated with antipsychotics, she insists that she was possessed. 'Thanks to God that he liberated me from Evil. I had a lot of bad things happen to me in the beginning, but I'm much better now. I'm very happy now. I feel free.'¹⁶³ The 1996 interview of Le Bar that Cuneo conducted revealed that Gina was still deeply troubled, and that she had not in fact been 'suffering from full-scale possession, but rather very severe demonic oppression.'¹⁶⁴

Catholic exorcism is truly a singular entity. As previously discussed, there is little room for variation. The *Rite* must be adhered to, the rules followed, the priest faithful in his recitation and enactment. In the previous case, it was noted that the performance of the rite in English was unusual and cause for attention. Such a difference, though critical in relatively Catholic terms, would barely be noticed with the far broader Protestant exorcisms.

¹⁶³ 2:00, "ABC's 20/20 Showing a Real Exorcism - 1991 - part 4 of 4" *youtube.com*, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=oiktEQfuiiM>.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, 65.

Deliverance and Mass Exorcism

As mentioned, it is far more common for Protestants, particularly those of the fundamentalist, charismatic variety, to abstain from use of the term “exorcism” in favor of “deliverance.” Additionally, some prefer “casting out,” in an attempt to move as far as possible away from “conjurations, incantations, and religious or magical ceremonies...”¹⁶⁵ However, the basic theology sees no difference; fundamentally, the exorcist is utilizing the power of Christ to exorcise demons. The difference occurs in practice. While Catholic exorcisms are very specific and detail oriented, deliverances can be considered a broad umbrella under which an entire spectrum of liberation from evil may be found.

Large ministries which perform mass exorcisms fall under this umbrella. Bob Larson’s practice is an example of this; however, there are many legitimate, well-meaning ministries aside from his rather suspicious scheme. Cuneo details a scene he witnessed:

...Throughout the auditorium, demoniacs are paired off with exorcism ministers, wailing, thrashing, regurgitating. Demons are being expelled in gushes of vomit and strands of mucus, and assistants pick their way through the heaving mess, handing out paper towels, holding brown paper bags up to peoples’ chins. Not more than five yards from me, a teenage girl, eyes dancing crazily, hurtles herself to a clearing on the floor, where four women hold her down, one of them praying fervently. Across the hall an attractive, middle-aged blond woman named Linda wails constantly, a high-pitched air raid siren of a voice. Young children roam the hall, taking it all in nonchalantly.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Unger, quoted by Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare*, 116.

¹⁶⁶ Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, 168.

There is no script. Exorcists may insult, taunt, or mock the demons. It becomes a battle of wills that, rather than resembling a fight between good and evil, begins to sound like a schoolyard fight between bullies. One of the pastors tells them “that they’re sorry excuses for demons, useless, weak. He laughs at them, scoffs at them.”¹⁶⁷ The demons retort with vindictive swearing and homophobic insults.

This is clearly a great deviation from traditional Catholic exorcisms, wherein engagement with the enemy is limited to discovering its name and basic details. Although the invectives occur within a Catholic exorcism as well, the priests do not intend to engage the demons in these battles.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted not only the prevalence of exorcism today, but also the dramatic evolution the practice has undergone since the early days of Christianity. As needs change and communities expand and blend, the practice will also continue to change. The Devil evolved during the infancy of Christianity into a battlefield general. For a time, he was subverted by modernism, but his absence left a hole within the Western consciousness that turned out to be only a temporary vacancy.

He has returned, and he has returned with even greater power than before. Many of the sins of the past are commonalities today; surely, the Inquisitors of the Middle Ages would find themselves quite busy trying to track down the Devil in modern America. This resurgence in his presence and the corresponding resurgence in demonic possession at a time when the world, due to the internet and modern communications, is so transparent, has resulted in an increased awareness amongst the wider public of the controversies associated with exorcism. As more

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 168.

people become aware of the Devil, become fearful of modern sin,¹⁶⁸ and find themselves gorged on information overload, an increase in tragedies associated with exorcism can be expected. The more exorcisms appear in the news, the more people will expect to encounter possession in their own lives. These people will turn to the internet, and the cycle continues. Likewise, among some Christian groups, the iniquities of modern day are seen as even more evidence of Satan's presence, as more and more of his demons range out across the Earth; possessions follow this logic, as do exorcisms.

The tragedies will continue, as will the healings. Whether one believes in the Devil, whether one believes in possession, and whether one believes in the efficacy of exorcism is irrelevant. Exorcism is powerful, and it is here to stay.

¹⁶⁸ Such as sexual freedoms and religious laxity, for example.

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