

**Deliverance from Demon Possession in the Gospels:
A Study into Its Backgrounds and Application in the Church**

Davidson Razafiarivony, PhD

Abstract

The Bible admits that demons exist, and the Church is not spared. As Paul clearly states in Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” The purpose of this paper is to investigate exorcism in the Gospels in order to inform and equip the Church for a ministry which may be needed, that is out of ordinary. A combination of methods is used (backgrounds, history, exegesis, and inter-textuality) to arrive at the conclusion that spiritual powers continue to exert their powers on people who need deliverance.

Keywords: demonology, mythological, exorcism, exorcist, exorcistic.

Introduction

Rudolf Bultmann considers biblical demonology as mythological, a view of the world that is obsolete: “Can Christian preaching expect modern man *to accept the mythical view of the world as true?* To do so would be both senseless and impossible.”¹ Further Bultmann clarifies, “it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, “Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate,” accessed 12 February 2018, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/Pdfs/BultmannNTMyth.pdf> (emphasis his).

same time to believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits.”²

Today, denial of demons which negates the need of exorcism is common. Dow affirms: “the assumption that demons do not exist has become sufficiently widespread for those of us who believe to the contrary to present the argument for their existence as a matter of urgency.”³ Dow attempts to “present the case for the existence of the demonic realm in the traditional understanding of personal spirit-beings or demons, acting as agents of the supremely evil one, also known from biblical theology as the devil or Satan.”⁴

This is a background study on demon possession and deliverance in the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mark. The intention of the paper is not to develop an expertise on how to cast demons out. However, some application for the contemporary church is derived.

Backgrounds

Exorcism in the Greco-Roman World

Graham H. Twelftree has analyzed and documented exorcism before and around the New Testament time.⁵ Twelftree starts with Babylonian texts and Egyptian materials which he believes to be useful for the understanding of first century exorcism,⁶ then he deals with other Greco-Roman writings (Lucian of Samosata, Apollonius of Tyana). There were apotheosized figures in the Hellenistic world, who were “extraordinarily gifted men, perhaps miracle workers,

²Bultmann, 5.

³ Graham Dow, “The Case for the Existence of Demons,” *Churchman* 094/3 (1980), 1.

⁴ Dow, 1.

⁵ Graham H. Twelftree, “Jesus the Exorcist: A History of Religious Study,” PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham, 1981, 9 -103.

⁶Twelftree, 12.

healers, or wise men who are grouped under the general designation of *theiosanēr*, or ‘divine man.’”⁷

Exorcistic practice is found in the magical papyri. For instance, Magical Papyrus PGM XII (J384), line 16, reads "among his operations, he sends dreams or causes sleeplessness; and he releases from an evil spirit (*dialasseik[ak]odaimo[no]s*)." ⁸ Deities names and potency of their names are found in magical texts. These include Pluto, Kore, Persephone, Erechigal, Adonai, Adonis.⁹

Since Homer, *δαιμόν*-family refers in general to powerful entities that transcend ordinary experience.¹⁰ Though the term, in the Greek magical papyri, as often in Greek literature, “is used of deities and lesser spirits whose influential control is sought,”¹¹ it is equally attested that it is used of an evil spirit. In this sense, *daimonizomai* (pass.) is used in the sense of being “possessed by a hostile spirit as in Plutarch (*Moralia* 706d).¹²

Of great importance to our study is the story of a youth who had a reputation for licentiousness who was confronted and exorcised by Apollonius of Tyana (ca. AD 15 – 100). The story itself has striking similarities with the exorcism story in Mark 5:1-20):

⁷ See Walter L. Liefeld, “The Hellenistic ‘Divine Man’ and the Figure of Jesus in the Gospels,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 16/4 (1973), 195-205.

⁸ Robert W. Daniel, ed. *Two Greek Magical Papyri in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden: A Photographic Edition of J 384 and J 395 (= PGM XII and XIII)* (Opladen: Springer Fachmedia Wiesbaden, 1991),

⁹ “A Love Charm and ‘the Key of Hades,’” (Region of Antinoopolis, III/IV cent.), lines 1-25, in G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976* (N. S. W., Australia: Macquarie University, 1981), 34.

¹⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. “*daimonion*.”

¹¹ Hans Dieter Bets, ed. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including Demotic Spells* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 334.

¹² Bauer, s.v. “*daimonizomai*.”

Apollonius looked at him and said: 'it is not yourself that perpetrates this insult, but the demon (daimōn), who drives you without your knowing it.' And in fact they youth was, without knowing it, possessed by a devil (demonion to meirakion). . . Now when Apollinius gazed on him, the ghost in him began to utter crises of fear and rage, such one hears from people who are being branded and racked; and the ghost swore that he would leave the young man alone and never take possession of any man again. . . . But Apollinius addressed him with anger, . . . and he ordered him to quit the young man and show by a visible sign that he had done so. "I will throw down yonder statue," said the devil, and pointed to one of the images which was in the king's portico. . . . But when the statue began moving gently, and then fell down, it would defy anyone to describe the hubbub which arose thereat and the way they clapped their hands with wonder.¹³

Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho, says that Gentiles exorcised through the use of fumigations/drugs and incantations.¹⁴

Jewish Exorcism in the Second Temple Period and Beyond

Scholars agree that Jewish exorcists were active in the first century.¹⁵ In Jewish literature, the verb *daimonizomai* (pass.) is used in the sense of being "possessed by a hostile spirit in the *Testament of Solomon* 17:3.¹⁶ OT, Jubilees, Testament of Solomon, Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, and Rabbinic writings contain materials about exorcism. For the Jews (as well as for non-Jews in antiquity), exorcism is part of

¹³Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.20 (trans. F. C. Conybeare, LCL).

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, ANF 01, pp. 290, 298.

¹⁵ Eric Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2002), 378.

¹⁶ Bauer, s.v. "*daimonizomai*."

magics.¹⁷ “Of all the Jewish magical practices of the Second Temple period, exorcism – by which we refer both to driving a demon or a group of demons out of a certain physical space and to driving it or them out of a human being – is the best attested.”¹⁸ Jesus himself was derogatorily called a magician/sorcerer in the rabbinic writing (*Sanh.* 43a), attesting the historical reliability of the Gospel narratives.

Among several references to exorcism in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, Genesis Apocryphon 20 talks about Abraham praying to God that Pharaoh would not sully Sarah whom he had taken, and God answered his prayer by sending a chastising/evil spirit to afflict him and the members of his family for more than two years (1QapGen 20:13- 21). Then Abraham was asked to lay his hand upon him so that the evil spirit would be banished from them. Eventually the evil spirit left after Abraham’s intervention (20: 22-29).¹⁹

Solomon is ascribed as the father of Jewish exorcism, according to Flavius Josephus, the first century Jewish historian:

“God also enabled him to learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and wholesome to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they

¹⁷ Edwin M. Yamauchi states: “there can be no doubt that both the Old Testament and the New Testament were born in environments permeated with magical beliefs and practices.” (“Magic in the Biblical World,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983), 169-200.

¹⁸ Gideon Bohak, *Ancien Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 88.

¹⁹ However, as Bohak, 95, states, “while the contents of Abraham’s prayer are not recorded here, there is no indication that it was a specifically exorcistic text; rather, the power of the exorcism seems to derive from Abraham’s personality, and from his close proximity to God.” Further Bohak adds, “elsewhere in Second Temple Jewish literature, there are no depictions of Abraham as an exorcist, or as working any other miracles.” (Ibid.).

never return; and this method of cure is of great force to this day.” (*Ant.* 8:45-46).

Solomon’s exorcistic method has been used by subsequent exorcists. For instances, Josephus mentions that Eleazar healed a demoniac through it:

and this method of cure [Solomon’s] is of great force to this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demonic in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this:he put a ring, that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he warned him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed.

And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to the spectators that he had such a power (*ischus*), he set a little way off a cup or basin full of water, and commanded the demon, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, and thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man;and when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shown very manifestly: for which reason it is, that all men may know the vastness of Solomon's abilities, and how he was beloved of God, and that the extraordinary virtues of every kind with which this king was endowed, may not be unknown to any people under the sun for this reason, I say, it is that we have proceeded to speak so much of these matters.” (*Ant.* 8:46-49)

Another exorcist account in the *Midrash Rabbah* (*Chubbath* 19.8) equates exorcism as practiced by R. Johanan b. Zakkai, with witchcraft:²⁰

An idolater asked R. Johanan b. Zakkai: 'These rites that you perform look like a kind of witchcraft. You bring a heifer, burn it, pound it, and take its ashes. If one of you is defiled by a dead body you sprinkle upon him two or three drops and you say to him: 'Thou art clean!' R. Johanan asked him: 'Has the demon of madness ever possessed you?' 'No,' he replied. 'Have you ever seen a man possessed by this demon of madness?' 'Yes,' said he. 'And what do you do in such a case?' 'We bring roots,' he replied 'and make them smoke under him, then we sprinkle water upon the demon and it flees.'" Said R. Johanan to him, 'Let your ears hear what you utter with your mouth! Precisely so is this spirit of uncleanness; as it is written [Zech 13:2].

The foregoing analysis gives an idea of some of the techniques/methods used in Jewish exorcism. Additionally, exorcism by means of vegetal, animal and mineral substances was practiced. Bohak says that the most popular method for demonic expulsion in the Jewish world of the Second Temple period was the use of a long list of vegetal, animal, and mineral substances.²¹ Such use appears in 3rd cent. apocryphal book, Tobit 6:8; 8:1-3. Bohak further summarizes:

²⁰The text is from *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers*, trans. Judah J. Slotki (London; New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), 2:757-758.

²¹Bohak, 89. "The technique itself consists of fumigating the heart and liver of a certain fish from the Tigris river (the fish's gall also serves to heal Tobit's eyes, but not by way of exorcism), and Raphael promises the young Tobias that this will drive away any demon or evil spirit and keep them away forever (6.8, 16-17)." (Ibid.). Apparently, these substances were perceived as exorcistic in nature.

two types of exorcistic techniques, and two types of exorcists. On the one hand, we noted the use of exorcistic substances, which work by virtue of their occult properties. On the other, we saw stories of exorcists whose success in exorcizing demons was based not on the occult powers of special substances, but on their own innate powers. To these two types we may now add a third, utilized by those practitioners who assumed that the occult powers of specific substances do not suffice for all exorcisms, but who could not rely on their innate powers to scare the demons away. To achieve their goal, they had to master an elaborate technique, which included the use of special substances, implements, and powerful incantations. These incantations (and perhaps also some instructions on when, where, and how to use them), were often passed down from one practitioner to another *in a written form.*"²²

Prayer along with the use of exorcistic substances, also played a role in exorcism. Such an exorcist prayer is found in *Jubilees* 10:2-12:

And the sons of Noah came to Noah their father, and they told him concerning the demons which were leading astray and blinding and slaying his sons' sons. And he prayed before the Lord his God, and said: 'God of the spirits of all flesh, who hast shown mercy unto me, And hast saved me and my sons from the waters of the flood, And hast not caused me to perish as Thou didst the sons of perdition; For Thy grace has been great towards me And let not wicked spirits rule over them [my sons] lest they should destroy them from the earth. . . . And Thou knowest how Thy Watchers, the fathers of these spirits, acted in my day: and as for these spirits which are living, imprison them and hold them fast in the place of

²²Bohak, 97.

condemnation, and let them not bring destruction on the sons of thy servant, my God; for these are malignant, and created in order to destroy. And let them not rule over the spirits of the living; for Thou alone canst exercise dominion over them. And let them not have power over the sons of the righteous from henceforth and for evermore.' . . . And one of us He commanded that we should teach Noah all their medicines; . . . And we did according to all His words: all the malignant evil ones we bound in the place of condemnation, and a tenth part of them we left that they might be subject before Satan on the earth.

And we explained to Noah all the medicines of their diseases, together with their seductions, how he might heal them with herbs of the earth. And Noah wrote down all things in a book as we instructed him concerning every kind of medicine. Thus the evil spirits were precluded from (hurting) the sons of Noah.

Exorcistic practice in Jewish synagogues is also of important interest to our study. Rabbi Geoffrey Denis writes:

Many exorcisms were public events, either performed in a synagogue, or at least requiring the presence of a minyan, a minimum of ten men that normally makes up a ritual quorum (Divrei Yosef). Various somatic symptoms (swellings, paralysis, markings, and bodily sensations) were sought in the victim for diagnostic purposes (Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim). Most techniques include interviewing the demon and/or dybbuk, taking a personal history, as it were, in order to understand what is motivating the spirit

and so better effect the removal (Shalsholet Ira-Kabbalah).²³

Justin Martyr talked about Jewish exorcists in his time: “But though you exorcise any demon in the name of any of those who were amongst you—either kings, or righteous men, or prophets, or patriarchs—it will not be subject to you. But if any of you exorcise it in [the name of] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, it will perhaps be subject to you.”²⁴

Exorcism in the Gospels

F. C. Conybeare wrote at the end of the 19th cent., “the origin of evil spirits in a movement of rebellion against God on the part of his angels is assumed in the New Testament as a matter of common knowledge.”²⁵ In the New Testament, the word *daimonion* is used of an evil spirit (i.e. ‘demon’). *Daimonion* occurs 63 times in the NT. Usage: (1) *archōndaimoniōn* (ruler of demons, Mark 3:22),²⁶ (2) *ekballōdaimonion* (cast out demon),²⁷ and (3) *echōdaimonion* (have a demon).²⁸ In the New Testament, the verb *daimonizomai* (pass.) is used in the sense of being “possessed by a hostile spirit.”²⁹ *Daimonizomai* (possessed with the devil).³⁰ It occurs thirteen times to mean mostly “demon-possessed” (Matt 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; Mark 1:32; 5:16, 18; Luke 8:36), or “suffering from demon-

²³ Geoffrey Dennis, “Jewish Exorcism,” accessed 01 February, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-exorcism/>

²⁴ ANF 01, 390.

²⁵ F. C. Conybeare, “The Demonology of the New Testament,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 8/14 (1898), 577. Conybeare quotes Luke 10:18 about the fall of Satan as lightning from heaven.

²⁶ Four times, Matt 9:34; Matt 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15.

²⁷ 24 times (Matt 7:22; 9:33, 34; 10:8; 12:24, 27, 28; Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22; 6:13; 7:26; 9:38; 16:9, 17; Luke 9:49; 11:14, 15, 18, 19, 20; 13:32.

²⁸ Nine times (Matt 11:18; Luke 4:33; 7:33; 8:27; John 7:20; 8:48, 49, 52; 10:20).

²⁹ Bauer, s.v. “*daimonizomai*.”

³⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 79.

possession” (Matt 15:22). The word *daimoniōdēs* (demonic, devilish) does not appear anywhere in the Gospels, and it occurs only once in the New Testament (James 3:15, “This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.”)

Merrill F. Unger affirms that the period of Jesus’ public ministry was the time of an unusual and startling outbreak of demonism.³¹ Symptoms of demonism have been dealt with elsewhere and will not be fully elaborated in this study.³² But the high number of demon-possessed people in the New Testament time is striking. Just on a Sabbath evening and in the village of Capernaum alone, after the healing of the one in the synagogue, all who were demon-possessed were brought to Jesus, and He “cast out *many* demons.” (Mark 1:32-34).³³ And the fact that demons would not leave without negotiating more favorable terms before departure³⁴ demonstrate their grip on men (Mark 1:24, 34; 5:12, etc).

It is of particular interest to us to observe through a serious reading of the gospel that the evangelist clearly ties discipleship (calling, appointment, and mission) with exorcism. Jesus’ first act after calling His first disciples was the miracle of exorcism (Mark 1:19 -23) in which he demonstrated that “he who is worthier than John wields special authority.”³⁵ The evil spirit was disturbed by the teaching of Jesus and started its manifestation. After the appointment of the

³¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of the Spiritual Forces Behind the Present World Unrest* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, 1952), 78.

³² See Donkor Kwabena, ed., *The Church, Culture, and Spirits in Africa* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011).

³³ Dennis R. MacDonald made a comparison between exorcism in Homer’s *Odyssey* and the gospel of Mark. The epic is about the exorcistic encounter between the god Odysseus who used magic with a secret herb and the Titan Circe whose magic consisted of a wand. Noting similarities in the process for both accounts, MacDonald concluded “Mark imitated Homeric epic and expected his readers to recognize it.” (Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epic and the Gospel of Mark* [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000], 189).

³⁴ MacDonald, 64.

³⁵ Wahlen, 89-90.

twelve, he was accused by the scribes for casting demons by the ruler of demons (Belzebul) (Mark 3:13-30). The appointment itself is interestingly preceded by the recognition of the unclean spirits that He was the Son of God (Mark 3:11). Noteworthy also is the casting out of the mute spirit (*pneuma alalon*) from a boy immediately following the transfiguration (a type of His glorification) of Jesus on the mountain (Mark 9:14-29). Then, and lastly, the great commission includes casting out of demons in His name (Mark 16:17). We note that in these gospel narratives, disciples are given the authority (*exousia*) of Jesus, which stands in sharp contrast against the power (*ischus*) of other exorcists, such as Eleazar's exorcism in Josephus's account (*Ant.* 8.46-48).

Biblical data reveal that symptoms often accompany demon-possession,³⁶ even though that is not always the case. The devil entered Judas Iscariot, without the latter showing any sign of possession (John 13:2, 27). Anyway, the New Testament is interested more on deliverance from demon-possession than on the description of it. And as we have already mentioned earlier, evil spirits may not leave immediately. In that case, perhaps, more accompanying strategies (prayer and fasting) are needed. The following summative table shows who was exorcised, when, where, and how:

#	Pericope	Refere	Day	Place	Procedure/M
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³⁶Symptoms include crying with a loud voice, epilepsy/mental disorder, dumbness, foaming, gnashing of teeth, rigidity, deafness, blindness, nakedness, living among tombs, breaking bonds, cutting oneself, fierceness, and divination (Lameck Miyayo, "Casting Out Demons: Lessons from the Bible," in *The Church, Culture, and Spirits*, ed. Kwabena Donkor [Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011], 168).

		nce			ethod
1	Casting out demons from a man	1:21-28	Sabbath	Synagogue, Capernaum	Command to come out
2	Casting out demons from demon-possessed people	1:39	Sabbath	Synagogues, all Galilee	
3	Unclean spirits recognition of Jesus (presumably cast out)	3:11	Sabbath	By the Sea of Galilee	
4	Scribes criticizing Jesus for casting out demons through the ruler of demons (Belzebug)	3:22-30	Sabbath	Galilee	
5	Casting out demons from a man	5:1-20		Gadarenes	Command to come out
6	Casting out demons from a daughter of a Greek Syro-Phoenician woman	7:24-30		Tyre/Sidon	Command to come out from a distance
7	Casting out a spirit that made a boy mute (<i>pneuma alalon</i>)	9:14-29		At the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration	Command to come out, accompanied by prayer (and fasting)
8	Report of another exorcist casting out demons in the name of Jesus	9:38-41		Galilee	Casting out in the name of Jesus
9	Casting out seven demons from Mary Magdalene	16:9		[Magdala]	

In addition to these nine episodes, there is also three other commissioning of the disciples with authority to cast out demons (3:14-15; 6:7;³⁷ 16:14-18).

#		Ref.	Day	Place	Procedure/Method
1	Appointment and giving the twelve authority to cast out demons	3:14-15		Galilee	Command to come out
2	Sending of the twelve, two by two, with authority over unclean spirits	6:7	Sabbath	Synagogue in Galilee	(command to come out)
3	Commissioning the disciples to cast out demons in His name	16:14-18		Galilee	(command to come out)

From the above summary and observations, two stand out: (1) many demon possession activities and exorcisms happened on Sabbath, even in the synagogue, and (2) the method is consistently to command the demons (evil spirits) to come out. Only once, it is said that the command should be accompanied by prayer (and fasting).

Moreover, we should not overlook the theological implications of exorcism narrative in the Gospels. First, a Christological significance is clearly delineated. “The Gospels of the NT are strategic narratives of proclamation. The primary focus of these narratives is Christological. Miracles stories play a central role in this narrative process and in its resulting Christological portrait. Strategies of interpretation must be consciously shaped to highlight this narrative strategy and its Christological focus.” Second, we note that exorcism itself is part of His proclamation, and it is embedded with an

³⁷ The sending out of the twelve, two by two, to cast out demons with authority

eschatological significance.³⁸“The kingdom of God is at hand.” (Mark 1:15). As Ambrozic states, “the kingdom is already present in his word and work, its eschatological powers are being manifested; neither demons nor natural forces nor men can resist its energy.”³⁹ With that in mind, we may understand why the first ever miracle of Jesus in Mark was exorcism, and it was performed in the synagogue on Sabbath day. Time has come for evil power to lose its grip. What a better place than in a place of worship (synagogue) and what a better day than the Sabbath (day of liberation/redemption), to demonstrate and enact it.

Exorcism in the Church History

Exorcism has been practiced throughout the history of Christian Church.⁴⁰Exorcisms “‘in the name of Jesus,’ is one of the earliest signs of the parting of the ways between Judaism and nascent Christianity.”⁴¹Eventually exorcism became an office: “the first mention of the office of exorcist as an order bestowed by the laying on of hands occurs in a fragment of a letter of Cyprian of Carthage.”⁴² Additionally, exorcism became associated with baptism. “At the beginning of the third century, the once simple rite of baptism underwent a liturgical transformation that turned it into ‘a drama of resolute and sometimes fierce struggle against the devil.’”⁴³ Young further states:

The earliest reference to a written rite of extra-baptismal exorcism occurs in the Gregorian Sacramentary, where during the service of ordination of an exorcist, a *libellus*

³⁸ Eve, 380.

³⁹ Aloysius M. Ambrozic, *Hidden Kingdom: A Redaction-Critical Study of the References to the Kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel* (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1972), 45.

⁴⁰ For more information, see Young, *A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity*.

⁴¹ Bohak, 88.

⁴² Young, 31.

⁴³ Young, 30.

(‘little book’) is placed in the hands of the exorcist with the words: ‘Receive this and commit it to memory, and have the power of laying hands upon an energumen, whether baptized or catechumen’. This form of words implies that, in addition to the pre-baptismal rites, the *libellus* also contained a rite for exorcizing the baptized.⁴⁴

Justin Martyr, the early Christian apologist of the second century, gives a testimony about successful exorcist ministry of the church : “numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world, and in your city, many of our Christian men exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs.”⁴⁵

But the ministry has declined in the church. Post-Vatican II attitude is revealing:

The special ministry of the exorcist, though not totally abolished, has in our time been reduced to a remotely possible service which may be rendered only at the request of the bishop; in fact, there is now no rite for the conferring of this ministry. Such an attitude to exorcism evidently does not mean that priests no longer have the power to exorcize or that they may no longer use it. Since, however, the Church no longer makes exorcism a special ministry, it no longer attributes to exorcisms the important role they had in the early centuries of its life.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Young, 44.

⁴⁵ ANF 01, 298.

⁴⁶ ‘Christian Faith and Demonology’ in *Vatican Council II, Volume 2: More Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. A. Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Press, 1982), pp. 456–85, at p. 473, quoted in Young, 211.

Deliverance from Demon Possession in the Church Today

The word exorcism is derived from the Greek *exorkizein* “adjure,” “charge someone under oath.”⁴⁷ Outside the New Testament, exorcism is “the process of expelling an evil spirit or spirits from a possessed individual through the means of (magical) adjurations and rituals. Oath are important in exorcism, and the invocation of a supernatural always central feature of exorcistic formulas.”⁴⁸ The word occurs in this sense in Matthew 26:63. In Acts 19:13, the noun *exorkitēs* (“exorcist”) is used for the itinerant Jewish exorcists who “took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘we exorcise you by the Jesus who Paul preaches.’” Evidently, exorcism is inseparably associated with demonology and demon-possession: “There is no exorcism without possession, and demonological theory, to a greater or lesser extent, underlies every exorcism.”⁴⁹ An exorcist is a Christian who “speaks with the authority of God to cast out demons.”⁵⁰

Attitude toward Exorcism

Young made a remark that “it is, moreover, a hasty conclusion to infer that there are no cases of demon possession now.”⁵¹ For Owusu-Antwi, it is part of the big picture in the great controversy:

From the biblical point of view, there is an unseen spiritual component of the world comprising God, the unfallen angels, and the fallen angels.

⁴⁷ D. E. Aune, “Exorcism,” *ISBE*, fully revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:242.

⁴⁸ D. E. Aune, 2:242.

⁴⁹ Young, 13.

⁵⁰ Francis Young, *A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

⁵¹ Unger, 82.

The fallen angels, also known as demons, are at war against God, His plans and values. They are also in opposition to the unfallen angels, who are the agents of God. This is the cosmic war. At the center of war are humans who are created by God but have fallen.⁵²

As we have seen, numerous exorcistic narratives are present in the Gospels. The question is then asked: “Do these [Gospels] accounts also model an approach for us as we minister to people who are severely afflicted by demonic spirits?”⁵³In fact, “can a Christian be demon possessed?”⁵⁴ Arnold’s answer is resoundingly affirmative: there is a variety of ways through which demons exert their influences on Christians.⁵⁵Nevertheless, Arnold clarifies that “Christian can be inhabited by demons but only if they provide the spirits with the space to occupy through protracted sin or by inviting their presence.”⁵⁶ About the demon-possessed man in the synagogue of Capernaum, Ellen G. White points out, “The secret cause of the affliction that had made this man a fearful spectacle to his friends and a burden to himself was in his own life. He had been fascinated by the pleasures of sin, and had thought to make life a grand carnival. He did not dream of becoming a terror to the world and the reproach of his family. He thought his time could be spent in innocent folly. But once in the downward path, his feet rapidly descended. Intemperance and frivolity pervert the noble attributes of his nature, and Satan took absolute control of him.”⁵⁷

⁵²Brepong Owusu-Antwi, “Demons and Demonic Activities in the Bible,” *The Church, Culture, and Spirits*, ed. Kwabena Donkor (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011), 66-67.

⁵³ Arnold, 104.

⁵⁴ Arnold, 78.

⁵⁵ Arnold, 97.

⁵⁶ Arnold, 38. Young, *History of Exorcism*, 24, “throughout church history, there is more demoniac women than men.”

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press, 1940), 256. “Wherever inspiration points out the cause, it declares that demon

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While it is affirmed that Christian ministry throughout the second, third, and fourth centuries followed Jesus' example in proclaiming the message of the gospel through casting out demons,⁵⁸ it is equally a fact that the church no longer makes exorcism a special ministry.⁵⁹ On the other side of the spectrum, "some Christians develop an excessive demonology interest that can be harmful both to them and to others."⁶⁰

Just as demon possession was in the synagogue where nobody did anything with a situation of having a man in that situation (maybe he manifested no symptom of demonic possession, or synagogue goers were unable to do something about it),⁶¹ evil spirit is present in the church today, whether it manifests itself or not, and it needs to be addressed.⁶² The church is commissioned to preach the gospel of the kingdom. "It is about the power of the Word of God. As the Word of God is preached with divine authority, the kingdom of Satan begins to shake. No evil can withstand the power of the Word of God."⁶³

As a church, we "may be called upon to participate, or even to lead out, in prayer services for victims of Satanic harassment or

possession comes about as the result of wrong living." (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 5:575).

⁵⁸ Arnold, 106.

⁵⁹ Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 64.

⁶⁰ Lyndon K. McDowell, "Demons and Deliverance," *Ministry* (April 1987), 5.

⁶¹ Paulson Pulikottil, "Demons in the Synagogue," accessed 01 February, 2018, <http://paulsonp.blogspot.co.ke/2013/03/demons-in-synagogue.html>

⁶² Doug Stanglin wrote in *USA Today* on 23 February 2018 an article entitled "Demand for exorcisms is up threefold in Italy, so Vatican is holding conference," accessed 24 February 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/02/23/vatican-host-international-exorcism-conference-meet-growing-demand/367735002/?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=usatoday-newstopstories, where he says that the Pope wanted the "Priests to Put Exorcists on Speed Dial."

⁶³ Pulikottil, "Demons in the Synagogue."

possession. An important work of personal preparation is spelled out in Scripture and in Ellen White's writings which includes close self-examination to discover the possible presence of sin which needs to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken before confrontation with the supernatural forces of evil. Fasting and prayer may be an important part of this preparatory work. There is a place for this kind of ministry, conducted properly."⁶⁴

Conclusion

Unlike exorcists in the Greco-Roman or Jewish worlds who used incantations, spells, and substances, or a combination of these, Christians are called and given authority to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. The teaching (word) of Jesus is with authority (Mark 1:27). That same teaching/word is still available to us today to deliver people from the grips of darkness. As in the days of Jesus, healing may appropriately come even on Sabbath (or any other service) and in the church. The command to come out is naturally accompanied by prayer and occasionally fasting as need arises. And the promise is sure to be fulfilled: "In my name they will drive out demons." (Mark 16:17).⁶⁵

⁶⁴"*Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Ministry" and Seventh-Day Adventists: A Report of the Biblical Research Institute,*" General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 1983, pp. 59-60, quoted in Yvon Caza, "Engaging the Spirits: An Adventist Perspective on Fighting Spiritual Battles," accessed 19 February 2018, <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/warfare/SpiritualWarfare5.htm>

⁶⁵ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν. Note the use of the future indicative active of the verb.