

# Let's Talk

Living Theology in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod

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## Dealing with the Devil

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## Dealing with the Devil

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/>

The devil, Satan, demons are big in popular culture and there is a resurgent interest in exorcism. Fascination with the devil and the demonic is evident in films, rock music, and requests (also to pastors) to exorcize ghosts from haunted houses. The devil, Satan, demons, and exorcism are also big in the Bible, but modern Western Christians, particularly in the mainline churches, often avoid dealing with these realities.

Here's a subject of great interest and some concern to our people that we are not dealing with. When faced with demon possession and exorcism in the Gospels we tend to psychologize the situation. In contrast, in other parts of the world, especially Latin America, Africa, and south Asia, the demonic and the spirit world are live realities. Exorcisms are commonly performed in African Lutheran Churches as well as in other African Churches. The demonic is taken seriously in charismatic/Pentecostal churches and the Catholic Church provides a trained exorcist in every diocese over against the necessity of needing his ministry.

This issue of *Let's Talk* proposes to deal with the devil. In the light of instances of evil in the world in recent years this is none too soon.

The one place where we deal with the devil in church life is in the liturgy of Holy Baptism. Our liturgy has candidates or their sponsors renounce the devil, the powers of this world, and the ways of sin (ELW). Some mistakingly call the renunciation of the devil an exorcism, but it is not. Professor Kent Bureson of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis explains the difference in his essay on [Exorcism in Lutheran Baptism](#). Kent Bureson wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Notre Dame on orders of Baptism in the Lutheran Reformation. He points to the role of exorcism in historic Lutheran baptismal liturgies and offers theological reasons for considering a restoration of exorcism to Lutheran liturgies of Baptism.

Rites of exorcism have the purpose of expelling demons or evil spirits from people's lives. Probably the leading Lutheran authority on exorcism in North America is Pastor Phillip Gagnon of Alberta, Canada. He had been drawn into the need for conducting an exorcism as a pastor, studied the practice in depth, and published *Deliver Us from Evil: A Manual of Exorcism* (2014). In April 2015 he attended a world meeting of exorcists sponsored by the Vatican and participated in a seminar on exorcism in Rome. In his article, [The Ministry of Exorcism](#), he introduces us to the pastoral practices of exorcism and guides us into a cautious approach that takes seriously the reality of demon possession while warning us not see demons "behind every bush."

Pastors as preachers are called to preach on exorcisms in the ministry of Jesus, especially in the Gospel of Mark. Marcus Lohrmann acknowledges the difficulty of this task in contemporary congregations filled with disenchanting listeners. In [Preaching Demons in the Gospel of Mark](#) Lohrmann guides us through the demon-haunted world of the gospel and suggests that preachers need to inhabit this haunted world to connect with some of the real haunted life situations of their parishioners.

Can the devil be made real to modern believers? Pastor [Seth Moland-Kovash reviews Richard Beck's](#)

[best selling new book from Fortress Press \*Reviving Old Scratch: Demons and the Devil for Doubters and the Disenchanted\*](#). Beck invites disenchanted modern believers to look beyond rationalism to behavior, and to focus on evil ideologies rather than individuals in our spiritual warfare.

Our “On the Way” columnist, Benjamin Dueholm, candidly admits that he is personally agnostic about how the Devil and demons are regarded as “real,” in the way we understand it, but in [Poverty-Stricken Power](#) he draws on Augustine and Milton for other ways of conceptualizing these spiritual figures.

Our “As I See It” columnist, Frank Senn, reviews the “inconsistent images” of the devil or Satan in the Bible but sees [The Persistence of Evil](#) in creation, in the ways of the world, in terrorist acts, and in our lives.

We invite our readers to read, mark, inwardly digest, and respond to the articles in this issue of *Let's Talk*.

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# “I command you, you unclean spirit, depart”: The Role of Exorcism in Lutheran Initiation Rites

by Kent Bureson

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/command-unclean-spirit-depart-role-exorcism-lutheran-initiation-rites/>

## What is Baptismal Exorcism?

I adjure thee, thou unclean spirit, by the name of the Father † and of the Son † and of the Holy Ghost † that thou come out of and depart from this servant of Jesus Christ, (name), Amen.<sup>1</sup>

With those words, Martin Luther in his revised baptismal rite of 1526 commended the practice of baptismal exorcism to the churches of the Augsburg Confession. While the text might indicate exorcising an evil spirit to free the catechumen from bodily-demonic possession, this is not the baptismal exorcism's intent. Distinct rites of exorcism for bodily-demonic possession existed in the medieval and Reformation periods. The exorcism, both in the ancient adult catechumenate and in the medieval infant rite, sought through baptism to reject Satan's lordship in the catechumen's life. As Luther's epilogue to the 1523 baptismal rite indicated,

Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy. Remember too that it is very necessary to aid the poor child with all your heart and strong faith, earnestly to intercede for him that God, in accordance with this prayer, would **not only free him from the power of the devil**, but also strengthen him, so that he **may nobly resist the devil in life and death.**<sup>2</sup>

The ritual of baptismal exorcism functioned as one such form of imprecatory prayer against the devil, the world, and sinful human nature.

Luther's 1523 baptismal rite (a translation of the prevailing medieval rite in Wittenberg) and his revised 1526 rite contained other prayers and rituals that aimed to renounce the lordship of the devil, sin, and evil in human life. These other prayers and rituals—the exsufflation or minor exorcism (blowing upon the catechumen), the ephphatha (touching the ears and nose with spittle), and the renunciation of the devil—point to a world that stands, in Heiko Oberman's words, “between God and the devil,”<sup>3</sup> confronting the rule of evil and sin in the lives of those entering the rule and reign of God.

Yet, ritually exorcism had in the church's practice a function that distinguished it from rituals like the exsufflation and the renunciation of the devil. The exsufflation—“Depart thou unclean spirit and give room for the Holy Spirit”<sup>4</sup>—is a mini-exorcism but does not identify the change of lordship for a specific catechumen. Likewise, the triple renunciation<sup>5</sup> of the devil, the devil's works or powers, and the devil's

ways reflects the change of lordship, but focuses upon the catechumen's confession rather than God's action through the Word, destroying the power and authority of sin and evil.<sup>6</sup> As demonstrated in Luther's, the exorcisms are prayer formulas of the Word, grounded in the biblical narrative of Jesus Christ's lordship, that specifically address and command the devil to depart and relinquish all control, authority, and power over the catechumens who now adhere to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

## **A Brief History of Baptismal Exorcism**

As with most of the elements in the Lutheran Reformation baptismal rites, the exorcisms were inherited from the medieval rites which, in turn, were collapsed forms of 4<sup>th</sup> century catechumenal practice. After the 4<sup>th</sup> century the catechumenate often included scrutinies (examinations) of the adult catechumens' lives through repeated exorcisms. In the Gelasian Sacramentary (7<sup>th</sup> century) the exorcisms were collapsed down to three that immediately followed one another. The Gelasian included both formulas (adjurations/commands addressed to the devil) and prayers of exorcism. While some of the prayers fell out by Luther's day, Luther translated the remaining formulas into German in 1523.<sup>7</sup>

Thematically, these imprecatory prayer formulas call for the devil to depart from the candidate at the command of Jesus Christ and implore the protection of the Holy Spirit through the cross of Christ traced on the child's forehead. From Luther's perspective, through the exorcisms God was acting against the devil, and the children, through their sponsors, were renouncing the devil. It was a renunciation worked by God, demonstrating Luther's monergistic view of baptism. Luther retains the exorcisms because they are part of the tradition and they convey the power and nature of original sin. Yet, even more, they are prayers that God has promised to answer and, through which, God works his will against Satan. Thus, the prayerful faith of the church that God will act in baptism comes to expression in the exorcisms. In 1526, Luther reduces the exorcisms to the one noted earlier which he considered sufficient for baptism.

The majority of the 16<sup>th</sup> century baptismal rites retain Luther's one exorcism, although some continue the tradition of three exorcisms.<sup>8</sup> The south German rites, especially those influenced by Johannes Brenz, are the primary examples where exorcisms were omitted.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the Reformed, including Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin, all rejected baptismal exorcism as a papal remnant. Lutherans certainly considered it an adiaphora, neither commanded nor forbidden. Exorcism could only be understood by virtue of its relationship to baptism itself, that is, within the total context of the baptismal rite. It could never attain the status of an independent, liturgical action apart from what God accomplished in baptism. It was not of the *esse* of baptism, but of the *bene esse*. In the context of the baptismal rite, it expressed the nature of baptism as freedom from human bondage to sin, evil, and Satan. Thus, any advocacy that exorcism was not in accord with the evangelical message was considered an assault against the Lutheran understanding of sin and the bondage of the human will.

In the later sixteenth century exorcism became a matter of the confession of the gospel over against the Reformed. The first instance of the controversy began in Thuringia when Pastor George Merula omitted the exorcism and was dismissed from office for his refusal. In the 1580's and 1590's its use became a mark of confessional Lutheran orthodoxy and its omission a mark of Calvinist adherence. This controversy permeated Anhalt and Saxony and continued in Brandenburg and Prussia into the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the theological confession and ritual practices of Pietism and

Rationalism drove the exorcism from Lutheran baptismal rites in nearly every Lutheran territory.<sup>11</sup>

While we might be quick to countenance such a move, the social imaginary that permeated medieval and Reformation life, one closer to a biblical social imaginary than our own, envisioned that demonic forces, such as the devil, were alive and well and bore down on humans to embrace sin and evil. Heiko Oberman expresses this social imaginary for Luther:

Luther's world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon and only his faith in Christ retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end. To argue that Luther never overcame the medieval belief in the Devil says far too little; he even intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic war for mastery over Church and world. No one can evade involvement in this struggle. Even for the believer there is no refuge—neither monastery nor the seclusion of the wilderness can offer him a chance for escape. The Devil is the omnipresent threat, and exactly for this reason the faithful need the proper weapons for survival

<sup>12</sup>

The most significant weapon was the Word. And the baptismal exorcism was a form of that Word waging battle against the Devil in his attempt to usurp lordship from Christ in the Christian's life.

## **Is there a Place for Adjuring the Devil Today?**

All this raises the question whether any benefit accrues from restoring a form of baptismal exorcism in Lutheran initiation rites today?<sup>13</sup> First, restoring some form of baptismal exorcism would confess that all humans fall under the lordship of sin, evil, and demonic powers and that we are complicit in and culpable for our submission to their lordship. Second, it would re-awaken us to the possibility of the existence of spiritual forces outside of our empirical, scientifically-demonstrable universe, as many of our brothers and sisters in the southern hemisphere attest through a social imaginary recognizing their existence and influence. Third, baptismal exorcism would enable all catechumens who experience the rite to grasp the depth of their submission to sin and evil and provide a basis for reflection on the radical nature of conversion (renouncing the devil and adhering to Christ). Fourth, it emphasizes the priority of the divine activity (monergism), God's grace expressed in Christ's victory over sin and evil through the Word in baptism.

Are there potential drawbacks? Through the exorcism, without proper teaching, all catechumens could be seen as spiritually-demonically possessed in their bodies. Outside of a vigorous teaching on human sin and culpability (the bondage of the human will), people could understand that the devil and demonic powers, and not humans, are responsible for sin and evil. Finally, an exorcism formula could be understood magically as an incantation.

Nonetheless, in the desacralized and un-demonized universe which we have created for ourselves, I

believe the benefits of a potential baptismal exorcism outweigh the drawbacks. The question then becomes: What form should it take? While the imprecatory formula of Luther is clear in intent, its direct frontal assault with the Word should be augmented so that it aims not only against the devil and demonic powers but the lordship of sin and all forms of evil. Likewise, it would be used best with a prayer for deliverance from the control of sin and evil. The exorcistic prayers of the Roman RCIA provide a good model.<sup>14</sup> It also would best be used with an adherence to Christ so that the transfer of lordship is expressed ritually. Finally, exorcism should be done in the context of clear catechesis expressing a biblical anthropology and the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. In this way, all who participate in baptism will understand what it means to stand between God and the devil.

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## Notes

1. <sup>^</sup>Martin Luther, "Order of Baptism Newly Revised" (1526), in Luther's Works, American Edition, Volume 53, edited by Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 108.
2. <sup>^</sup>Ibid., 102.
3. <sup>^</sup>Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell Publishing, 1990), 104.
4. <sup>^</sup>Ibid., 96. The Alternate Form of Holy Baptism based on Luther's 1526 baptismal rite in the Lutheran Service Book Agenda contains the exsufflation text without the ritual act of blowing upon the catechumen. It adds the Trinitarian name to the end of the text. See LSB Agenda (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 13.
5. <sup>^</sup>Both the ELCA's *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 229, and the LCMS's *LSB*, 270, contain the triple renunciation. The wording in *LSB* is that of the medieval and Lutheran Agendas. The wording in *ELW* more comprehensively accounts for evil and sin.
6. <sup>^</sup>As an aside, the fact that the renunciation is triple is probably a reflection of ritual conformity through its juxtaposition to the triple credal confession. The earliest liturgical texts of the catechumenate contain the renunciation of sin and the devil, but all of them list a different number of things that are rejected. Apostolic Tradition lists Satan, service, and works; Chrysostom lists Satan, pomp, worship, and works; Ambrose lists the devil and his works, the world and its pleasures. See Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 18-20. Originally the renunciations took place alongside the pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of exorcism and prior to the catechumens' return of the Creed on Holy Saturday. In the later medieval period the return of the Creed was dropped, the exorcistic anointing moved, and the renunciations moved immediately before the Triune credal questions/confession. This juxtaposition probably led to the tripartite pattern.
7. <sup>^</sup>Martin Luther, "The Order of Baptism" (1523), *LW* vol. 53, 97-98.
8. <sup>^</sup>See Kent Bureson, "The Saving Flood: The Medieval Origins, Historical Development, and Theological Import of the Sixteenth Century Lutheran Baptismal Rites," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2002, 456-58.
9. <sup>^</sup>See Bodo Nischan, "The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18:1 (Spring 1987), 33.
10. <sup>^</sup>For a thorough examination of the history of this controversy, see Bodo Nischan, "The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation." Bryan Spinks provides a summary of Nischan's argument in *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther*

to Contemporary Practices, Liturgy, Worship, and Society Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 21-23.

11. [^](#)Bodo Nischan, "The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation," 46-47. Yet, as Bryan Spinks indicates [*Ibid.*, 24-25], in the confessional revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the baptismal exorcism was restored to some baptismal rites. Interestingly, the 1856 Agenda prepared by C.F.W. Walther for the LCMS contains a footnote after the Flood Prayer and before the Gospel reading indicating that in many Lutheran territories the exorcism was used and providing the wording exactly as in Luther's 1526 rite. *Kirchen-Agende für Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden unangeänderter Augsburgischer Confession*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1890).
  12. [^](#)Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, 104.
  13. [^](#)Neither Holy Baptism in ELW nor LSB's Holy Baptism or the Alternate Form of Holy Baptism contain an imprecatory prayer/adjunction formula of exorcism (although the latter does contain the minor exorcism or exsufflation).
  14. [^](#)See Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 42-47, 84-86, 98-100, 106-108.
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# The Ministry of Exorcism

by Phillip Gagnon

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/the-ministry-of-exorcism/>

As one would expect, the New Testament treats the subject of demons in concert with some of the contemporary thought of the day. Demons were “unclean spirits” believed to have personalities with the ability to inhabit waste places and possess individuals where the afflicted individual’s personality was perverted and sickness could be inflicted (Matt.10:25; Luke.11:15-19).<sup>1</sup>

However, no matter how independent in their actions these demons might seem, these lesser spirits are in subjection to the “prince of this world.” Satan is the chief demon who is in direct opposition to God and God’s anointed people (Mark 3:22; Matt.10: 25; 12:24). The purpose, according to Jesus, in Satan’s opposition is to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10).

As such, an especially important aspect of Jesus’ mission was to “destroy the works of the evil one” (1 John 3:8). Jesus demonstrated this integral aspect of his ministry repeatedly as he cast out demons and healed the sick by his own authority (Mark 9:24; 8:16) as “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). Further, as the kingdom of God displaced the kingdom of darkness Jesus also empowered the apostles and disciples of that day and believers in general, to cast out demons and heal in his name (Matt.10: 1,8; Luke 9:1; 10:17; Mark 16:17).

## Exorcism in Church History

The early Church Fathers, especially the Apologists, were fond of pointing to the efficacy of exorcism in Christ’s name as a proof of the true religion, “As they (the pagans) could not be exorcised by those who used incantations or drugs.”<sup>2</sup> As in the days of the apostles, early Christian exorcism consisted of the invoking of the name of Christ, that is to say, “a simple and authoritative adjuration addressed to the demon in the name of God, and more especially in the name of Christ crucified, was the usual form of exorcism.”<sup>3</sup> As well, though not alluded to in the New Testament book of Acts or the Epistles, the making of the sign of the cross is also remarked upon by the Fathers.<sup>4</sup>

Later in the early Church’s liturgy, Holy Baptism (both for adults and infants) included the making of the sign of the cross over the one being baptized, accompanied by the use of exorcised salt, oil, and water, as well as breathing (*exsufflatio*) signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the laying on of hands. The rite of exorcism was performed primarily as a healing rite for a possessed person and as a vital aspect of the sacrament of baptism. The remnant of which can be seen in the renunciation of “all the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises” in the baptismal liturgy of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978).

Catechumens in the early Church were also exorcised as “a preparation for the sacrament of baptism,” as they were seen to be subject to the effects or power of the devil from the consequence of original sin.<sup>5</sup> Exorcism was powerfully seen as part and parcel of the Christian mission validating the message of God’s reconciliation (2 Cor.5: 17-21) and healing in Christ to a humanity suffering from the ravages of the flesh, the world and the Devil. It was and is the gift of God freeing all afflicted from the effects of evil

and intimately concerned with God's mercy and grace to the afflicted, "a continuing sign of man's Redemption."<sup>6</sup>

The emphasis on the healing focus of exorcism is evident from a Gallican prayer of blessing of the minister of exorcism. "Holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God, vouchsafe to bless by our servant N. in the office of exorcist, that by the office of the imposition of hands and mouth [you may deign to choose him, and] he may have power to curb unclean spirits and be an acceptable physician of your Church, strengthened by the power of the grace of healing."<sup>7</sup>

Priests were not the only ones authorized to perform exorcisms in the early Church. Although in the Western church exorcists were ordained as priests to that position, in the Eastern Church priests were allowed to perform the rite without special permission from the Bishop.<sup>8</sup> Laity as well were encouraged to pray against evil and exorcise evil as part of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>9</sup>

The rite of exorcism had not changed significantly during the Medieval and Reformation periods. It was included in the Roman *Rituale* of 1614. As of 1998 the *Rituale* has been "updated" and in 1999 translated into English. It is not without its critics from within the school of exorcists. Critique of the new rite of exorcism could be another article, however, and I will not go into it here.

The *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 was essentially the same in content as in the early Church with additional prayers for deliverance from the evil one included.<sup>10</sup> The Roman Ritual included the traditional sacramental signs; the use of oil, salt, and consecrated water as aids to faith as well as the litany of the saints. The sign of the cross and oil was normative as well as the three-fold imprecatory exorcisms interspersed with deprecatory prayers for deliverance from evil.

Martin Luther certainly accepted the reality of the devil. While he was deadly serious about the existence of the devil, his earthy sense of humour was grounded in the gift of grace in Christ allowing him to temper his profound theological insight with such sound advice as, "Mr. Devil, do not rage so. Just take it easy! For there is One who is called Christ. In Him I believe. He has abrogated the Law, damned sin, abolished death, and destroyed hell. And He is your devil, you devil, because He has captured and conquered you, so that you cannot harm me any longer or anyone else who believes in Him."<sup>11</sup>

In his Order of Baptism of 1523 Luther included, in keeping with the early Church, the exorcism of evil spirits from the initiate as well as the admonition for the baptized to renounce the "works" and "ways" of the Devil.<sup>12</sup> He also retained the acts of exsufflation with the admonition of "depart thou unclean spirit and give room to the Holy Spirit," the placing of the consecrated "salt of wisdom" [upon the tongue], the anointing of oil and the anointing of the ears and nose with spittle while with the adjuration "but thou, devil, flee; for God's judgment cometh speedily."<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, all that remains of the early Church's and Luther's baptismal liturgies against evil is seen in the *Lutheran Book of Worship's* Rite of Baptism "Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises" (p.123). Even in the Roman Catholic Church, the opinion of the chief exorcist of Rome, Father Gabriele Amorth, was, "I believe that taking most of the exorcisms out of the baptismal ritual was a grave mistake. I am convinced that allowing the ministry of exorcism to die is an unforgivable deficiency to be laid squarely at the door of the bishop. As a result of this negligence, we now have lost what was once the school; in the past, a practicing exorcist would instruct a novice."<sup>14</sup>

As scripture and human experience attests, evil, and more specifically, the devil exists along with those angels that followed his rebellion against God before the fall of humanity. He has many names; father of lies, accuser of the brethren, Satan the adversary, the great deceiver, and many others. Throughout the ages the devil has been the enemy of humanity, especially the people of God. Jesus, the promised one of God from the beginning (Gen. 3:15) confronted Satan in the wilderness and resisted his temptations (Lk 4:1-13); expelled demons throughout his ministry (Mk 1:24; 8:16; 9:24) and “disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them” on the cross (Col 2:15).

## **The Reality of Sin and Evil in Human Life**

On the cross and in his resurrection, Jesus destroyed the power of sin, hell and death and brought “faith, hope and love” to all of creation that had been until Calvary “groaning in labour” (Col. 2:13-18; Rom 8:22). In fulfillment of the promise given in Genesis chapter three we have been given the supreme gift of grace from God “who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18).

The reality of original sin exists in our hearts and actions in the world through societies, institutions and nations. If anything, original sin is the most clearly seen truth of Christian doctrine and faith. The after affects of 9/11, child prostitution, street gangs in L.A, serial killers, theft, adultery, gossip and character assassination continue to plague our lives reaping the bitter fruit they have sown. Evil has always had its willing accomplices.

The Devil and his angels are unmitigated in their relentless pursuit and their goal “the destruction of those God loves. As Father Amorth reminds us, “Satan’s true goal is not to make you suffer or to harm you. He does not seek our pain but something more. He wants our defeated soul to say, “Enough. I am defeated; I am a piece of clay in the hands of evil. God cannot liberate me. God forgets his children if he allows such suffering. God does not love me; evil is greater than he is.” This is the true victory of evil.”<sup>15</sup>

In order to combat demonic evil we must first understand our own sin. As the Book of Concord relates, “Knowledge of original sin is a necessity. For we cannot know the magnitude of Christ’s grace unless we first recognize our malady”<sup>16</sup>. Original sin, simply put, means that despite our priceless freedom our human nature remains fundamentally vulnerable to self-centred, egotistical actions. Our innocence is past. Eden is but a memory.

As Dr. Ted Peters observes, “Evil exists within us, outside us, and before us.”<sup>17</sup> We are all cracked cups. And though Satan pre-dates the garden in his rebellion against the Creator, humanity is volitionally related to our first cousin, all of us “absolutizing the relative and relativizing the absolute” (Fr. Biztyo 1993)<sup>18</sup> in our post-fall quest for power, control and status. Thus, as Dr. Peters puts it, “If we choose to get what the self wants, we are implicitly placing a higher value on what the self wants than on the good itself. We place ourselves in the position of God, who would otherwise determine and define what is good.”<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, there is a tapestry, so to speak, of evil woven between the realms of the visible and invisible, the natural and supernatural describing in a limited manner the “diverse manifestations of a seamless web of reality opposed to God.”<sup>20</sup> It is a tapestry woven by a common rebellion to God, but not

united by concerted intent. Sin or evil, of course, is not limited to Satan. Sin is experienced primarily in the negative acts and attitudes of humanity, which separate us from God, each other, creation and even from ourselves. It keeps humanity ensnared in guilt and spiritual blindness. In short, sin alienates and estranges us from our source of “life and well-being.”<sup>21</sup>

As the Book of Concord teaches, “Concerning the cause of sin it is taught among us that although almighty God has created and preserves all of nature, nevertheless the perverted will causes sin in all those who are evil and despise God. This, then, is the will of the devil and of all the ungodly.”<sup>22</sup>

Because of our wretchedness before God, the recognition of our darkness invites contemplation on the mystery of sin and human weakness in light of God’s reconciliation in Christ. Consequently, our ability to counter sin and evil, whether of our design or demonic, lies in our understanding of grace and our powerlessness apart from God.

Marva Dawn beautifully reminds us, “Even as Christ accomplished atonement for us by suffering and death, so the Lord accomplishes witness to the world through our weakness. In fact, God has more need of our weakness than of our strength. Just as powers overstep their bounds and become gods, so our power becomes a rival to God. As the Psalms and Isaiah teach us, God’s way is not to take us out of tribulations, but to comfort us in the midst of them and to “exchange” our strength in the face of them. By our union with Christ in the power of the Spirit in our weakness, we display God’s glory.”

C.S. Lewis wrote in his *Screwtape Letters* that there are two extreme responses to the question of Satan and/or demonic affliction: one will either believe in Satan’s existence or dismiss the question out of hand with some sort of naturalistic rationale. Despite the suspicion of many regarding the reality of demonic affliction,<sup>23</sup> there are also a significant number within the Church today who not only accept the reality of Satan and the fallen angels, but are too quick to attribute events and circumstances to the demonic. Both extremes need to be avoided.

Failing to discern the true presence of the demonic or to ascribe demonic affliction where there is in fact none, is unjust and unhealthy for the afflicted in question. A faulty, superficial diagnosis doesn’t address the core issues of distress and runs the risk of possibly condemning the presenting afflicted to further torment. Seeing a demon behind every bush will not allow the individual to receive proper spiritual and psychological counseling and healing where it is truly needed. In either case there is the risk of possible spiritual and psychological damage to the afflicted.

Furthermore, in believing too easily in the dangers of the demonic and its supposed ubiquitous presence one runs the risk of being spiritually gullible. An unfortunate by-product of the North American Evangelical experience seems to be the phenomenon of the highlighting and extolling of the stereotypical “ex-satanic high priest turned Christian Evangelist.” The Church’s desire is to see evil defeated and people freed. However, this desire often overshadows the process, which includes the necessity of asking the hard questions in order to determine integrity and truthfulness. Being comprised of frail humans, simul iustus et peccator, the Church loves its superstars that have supposedly escaped the clutches of the satanic underground and cults.

Unfortunately, some churches and Christian publishing houses have learned their lessons the hard way as some well known Christian authors and speakers have been revealed to be at best unreliable, if not

downright damaging to the faith. The ensuing debacle caused by Cornerstone's reporters Hertenstein and Trott in the book *Selling Satan* regarding the well-known speaker and evangelist Mike Warnke is a case in point. The Church was simply too gullible. We have not always been "as wise as serpents" (Mt. 10:16).

It is my conviction, in accord with the tradition of the Church, that Satan and his fallen angels are indeed spiritual realities that can and do afflict humanity in various ways. It is well taught in the gospels, the epistles and by tradition, that those who are afflicted can be discerned as such and delivered from evil by servants of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though we may be sure that our life in this fallen world is at times influenced by the demonic, it is most likely not as often nor as pervasive as some would assert. Many instances described as demonic affliction by various recent authors are most likely not.<sup>24</sup> Many reported cases of demonic possession or oppression are examples of physiological or biological disorders and/or dysfunctional life choices (addictions), and their consequences.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, it is especially important for those called as pastoral leaders to accurately discern the possibility of demonic influence amidst the pain of emotional, spiritual and physical woundedness.

As Christian exemplars, the clergy have a responsibility to be obedient to God's calling and to the church at large to rediscover the biblical mandate to deal effectively with the reality of evil in its various forms, including the discipline of apologetics. Apologetics and knowledge of World Religions and New Religious Groups can inform and help in the process of discernment, which is both a spiritual gift of God as well as a discipline or tool refined through prayer, biblical and interdisciplinary study. The mutual encouragement and wisdom of the saints enables us to discern the influence of various cultic group's theologies and practices upon people that may allow them to be influenced by the demonic.

The main training against evil human and preternatural occurs in daily prayerful reflection upon God's Word, mature discipleship and humility in order to resist temptation in the face of life's struggles. The one called to confront evil is well advised to know the territory before confronting the enemy, and he must know not only his weapons especially well, but especially himself, his sin and his saviour. As Jesus admonishes his disciples, "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt. 10:16). It follows that the exorcist ought to be a humble, mature person of faith. The exorcist must understand we are vessels of clay, weak and nothing apart from God's grace (1Cor. 4:7).

Consequently, the exorcist must be aware of his own frailties and weaknesses. He should not too easily believe that a demon is present. It is important to the exorcist to search his own heart as to why it might be important for demonic suffering to be the desired diagnosis. Pride and fascination must be avoided at all costs.

In order to understand and minister effectively to those suffering demonic affliction, one must first have a biblical understanding of the human condition. Not understanding the dark nature that resides within the human heart of both the afflicted and the one called to heal is to be potentially open to demonic deception. According to scripture "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10-18), for "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) and all the good we do is but "a filthy cloth" in his eyes (Isa. 64:6).

Since the Fall (Gen.3), humanity has followed its own narcissistic impulses. As Paul reminds the Romans in his letter, humanity has "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the

creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (Rom.1:25). Idolatry lies at the centre of the human heart. For as Jeremiah relates, “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse, who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9).

As the Brief Order of Confession reminds us “we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.”<sup>26</sup> “Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Ecc. 9:3). We are, as Luther reminds us in his commentary on Romans, curved in upon ourselves.<sup>27</sup> Truly, by grace received in faith alone in Christ Jesus we are simul iustus et peccator. As saint and sinner, we continue to struggle against the desires of the flesh, the temptations of the world and the passionate hatred of the devil as he “prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (2 Pet.4:8).

Each person has a weakness, an Achilles heel if you will (often more than one, as addictions, like sin, tend to cluster, for sin and addiction are like kissing cousins)<sup>28</sup> As Gerhardt Forde notes, “As sinners we are like addicts—addicted to ourselves and our own projects (*On Being*, p.94). We are all predisposed to our own dark predilections. Unless exposed to the Light of Christ in the life of faith, i.e. regular prayer, confession and absolution, and communion, these predilections are extremely likely to pop up to the surface like a balloon held under water and released. Periodic indulgences eventually lead to habitual, unrepentant sin and spiritual indenture and eventually addiction comparable to substance abuse, and equally as difficult to overcome.

Once tasted, sin’s dark pleasures are an intoxicating aphrodisiac, as addictive as crystal meth or crack cocaine. Habitual sin especially becomes closer than an old friend and we are equally reluctant to let go. If we are honest with ourselves, there are moments in our lives when we plan, not out of our naivete, but by dark design to “get away” with some secret sin, to indulge ourselves. We count on God’s forgiveness, the cheap grace that we confer on ourselves, to see us through to our next dalliance with sin (*Cost of Discipleship*, p.44).

For once we have entertained the possibility of sin, we have already lost the battle. Sin has gotten a foothold as Paul describes in (Eph. 4:27). We try to rationalize, “Maybe just this once and then it’ll go away” I can control it.” As Churchill was once reported to have said, “I’m not addicted to smoking, I’ve quit a thousand times.” Once it has a foothold in the doorway of your heart, getting rid of sin without Christ is like trying to get red wine off linen. One cannot entertain sin in the dining room of our hearts without its leaving its stain.

Succumbing to sin’s deadly sweet seductions we can find ourselves walking either of two paths. We can become either i) a person whose conscience, by the grace of God, convicts us of our sin, thereby urging us to seek forgiveness through confession and/or restitution or; ii) a person whose conscience becomes as if “seared with a hot iron” having neither empathy nor loving truth, self-sacrifice or authority (1 Tim. 4:2).

Our natural, human proclivity toward sin coupled with our society becoming increasingly estranged from God and the mushrooming of our desire, contributes to a momentum of evil within us, leaving us potentially vulnerable to demonic influence. As Father Amorth asserts regarding this day and age, “The first factor that influences the increase of evil influences is Western consumerism. The majority of people have lost their faith due to a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle.”<sup>29</sup> In our delusion of being able to control or manipulate sin, we falsely believe we have acquired power. But it is empty. It has often been

said that “more” is Satan’s favorite word. In our quest for illusory success we seek more and more power, control, and knowledge—continually living to ourselves, sinking deeper and deeper into the quagmire of self.

And so, impenitence embodies the spirit of rebellion prevalent today that leads to the increased possibility and susceptibility to demonic influence. Thus, where Satan gains entry into the living room of our hearts he unpacks his bags making himself at home. After all, to a certain extent he is family. In terms of what can be done; the person whose conscience is troubled and is not experiencing obsession or oppression of any type is a good candidate for spiritual counseling, whereas the one whose conscience is seemingly dead may be labeled a socio/psychopath (among other things) or, possibly an afflicted person requiring deliverance through exorcism. Some may require both as the presence of the demonic certainly leads to mental illness that may be difficult to distinguish from demonic affliction.

## **The Diagnosis of Demonic Affliction**

One possible doorway for uninvited demonic guests in the living room of our hearts is unconfessed, nurtured, and rationalized sin. However, it is especially important to be sensitive to and watchful for the person who cannot or will not receive forgiveness—believing that God cannot or will not forgive him. This falsehood comes straight from the lips of the father of lies and those who in their ignorance or malice would deceive and lead others to despair.

As the Apology of the Augsburg Confession relates, “The consciences of the godly will not have sufficiently firm consolation against the terrors of sin and death or against the devil’s inciting them to despair, unless they know that they ought to stand firmly upon the fact that they have the forgiveness of sins freely on account of Christ. This faith sustains and enlivens hearts in their most bitter struggles with despair.”<sup>30</sup>

Of course, those actual sins drawn from the well of original sin are as varied as the multitude of humanity. Our sin manifests itself out of existential fear, anxiety, dread and our felt need for power, control and status in a world of fellow gods in the making. Sin operates primarily in the spheres of the relational (God, others and self), as well as in relation to the rest of creation. Without the grace of Christ it manifests itself through self-serving gratification and self entitlement, exploiting others and seeking after esoteric power often through involvement with the occult.<sup>31</sup>

## **Confession and Forgiveness vs. Therapy**

As Dr. Lee Griffin contends, because of our present day infatuation with most modern psychological theory—a naturalistic understanding of the Christian faith that excludes the miraculous, and embraces a love of whatever is new—many pastors have abandoned the heart of the gospel, and neglected the life-giving power of confession and forgiveness. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ministers began to see themselves as pastoral professionals and as counselors. Problems were understood in the context of psycho-social dysfunction or fractured relationships -- “mistakes” to be dealt with through understanding and resolution rather than confession and forgiveness.

Sin has become an archaic theological term even to the point where eminent American psychiatrist Dr.

Karl Menninger decades ago asked the question in the title of his significant work, *Whatever Became of Sin?*. A therapeutic approach to sin is akin to putting a band aid on a broken arm, whereas confession and forgiveness brings miraculous life and healing.<sup>32</sup>

Most therapeutic models concern themselves primarily with the intricacies of human personality rather than with the core disfigured entity which human beings truly are. False knowledge about some “thing” replaces true knowing of “someone,” that is, Jesus and the power of life giving forgiveness through his gracious sacrifice. The essential problem of a secular therapeutic model to spiritual problems in relation to supernatural evil is that it is more problem-oriented than life-oriented. In stating this, I mean to point out that even the best therapeutic models tend to be inadequate. Because our human proclivity is to avoid pain rather than to promote true life through pursuing an uncompromised allegiance to that which brings wholeness, they all attempt to reconstruct, reconstitute or splint that which in reality needs confession, forgiveness, re-creation or re-making.

As such, one can confidently assert that we are more often in love with our crutches in life than we are with Jesus who invites us to carry our cross, die to self and follow him. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer so succinctly points out “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”<sup>33</sup> It is threatening to confess our sin, for to do so admits our loss of control and power and reveals our weaknesses through our sin, sin which unless confessed acts like a teredo boring through our souls.<sup>34</sup>

No, therapy won't do; only confession which admits sin and offers forgiveness which destroys guilt and brings freedom and life will suffice. Self-absorption is our foremost enemy. Exorcism is primarily a healing rite completely based upon God's declaration of forgiveness in Jesus Christ through his passion and resurrection. Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to the cross of Christ. It is the power of God that destroys the influence of the devil and quells the power of all evil whether angelic or human. Forgiveness of sin is the only thing that can bring freedom to a soul that has as its core need: agape love through acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation with the Creator. It allows us to say what we are unable to say by ourselves, “Yes, Lord.”

## **History of the Individual (Family of Origin)**

As the exorcist begins the task of discerning whether there is a need for exorcism a time of pastoral teaching and exploration will be required as many people are unaware of what is evil, being deceived by the enemy and blinded by their own sin. This being the case, the ensuing pastoral conversation should explore the family's history in terms of any emotional, physical, verbal, substance or sexual abuse within the family or relationships with friends, clergy, and/or other authority figures. In addition, any history of family involvement with cults or occult beliefs and/or practices should be noted and formally renounced. If the afflicted has articles<sup>35</sup> used in occult practice present, they should be destroyed.

In the ensuing relationship, the pastor must explore past or present relationships, family history, involvement with false religions or cults, as well as unhealthy coping mechanisms and behaviours which may influence the presenting problem, such as addictions or family history of mental illness.<sup>36</sup> Addiction, one might say constitutes the basic ontology of sin.<sup>37</sup> It can be understood in terms of moral failings such as habitual lying, lust, blasphemy, etc. and not only in relation to substances, though one can and is often tied to the other as addictions tend to cluster together. The task of sifting through all of the above is

daunting, as it will confront our own fascination with evil and the possibility of our own vulnerability to demon affliction.

Note that the presence of abnormal behaviour including any type of addiction, does not necessarily confirm a demonic presence per se, but neither does it exclude it. Furthermore, as the individual's relationships are examined any unconfessed sins should be dealt with by pastoral conversation including the rite of confession and forgiveness.

Usually, the misdiagnosis of demonic affliction typically occurs when the classic or parapsychological marks of demonic presence are minimized in favour of the more easily manufactured psychiatric indications. Both types of criteria; parapsychological and psychiatric must be seen from a holistic perspective and not set against one another.

According to Father Corrado Balducci, one of the world's leading demonologists, misdiagnosis normally occurs "when the source of a temptation is not immediately evident."<sup>38</sup> When ordinary temptations in life arise and slowly become overwhelming and constitute a disruption in a person's life or a family's life, there exists within us all, a proclivity to dismiss our responsibility and accord blame to others or to the demonic. Flip Wilson's old line "the Devil made me do it!" becomes especially pertinent here. Balducci differentiates between those temptations, the sources of which are so obvious so "that they do not require a diagnosis" and those, which "without any precedent, (a temptation) arises suddenly and violently..."<sup>39</sup>

Again, as Balducci quotes G. Cavalcoli, "The thoughts and impulses that come from our own ego are experienced as our own; we recognize ourselves in them; we meet our own vices and evil inclinations.... On the other hand, thoughts suggested by the devil are experienced as coming from another 'ego' different from ours; that is, from another personality that on its own initiative speaks to us and proposes ideas or projects that we experience as new and foreign to our customary habits and inclinations."<sup>40</sup>

Aside from understanding biblically and psychologically the reality of human preternatural evil, we must pay close attention to the need not only for proper and effective confrontation with demonic evil, but especially for the aftercare of the afflicted. All too often we are concerned more with the battle than the care of the person afterwards. I provide more pastoral guidance in my manual, *Deliver Us From Evil*, which treats exorcism from a Lutheran perspective and which contains my reflections from being in Rome for the course on exorcism in April 2015.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The territory of demonology and exorcism is a shadowland with great potential for misunderstanding and misdiagnosis, both for the pastoral counselor and the afflicted. So much more needs to be said in greater detail. For example, Dr. James Friesen claims that Multiple Personality Disorder "is most often found to result from satanic/ritualistic abuse"<sup>41</sup> There is as well as the concern for proper documentation and evidence of demonic affliction.<sup>42</sup> For instance, according to Father Malachi Martin, Henri Gesland, a French priest and diocesan exorcist in Paris, stated in 1974 that, out of 3,000 consultations since 1968, "there have been only four cases of what I believe to be demonic possession." T. K. Osterreich, on the other hand, states, "possession has been an extremely common phenomenon, cases . . . abound in the history of religion."<sup>43</sup> The truth is that little official or scholarly census of possession cases has been

made. While the assertion by Osterreich is true that cases “abound in the history of religion”, what is surprising is the percentage: .0013% of 3000 cases diagnosed as demonic possession in six years by the Roman Catholic Church. This is surprisingly low considering the frequency of demonic affliction reported by many in various charismatic and Pentecostal deliverance ministries.

Due care and attention must be given to the mandate our Lord gave regarding the demonic. The skills needed to address true demonic affliction are in dire need of acknowledgement and honing because of the lack of serious attention to the subject of exorcism in recent years---although I should add that the Roman Catholic Church has begun in the last dozen or so years a course dealing with the demonic and exorcism.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, we need to preserve and teach the recognition of the distinctions between ordinary evil (everyday temptations and personal predilections to sin), and the extraordinary diabolical activities of obsession, oppression, infestation of a place and possession of people. Too much evil has been relegated to multi-national corporations.

If we are to serve the world, we must take into account the harm, both religious and psychological, that the ill informed and ill prepared can inflict upon a person when misdiagnosis prevails. If we are to serve the church effectively as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we of necessity must be daily ensconced in the means of grace and in the life of prayer. In the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians, “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Being healed of demonic possession or obsession is one thing, but maintaining this freedom is quite another. By disregarding the spiritual snares by which one was afflicted in the first place, the individual could be afflicted yet again and possibly more seriously (Mt. 12:43-45); for the devil hates to give ground to the kingdom of God.

And yet, ultimately, he cannot help but do so.<sup>45</sup> The Light has indeed entered the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5). The Lamb of God has decisively won the war, but battles are yet to be waged by the servants of both kingdoms. But this is the Good News that the dark kingdom cannot bear to hear, Jesus is Lord and his Kingdom will have no end.

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## Notes

1. [^Judaica](#), p.1526
2. [^New Catholic Encyclopedia](#), p.748
3. [^Nauman.](#), p.36
4. [^New Catholic](#), p.748
5. [^Nauman.](#), p.38
6. [^New Catholic](#), p.749
7. [^Bradshaw](#), Paul F., *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Church, East and West*, pp. 222 - 224
8. [^Bradshaw](#), p. 222
9. [^Nauman](#), p.51
10. [^Nauman](#), pp.209-215 It has last been updated in 1999 and approved by Pope John Paul II.
11. [^Gritsch](#), Eric, *The Wit of Martin Luther* (Augsburg Fortress, 2006), p.55
12. [^Leupold](#), Ulrich S., editor, *Luther's Works* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia., 1965) Vol. 53,

pp.96-101.

13. [^Ibid.](#)
14. [^Amorth, Gabriele, \*An Exorcist tells His Story\*, \(Ignatius Press, 1999\), pp.54-55](#)
15. [^Ibid.](#), pp.108-109
16. [^BOC.](#), Article II: Original Sin, p. 117:33.
17. [^Peters, Ted, \*Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society\*. \(Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994\), pp.108-109.](#)
18. [^In conversation with Fr. Biztyo when I was at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. While I was in my first year in 1993 we were to choose a rite of the Church to research in our Liturgy and Homiletics class. I chose exorcism since only three out of the fifteen students polled informally one day in September believed in radical, raw evil forces opposed to God and his kingdom known as demons or fallen angels. Father Biztyo became a good friend who, as the diocesan appointed exorcist endeavoured to help me in my paper as well as my practical understanding. We had wonderful conversations as I coveted his library. May God be merciful to me, a sinner.](#)
19. [^Peters, p.27.](#)
20. [^Dawn, Marva, \*Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God\* \(Wm. B.Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2001\), p.19; quoting from Yoder Neufeld's, \*Put on the Armour of God\*, pp.123-24](#)
21. [^Peters, p.28](#)
22. [^The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans.Kolb, R., Wengert, T.J. & Arand, C.P. \(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000\),.Conf.: 2, XIX](#)
23. [^The use of the terms, "afflicted" or "affliction" will be used in a general sense referring to all degrees of demonic influence, from the lesser of temptation through to oppression/obsession to the greater of full possession. In relation to the more formal categorization the terms infestation, oppression, obsession and possession shall be used.](#)
24. [^Rebecca Brown, Bob Larson, Lauren Stratford, Mike Warnke, etc. Each of these authors has been thoroughly discredited by competent counter-cult groups such as The Christian Research Institute, The Trinity Foundation and others. For example, in the video series The Final Battle, by Bob Larson, he supposedly exorcises probably the most polite demon I have ever witnessed, read or heard about. In this portion of the video I'm referring to, he is supposedly exorcising a demon from a woman. It seems that the demon has no knowledge of English curse words as the best the demon can come up with is, "I don't like you, Bob," in response to Bob's questions and adjurations. The demon never curses or insults \(let alone spin its head around or spew anything as it probably has to follow FCC regulations\) and has the presence of mind to scratch its host's nose during the expulsion, adjust the host's blouse as Bob leans in and finally, smoothly flows between mental states and conversation from demon to host and back again as the demon and Bob discuss books \(how the demon got the woman to get interested in the occult\) and the demon's techniques in manipulation and deception \(one wonders if Bob remembers that Satan is the father of lies? I would also like to point out that not all deliverance ministries exhibit the simplistic viewpoint I decry. Many pastors or Christian psychologists such as Frs. Frances MacNutt, Corrado Balducci, Gabriele Amorth, Drs. Ed Murphy and James G. Freisen also place tremendous emphasis upon psychological and physiological evaluation in concert with spiritual counselling \(see bibliography\).](#)
25. [^RAD \(reactive attachment disorder\), OCD \(obsessive- compulsive disorders\), borderline or narcissistic personality disorders, etc or subsequent issues caused by family dysfunctions or abuses \(verbal, emotional, sexual or physical\), or simply an aversion to dealing with difficult](#)

personality faults or sins (control issues, reluctance to forgive, harbouring anger, lust, jealousy, etc) which may manifest themselves in violence, pathological sexual behaviour, and/or addictions (not an exhaustive list I'm sure.)

26. [^Lutheran Book of Worship](#) (Augsburg Publishing House & Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), p.57
27. [^LW](#), American Edition, 25:245, "If we examine ourselves carefully, therefore we shall always find in ourselves at least vestiges of the flesh by which we are afflicted with self-interest, obstinate over against the good, and prone to do evil. But it is easy, if we use any diligence at all, to see the depravity of our will in our love of sensual evils and our flight from things that are good, if, for instance, we are drawn toward lust, greed, gluttony, love of honour, and we abhor chastity, generosity, sobriety, humility, shame; but it is easy, I say, to understand how in these things we seek our fulfillment and love ourselves, how we are turned in upon ourselves and become ingrown at least in our heart, even when we cannot sense it in our actions.
28. [^Dr. Gerhard Forde](#) powerful book, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, is an excellent resource articulating the brilliance of Luther's theology of the cross. Pulling no punches, Dr. Forde likens sin to addiction admonishing us and distinguishing the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross, "The theologian of glory is like one who considers curing addiction by optimistic exhortation. The theologian of the cross knows that the cure is much more drastic theologians of the cross know that we can't be helped by optimistic appeals to glory, strength, wisdom, positive thinking, and so forth because these things are themselves the problem the truth must be spoken thus again Luther's statement of the radical cure in his proof for Thesis 22: 'the remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it.' The cross is the death of sin, and the sinner. The cross does the "bottoming out." The cross is the intervention. The addict/sinner is not coddled by false optimism but is put to death so that new life can begin." (pp.15, 17)
29. [^Amorth, Gabriele](#), *An Exorcist Tells His Story* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 53.
30. [^The Book of Concord](#), trans. Kolb, R., T. J. Wengert, & C. P. Arand, Apology: 1, VIII, 85.
31. [^And so, deep within, we nurture our sins, winking at ourselves in the mirror of our ego while sinning in the shadows. The light and freedom of confession is exchanged for the night of secrecy and dark fulfillment. As the Apostle John wrote, "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" \(John 3:19-21\).](#)
32. [^In conversation with Dr. Lee Griffin](#) over two periods of study, in January of 2005 and 2006 in Port Angeles while writing this manuscript.
33. [^Bonhoeffer, Dietrich](#), *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), p.89.
34. [^A favourite analogy of Dr. Griffin's: A "teredo" is a sea worm, which has historically been known to bore holes through the hulls of wooden ships. A long held negative emotion or sin can bore a hole through the hull of a human personality; an invitational opening is created that can beckon a spirit of the same dark ilk. Therapeutically, one does not exorcise a biological, a psychological or a characterological disorder; neither is it efficacious to attempt to counsel away a demonic affliction, though counseling should certainly be part of the aftercare.](#)
35. [^Candles, knives \(athame\) used in satanic and wiccan ritual, runes, crystals, tarot cards, books, diaries \(book of shadows or record of ritualistic advancement and practice\), etc.](#)
36. [^See Appendix A in my manual, Deliver Us from Evil](#)

37. [^](#)“As sinners we are like addicts, addicted to ourselves and our own projects. The theology of glory simply seeks to give those projects eternal legitimacy. The remedy for the theology of glory, therefore, cannot be encouragement and positive thinking, but rather the end of the addictive desire.” Forde, p.94
  38. [^](#)Balducci, Corrado, *The Devil: Alive and Well in our World*, (Society of St. Paul, 1990), p.105
  39. [^](#)*Ibid.*, p.105
  40. [^](#)*Ibid.*, p.106
  41. [^](#)Friesen, James G., *Uncovering the Mystery of Multiple Personality Disorder* (Here’s Life Publishers, 1991), p.66.
  42. [^](#)Peck., Scott, M., *Glimpses of the Devil* (Free Press, 2005).
  43. [^](#)Martin, Malachi, *Hostage to the Devil* (Bantam Books, 1977, p.11).
  44. [^](#)Pontifical University Regina Apostolorum, Rome
  45. [^](#)“God’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom cannot co-habit the same persons. Christ’s arrival means Satan’s expulsion. Wherever Jesus goes, one by one people are freed at His command from this grotesque form of bondage to the evil one.” (Article “The Decisive Encounter” by ELCiC Bishop Robert Jacobson.)
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## Preaching the Gospel to a Haunted World

by Marcus Lohrmann

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/preaching-gospel-haunted-world/>

“That b\*\*\*\* is gonna haunt us.”

The sister coaxed a laugh out from behind her tissue, snorting through tears. The three women in the room gazed down at the youngest of the them and smiled at the inside joke passing just beyond the reach of the chaplain’s ears. The dead woman was covered in homemade quilts piled two and three layers deep. An hour earlier the machines in the room had been unplugged.

She had died in a way that countered her explicit wishes. Kept on feeding and breathing tubes against her prewritten instructions for a few weeks, there had been a glimmer of hope from ambiguous testing that kept the doctors from finally ending the months long struggle with a nameless cancer that had come on too quickly.

The sisters hugged one another and shooed the chaplain out of the room after a prayer. She was in her late thirties.

I don’t know whether to believe in intangible spirits or demons, but in my work I’ve witnessed forces that fall outside the comfort of my disenchantment: the guilt that racks families after a loss, the missed opportunities, the suspicions, the failures that keep coming back to haunt us. For the three sisters sitting in that hospital room, they would live their lives with the memory of a dying child before them who had begged not to stay on breathing tubes as her last conscious wish.

They had acted in good faith, resting their hopes on a doctor’s suggestion that further testing could yield unexpected results. The waiting forced them to act opposite her explicit wishes: the disconnect between these unsettled them. These are the roots of haunted places.

Preaching texts that encounter unsettled spirits is a dangerous task. There is, to begin with, an awkwardness of reading inhabited texts in our present historical moment. The hackles of empirically-minded 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences tend to go up at the mention of ghosts or demonic forces. To paraphrase Max Weber, ours is a disenchanted age.

There is, however, a deep dishonesty in avoiding texts that encounter these realities. This dishonesty burns at two levels. First, the texts themselves speak to an enchanted world of demons, ghosts, and unquiet spirits: skipping over these awkward details serves to undermine pastoral authority, (i.e., *why should I read the bible at all if I don’t have to take the uncomfortable parts seriously, pastor?*).

Demanding the disenchanted reading in nods to hyper-contextuality, the effort to soften up scripture for empirically critical readers, signals more about the dis-ease of the preacher to avoid what is challenging than anything about the text itself.

In the second place, the preacher risks dishonesty at the level of exactly the type of discomfort which the

presence of the demonic and ghosts elicits. Although the preaching event may occur within an allegedly disenchanted context, listeners (and even preachers) know the unmistakable echoes of the ghostly inhabited places of this world. Glossing over their reality only makes them howl that much louder.

Maybe the last unmet wishes of a loved one haunts an assembly member. Maybe the assembly listener has been sensing the disquietingly racist currents in recent political discourse demonically lurking around the edges of an otherwise cheerful bedroom community. Perhaps the nightmarish image of a Syrian child washed up on the shores of Turkey continues to impart chills. To ignore these as having the quality of hauntedness out of an unspoken nod to empiricism is to not only to ignore their reality but to invalidate the experiences of the listener. Glossing over the ghastly and the demonic is an injustice, both to the listener and to the text.

Although we live in an age whose intellectual Truth is disenchantment, our bodies know the calls of the disembodied. While our hyper-empiricism pleads us away from belief in ghosts and demons, our experiences do not. The sister's comment in that hospital room might have been a throwaway line, bringing a welcome laugh amid hard tears, but it spoke to a deeper, much more troubling aspect of what had transpired.

The Gospel of Mark is haunted. There are an important set of other-worldly characters within the text whose presence shape and tell us something about the protagonist, Jesus. To ignore these characters as real forces is to ignore a major element of the story and therefore the message of this protagonist.

Biblical scholar Joel Marcus' excellent two volume commentary on the Gospel largely revolves around his reading of Mark as an apocalyptic struggle between agents of eschatological dimensions. It is a tale of the epically hellish agents of death conquered by the supreme agent of life. Beginning with a cosmic struggle in the desert in which Jesus defeats Satan, the first half of Jesus' ministry is in direct confrontation to demonic forces that wreak havoc on human existence. Marcus writes, "*For Mark as for other Jewish apocalypticists, this salvation is above all a liberation of humanity from the cosmic powers that oppress it; Jesus' main mission is to clear the earth of demons (Käsemann, Jesus, 55), and even his teaching is a weapon in this struggle,*" (Joel Marcus, 72).

Counting either explicit demonic exorcisms (i.e., 1:21-28), general references to either Jesus' casting out unclean spirits, (1:34) or the mission of the twelve as encompassing exorcism (6:6b-13), there are at least eight explicit references to the exorcising of spirits or demons in the first eight chapters of Mark's gospel alone (more still if we include a cast of demonic characters imbedded less explicitly in the text, such as the storm upon the Sea of Galilee). Unclean spirits, demonic forces, ghosts, and even Satan himself make appearances in Mark's gospel. They inhabit the human world as destabilizing forces.

Amid all these other-worldly forces, even *Jesus* is mistaken as a ghost! As he walks out from the land across the sea, the disciples cry out in response to his presence as a ghostly one (6:45-50). Herod, upon hearing about Jesus' ministry, likewise believes that Jesus is a specter of John the Baptist (6:14-16). Herod's guilt in relation to John's disappearance throws him into panic over the mere prospect of John's haunting return.

What's more, both Jesus' family and the scribes mistake his power over these other-worldly players as either an indication of his madness (3:20: "he has gone out of his mind!") or his being in cahoots with Satan (3:22-30). Even his disciples, the ones who ought to have known better, mistake his identity as

belonging to the ghostly realm when he walks on the water towards Bethsaida.

Thus, Jesus' true identity is intimately connected his relationship to these demonic forces. Although the reader knows Jesus' identity all along (1:11), it takes the human characters of the story until Peter's confession to figure it out (8:29b): "You are the messiah!" All the while, there is a set of characters within the narrative who do not confuse Jesus' power and identity: the demons, Satan, and unclean spirits, whom he is constantly ordering *not* to reveal this identity. Mark's famous "secrecy motif" is most consistently challenged by these other-worldly foes, who are continually silenced in turn.

That these demons show a frightened awareness of Jesus' power before anyone else imbues the preacher's task with a power and force of its own. The demons are *conscious* and *frightened* of the reality of God's dominion over the earth, brought forward in Jesus (1:14). Where earthly political or religious figures scoff at his work and plot his demise, Jesus' power is unquestionably strong over those unearthly forces of division, darkness, and haunting.

That those figures recognize and respond to Jesus' power well before humanity can see or understand his work among us is also significant. They respond to the Word when human understanding fails it. When Jesus forcefully tells a demon to "shut up!" and come out of a man, (poignant language to be repeated later when Jesus tells the stormy winds to "shut up" upon the sea), the disciples and crowds watching are completely aghast: "And they were all awestruck, so that they asked one another saying, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even gives orders to the unclean spirits, and they obey him!'" (1:27, *translation J. Marcus*).

All the same, preaching the demonic is uncomfortable at best.

Yet this is exactly the space the preacher ought to inhabit. Our present age of disenchantment is also, perhaps not coincidentally, an age of rampant opioid addiction. Numbness, quieting the unquiet voices, and ignoring the haunts seems to be an alarmingly necessary component of our age of disenchantment.

Demons and ghosts destabilize that insistence on disenchantment. Like Jesus, those of us who deal with these forces honestly are met with words from loved ones and friends just as skeptically. The disquieting, intellectually invalidating force is precisely their destabilizing capacity. A question of *who* sees ghosts and *who* is affected by them is always a lively subject of ghost stories. To those who see no ghosts, the presence of a ghost seen by another is often a sign of madness. Ghosts invalidate the intellect.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a perfect example of the destabilizing quality of the ghostly presence. Upon the entrance of the ghost of Hamlet's father, Horatio cries out at its presence: "...it horrors me with fear and wonder". The haunted world of the text is continually moved by the ghost, whose figure stands as a witness to malice and evil that has preceded it. Yet, more than any other force on stage, the presence of the ghost will forcefully shape all that follows on stage. Hamlet's power lies in his sword; the ghost's power lies in his capacity to unleash unrest upon the characters. There is no internal logic of plot of *Hamlet* if the reader cuts the ghost scenes out of a disenchanted sensibility.

Now, for the preacher who views the homiletic work as a teaching exercise the challenge of other-worldly inhabitants becomes a task of explaining their presence. A homiletic that teaches, then, is a homiletic constantly threatened by these forces, since it has no Word for them but only a word about them. This

aversion is its powerlessness. (Interestingly, one of the places where we find Jesus *teaching about* the dominion of God rather than proclaiming its liberating presence in Mark's Gospel is when he stands opposite the Temple and notices a bunch of religious authorities failing to carry out their work!)

But when Jesus *speaks to* demons inhabiting physical human bodies, human bodies are physically altered. The mission of the coming of God's dominion affects these people on a life-altering level – it is a constant force of liberation, not explanation.

Our world is as haunted as Mark's. Admitting it as such is the first step towards liberating bodies under the force of that demonic hauntedness. Unfortunately, merely believing that these forces will go away out of a misplaced idea that they belong to another context is dangerously wishful thinking. The aversion to naming demons and ghosts only gives them greater force.

There is power in the Good News that speaks plainly to these places of hauntedness. Mark's gospel not only depicts a world inhabited by disquieting forces who unsettle human history, but gives the methodology of counteracting these: proclamation of the gospel. We preachers have the distinct capacity then in respect to these forces. We name them, we do not allow them to speak, and we follow the example of Mark's Jesus who tells them to flat out “shut up” and leave.

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## Book Review: *Reviving Old Scratch: Demons and the Devil for Doubters and the Disenchanted*

by Seth Moland-Kovash

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/book-review-reviving-old-scratch-demons-devil-doubters-disenchanted/>

Richard Beck

*Reviving Old Scratch: Demons and the Devil for Doubters and the Disenchanted*

Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2016

In his contribution to Fortress Press' "Theology for the People" series, author and professor of psychology Richard Beck makes an argument for Christians of all theological persuasions to reclaim language for the devil and spiritual warfare. Beck writes from a biblical perspective and based on his experiences leading a weekly Bible study at a local maximum security prison as well as worshiping and serving as part of his congregation's ministry with intentional outreach to the lost and marginalized in our society.

It is in those marginal places, Beck recounts, that his faith was restored and refreshed as he (re)encountered language and practices around the devil and spiritual warfare. In his Introduction, Beck shares a memory of a prison prayer that included "Lord, protect us from Old Scratch..." (p. xiii). Beck recalls that prayer as the beginning of his journey to take seriously the devil as a biblical and theological concept but most importantly as a reality to be resisted.

Beck makes arguments from the biblical witness including a reminder that Satan "names that which is working against God and God's kingdom in the world" (p. 8) and that our struggle is against spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12). He touches on various atonement theories and their relationship and witness to the power of evil overcome by Jesus. This is, finally, Beck's theological argument: Jesus overcame something. As Lutherans we often say you can't have Easter without Good Friday. You can't have good news without bad news:

Does the Devil exist? As in *literally*?

I don't know. Maybe. I wouldn't rule it out. But I do know this:

Something killed Jesus. Something real. And the Bible named it:

Satan. The Devil. Old Scratch. The adversary to the kingdom of God.

And the Bible warns us that Satan is still out there, still prowling the world, like a lion, looking for someone to devour. (p. 11).

After making a biblical and theological case for the existence of the devil (or at least for "modern" Christians to consider it), Beck moves into the concept of spiritual warfare. The problem, as he sees it for disenchanted Christians (that is, Christians who engage with their faith and with the world through primarily rationalistic, scientific, and dis-enchanted means) is a "Scooby-Dooification" of evil. That is, we read biblical stories and our own lives like an episode of Scooby Doo. We seek to unmask the

demonic to prove that it is really just a human in disguise (p. 19). We do this when we say that the problem is not the devil but economic greed or Republicans or Democrats or secularization in society.

The problem that this “Scooby-Dooification” presents us in our struggles is twofold. First, we become discouraged as we suffer from compassion fatigue. We can become like Oskar Schindler who was exhausted by his lament that he couldn’t save one more person (p. 155). The other problem is that we turn people into our enemies. We ignore Paul’s reminder in Ephesians 6:12. We think Adolf Eichmann is our enemy and then we find him completely banal (pp. 103-105). Eichmann is not our enemy. Nazism is our enemy. Omar Mateen is not our enemy. Violence and homophobia and racism are our enemies.

Instead, Beck calls us to a spiritual warfare of resistance. The Bible, he says, does not debate whether evil and the devil exist. The Bible takes them as givens and calls us into a posture of resistance (p. 174). Doubting and disenchanting Christians (or curious seekers) often run into problems with the question of evil – why does evil exist? What is the nature of evil and suffering? Beck says that our “response to suffering isn’t *intellectual* but *behavioral*” (p.175). We can debate the existence of the devil and our monotheism and our theological categories of suffering and evil or we can pick up a towel and wash our neighbor’s feet. Beck believes that a revived language for the devil (Old Scratch) and spiritual warfare will keep us from demonizing individuals as we stay focused on the freedom that has been won for us in Christ (freedom from what?) and our call to engage in that spiritual warfare to participate in God’s work of building the kingdom.

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## On the Way: Poverty-Stricken Power

by Benjamin Dueholm

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/way-poverty-stricken-power/>

Try as I might, I can't find anything to say, or even really believe, about the Devil and the demons as such. Whether they can be said to exist in a way that we say anything else exists, and if so what they are, how they originate, and what their powers--I have no idea. In practice I answer the first question "No," since my choices and actions are not touched in the least by the possibility that some demonic power may shape their results. This renders the other questions fascinating but strictly, as it were, speculative.

But I do love reading about the Devil and his angels. Milton shows us Satan struck to a standstill by the beauty of Eve. For an instant, the Evil One "abstracted stood / From his own evil, and for the time remain'd / Stupidly good."<sup>1</sup> Ivan Karamazov hallucinates a demon who sighs that he, like the atheist in a fable he has just told, will one day give up his revolt, walk his penitential quadrillion miles, and enter Paradise. The Devil visits a solitary country farmer, not saying or doing anything untoward, repeatedly, until a neighbor happens in and asks who the oddly dressed, caprine fellow is. "My nephew," the man says. After the neighbor leaves, the Devil throws his arms around the man's neck and exclaims "Uncle!" I spent weeks tracking down a citation for that story, which I read ages ago, before giving up and setting it in Wisconsin for a sermon.

Without these shadows of pathos—the demons are lonely, longing, despairing—the demonic images of pure menace fall flat. To be sure there are plenty of terrifying forces in the world: tsunamis, cancer, Big Data. But they are impersonal. We can anthropomorphize them, but their terror comes from their lack of interest in us. Demons are different. They recognize themselves in us, as we recognize ourselves in them. It's only the sliver of fellowship with human suffering that gives the demons their haunting power.

Augustine, for example, has no more satisfying an explanation for the existence of the fallen angels or false gods than anyone else does. But his description of their place in the cosmos is astounding and poignant. The "impious and arrogant gods" are

*deprived of [God's] changeless light which is shed upon all alike, and are therefore reduced to a poverty-stricken kind of power, and engage in a kind of scramble for their lost dominions and claim divine honours from their deluded subjects.*<sup>2</sup>

They are deprived of God's changeless light, Augustine maintains, because unlike the good angels they were not given a secret assurance by God that they would persevere in blessedness. In their ignorance they plunged from bliss altogether, and cobble together whatever approximation of their former happiness they may in their exile. Their might in earthly things, which is considerable, is "poverty-stricken" in comparison with the real thing. Their empires (including Augustine's own Rome) are, in the end, nothing but a parody.

I've been reading *City of God* every morning for over a year, and this is one of the passages that has stuck

with me. Deprivation, poverty, scrambling, delusion—that these should be the motivations for all malice in the world, and the root of all religious error, however beautiful, noble, and respectable, is a difficult thought to bear. Who scrambles and I do not scramble? Whose power in this world is not, ultimately, defined by its poverty? Milton's Satan does not rest in stupid goodness because he demands more and will, paradoxically, accept less. That's not sin hatching from the egg, but it is certainly sin on the wing.

Demons have never left us, and never really will, because we will never be able to resist the urge to see how we look in a cracked mirror. And we cannot rid ourselves of them because however far our own scramble for dominion proceeds, and however immense our power becomes, it will only introduce us to new and more terrifying experiences of limitation.

Yet whether consciously or not, these vivid imaginings of evil forces show us something of God, too, by a sort of inversion. If there is such a thing as poverty-stricken power, there may likewise be a power-stricken poverty. The mad scramble suggests the possibility of rest, and the delusion the possibility of truth. Tragically, comically, ironically: demons suffer for a permanent lack of something we can attain to. Perhaps the tears of the demons are precious in their way.

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Notes

1. [^](#)*Paradise Lost*, IX.463-465
  2. [^](#)St. Augustine, *City of God* XI.1, John O'Meara, trans. (London: Penguin) 1984
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## As I See It: The Persistence of Evil

by Frank C. Senn

<http://mcsletstalk.org/dealing-with-the-devil/see-persistence-evil/>

One of our modern problems with the Devil is the inconsistency of the images of the Devil or Satan in the Bible. Was the serpent that tempted Eve in Genesis 3 the Devil in disguise or just a talking snake? The identification of the serpent with evil is seen in the medieval image of the dragon who takes captive the young maiden (a figure of the church) who needs to be rescued by the knight (St. George — a Christ figure). But if the snake is the personification of evil, of Satan, what was it doing in Paradise?

Satan in the Book of Job really functions as God's prosecutor who travels to and fro on the earth checking to see that faith is what it should be. ("Satan" is a Persian word for prosecutor.) God actually gives Satan permission to test Job. Is the devil who tempts Jesus in the gospels also functioning as a prosecutor to see if Jesus' commitment to his mission is what it ought to be? Is Satan God's devil after all?

There's a theological problem if a source of evil exists separate from God and also if evil exists in God. The ancient religion of Manichaeism, with roots in Persia, divided the world between good and evil principles and regarded matter as intrinsically evil and the spiritual as intrinsically good. The Bible, of course, regards matter (the created world) as intrinsically good and created by a benevolent Creator.

Apocalyptic literature resolved the conundrum by portraying Satan as a fallen archangel who rebelled against God in heaven and was defeated in the heavenly battle by the archangel Michael and thrown down to earth with all his followers (see Revelation 12). John Milton's *Paradise Lost* picks up the theme of Satan's ambition. Satan has the best lines in this epic poem. "For to reign is worth ambition, though in hell. Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven." Satan and the demons are therefore portrayed as fallen angels.

This all takes place in heaven, in eternity, outside of historical time. It is the stuff of mythology, of primordial origins, of what took place in Mircea Eliade's famous phrase, *in illo tempore*, "in that time" of beginnings before time. The first chapter of Genesis can be interpreted, as some Jewish commentators do, as God's mastery of the pre-created world, the subjection of the sea, which represents chaos. God's creative work is to bring order out of chaos. But evil persists in creation. It was pushed back by God's creative act, but not eliminated. This theme is developed by the Jewish scholar Jon D. Levenson in *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence* (Harper and Row, 1985). However, the Book of Revelation envisions a new earth in which "the sea is no more" (Revelation 21:1). This is God's final mastery over creation, the elimination of chaos.

In the meantime the Satan and his angels have been thrown down to the earth. The devil tempts Jesus at the beginning of his ministry to look after his own needs by turning stone into bread, by proving his trust in God's word by leaping off the pinnacle of the Temple and relying on God's angels to bear him up, and by serving Satan who can deliver over to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:1-11). We can see our own contemporary temptations in the temptations of Jesus when we look out after our own needs

instead of the needs of others, when we seek the acclaim of others in what we do, and when we grasp for power. But if we regard these as temptations, it seems that there is some combination of a source of temptation outside of ourselves and our own willingness to succumb.

Jesus devoted much of his ministry to exorcising demons. Healing and exorcism were seen as ways of advancing the kingdom of God. When the demons exorcized by Jesus left a body they had inhabited, they shrieked their recognition of Jesus as the Son of God. The demons knew who Jesus was before his disciples did! But these spiritual beings needed another body to inhabit, and in Mark 5 Jesus lets the exorcized demons take possession of pigs, which then stampeded off a cliff into the Sea of Galilee and were killed. (Well, Jesus was Jewish, but this was not good for the local economy on the Gentile side of the lake and Jesus was asked to leave the territory!)

There are so many dynamics going on in this story that it seems lame just to attribute the man's demon possession to some psychological malady, as I've heard preachers do. The demons must be named. They give their name as "Legion." Could this be a reference to the Roman Legions that occupy this territory? Is part of this exorcism Jesus taking possession of territory for the advancement of God's reign? Are there whole systems operating in the world that have us in a deathly grip (the possessed man was naked and lived among the tombs), systems that are so pervasive and persistent that they can be expelled by nothing short of massive exorcism?

Today, many people deny the existence of Satan and demons or believe that Satan is only a metaphor for evil. The Bible is clear that the life of faith is a spiritual battle against powers or forces of evil outside ourselves. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Yet 1 John 4:4 reminds us that God's power far exceeds those of any demon: "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."

But even now, as 1 Peter 5 says, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." Far from being a creature with hooves, horns, and a tail in red asbestos underwear carrying a pitchfork leaving the odor of sulfur, C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, famously portrayed hell as a bureaucracy and one of the senior devils as Uncle Screwtape who advised his nephew Wormwood, a junior tempter, on how to undermine the Enemy (God) by persistently going after his prey, changing tactics according to changing circumstances in the Christian's spiritual journey. Lewis is suggesting that there is no point in our journey when we are immune from "the crafty assaults of the devil."

Possession by evil spirits is a reality in many places in the world where the spirit world is real to people. Shamans in many cultures deal with the spirit world, driving evil spirits out of a person and inviting good spirits in. There are places in the world where no Christian missionary ought to go who doesn't know how to perform an exorcism. The Catholic Church has trained and certified exorcists. There are undoubtedly Lutheran exorcists...in Africa and in other parts of the world where exorcism is regularly practiced.

I saw a demon-possessed man on a street in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. How do I know the man was possessed? My companion told me rather casually that the man was possessed. As an urban pastor during

my pastoral career, I've seen schizophrenics on the streets of American cities. But I've never seen anything like the writhing of this man's body, the growling noises coming from his throat, the empty look in his eyes. I asked a friend who teaches in a seminary in Jakarta if demon possession is an issue in Indonesia. He assured me that it is and that some pastors are called on to perform exorcisms.

Personifying evil makes it real. I think we need to do that so that evil is not just an abstraction. Evil is a force outside of ourselves that can take possession of us and cause us to do things we would not do on our own. In other words, evil is not the same as sin, for which we bear sole culpability. There is some truth to the statement, "the devil made me do it." But we shouldn't be frivolous about this; it is insidious. Evil people (or people possessed by an evil spirit) intend to cause harm for the purpose of causing harm, as the psychiatrist M. Scott Peck documented in *People of the Lie* (New York: Touchstone, A Division of Simon & Schuster, 1983). We've seen this over and over again in terrorist assaults inflicted by the likes of Eric David Harris and Dylan Bennet Klebold, Adam Lanza, Nidal Malik Hasan, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, Dylann Roof, Seung-Hui Cho, Tashfeen Malik and Syed Rizwan Farook, Omar Mateen.

So, yes, evil is alive and well in the modern world and can inflict harm, even massive harm — sometimes in the name of the state, sometimes in the name of religion, sometimes in the grip of an insidious ideology like racism, sometimes in the grip of personal demons. Well did Jesus teach us to pray, "Deliver us from evil." Some versions have "Deliver us from the evil one." But Satan and the power of evil was broken by the cross and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, when it comes to the devil, Martin Luther, who is reported to have thrown an ink pot at the devil, penned in his most famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, "one little word shall fell him." This is the word of exorcism---depart in the Name of Jesus---that must always be on our lips because evil is so persistent in this world.

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## **Let's Talk**

### **Living Theology in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod**

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