

THE OCCULT

Lecture IV: DEMONIC POSSESSION

It is strange that a world which appears in large measure to have lost its faith in God seems to be intent upon demonstrating the existence of the devil, and many people who have lost interest in the truths of God's revelation display a morbid curiosity in demonism. Thirty-five years ago, it seems to me, anyone who would seriously have suggested that there are today actual cases of devil possession would in most instances have been looked at askance as incurably superstitious. This was even characteristic of most Christians. Liberal Protestantism widely denied even the existence of a personal devil. One of the most noted theologians of that generation wrote,

I maintain that to revive or perpetuate the demonology of the New Testament in the modern world is to incur the charge of obscurantism and superstition. The church should do all in her power to root it out, for it can only stultify her proclamation.¹

The more conservative admitted that there were cases of devil possession in New Testament times but seriously questioned whether such things could still happen today.

But in the past decade we have seen a long list of novels and films dealing with the subject of devil possession and devil worship. Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist, and the Omen are perhaps the best known. A serious scholarly study of possession and exorcism by the Jesuit professor Malachi Martin has been published by the Reader's Digest Press and our newspapers and newsmagazines from time to time carry articles dealing with the subject. My own impression is that none of these things could have happened a third of a century ago.

DEVIL POSSESSION IN THE BIBLE

No Bible-believing Christian can deny the possibility and the reality of demonic possession. The Bible tells us in clear and unmistakable terms that there were people possessed by devils who were cured by the Lord Jesus and by the apostles. To doubt the possibility of demonization is to doubt the authority of Scripture, and even the apostate priest David Farren says, "From a reconsideration of whether Jesus did 'drive out devils' to whether the Resurrection was an actual event is a very short step."²

In spite of the clear statements of Scripture, however, there have been many so-called Christian scholars who have denied that there is such a thing. They have attempted to explain the Biblical language by saying that Jesus and the evangelists were children of their time. By the Jews of that unenlightened, prescientific age, it was commonly held, so it is argued, that both physical and mental illnesses were caused by devils. If Jesus effected any cures, and even liberal critics will admit that He did, they were cases of psychosomatic illness which were cured by suggestion.

If it was so commonly believed that diseases were caused by devils we might ask why it is that the great majority of illnesses cured by Jesus are not ascribed to devil possession. Of the twenty-three healing miracles described in some detail in the four Gospels, only six (or seven if we include the woman in Luke 13:11) are designated as cases of devil possession. The Gospels also make a very clear distinction between disease and devil possession. Matthew, for example, says that they brought to Jesus "all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments and those which were possessed with devils"(Mt 4:24).

Moreover, such a view could not be held by anyone who believes that the Bible is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God and accepts the deity, omniscience, and truthfulness of the Savior.

Closely related to this way of looking at the matter is the opinion of those who say that there is no such thing as devil possession, that Jesus knew that there was no such thing, but that He accommodated Himself to the views of the populace and went along with them in order to heal by suggestion those who believed themselves to be possessed. While such a view may seem to uphold the omniscience of the Savior, it is certainly an attack on His truthfulness and on the reliability of the inspired record, so that no Bible-believing Christian can hold such an opinion.

Historical-critical scholarship is inclined to view the stories of the healing of demoniacs as an outgrowth of the conviction of the early Christians that Jesus had come to destroy the works of the devil. Whether or not He really cast out devils is a subject of little concern to the critical scholars. The important lesson to remember, according to their view, is that in Jesus the forces of evil are overcome. The individual believer thus is left free to believe in the reality of demonic possession or not, as he chooses. In this way another obstacle to ecumenical togetherness is removed.

It is sometimes held that devil possession is just another name for mental illness. Aside from the fact that such a view also violates the clear statements of the Gospels, it should be pointed out that in only one, or at the most three cases, do we have any clear reference to what would appear to be beyond question mental aberration in the demoniac. The Gadarene demoniac displays some of the classic symptoms of a schizoid personality, but it is to be questioned whether this would explain his superhuman strength. The demoniac boy whom Jesus healed after the transfiguration (Mt 17:14; Mk 9:17; Lk 9:38) exhibits the symptoms of epilepsy which surely ought to be classified as at least partially a physical illness. Whether the shouting of the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mk 1:23; Lk 4:33) is a mark of mental illness or not could be debated. In the case of the dumb demoniac (Mt 9:32) and the dumb and blind demoniac (Mt 12:22; Lk 11:14) nothing is said that would suggest any kind of mental illness. Only their physical affliction is mentioned. In the case of the daughter of the Syro-Phenician woman we are only told that she was " grievously vexed by the devil" (Mt 15:21; Mk 7:24), which does not tell us much about her symptoms. If the woman in Luke 13 who could not stand up straight, and of whom Jesus said that Satan had bound her for eighteen years (13:16), is included in the list of demoniacs, we have another case of what would appear to be a purely physical affliction brought on by the devil. Devil possession evidently can manifest itself in various ways.

When the Biblical statements are taken at face value the only possible conclusion to which we can come is that at least in New Testament times people were possessed by devils and that Jesus and His disciples actually cast them out. On this conclusion there is no room for compromise.

DEMONIC POSSESSION TODAY

Whether there is such a thing as devil possession today is at least subject to question. The question probably cannot be answered with absolute finality without a revelation from God, since we are here dealing with things which are beyond the measuring capacity of scientific instruments. However, I must say that, for myself, I am convinced of the occurrence of the phenomenon in the modern world.

However, it is probably not as common as the present state of literature and the surge of interest in the subject might seem to imply. One of the exorcists in Malachi Martin's book says that "out of every hundred claimants there might be one genuine case."³ A French Roman Catholic expert on possession, Henri Gesland, reported that from 1968 to 1974 he was

consulted in 3,000 cases of suspected possession, and that he believes that out of the 3,000 there were only four that he could consider to be genuine. Such restrained estimates would surely seem to indicate, however, that the evidence must finally overwhelmingly point to the fact that sometimes human beings actually do become demonized.

In contrast to the questioning attitude of Gesland, Martin quotes the German psychologist T. K. Oesterreich as saying "that 'possession has been an extremely common phenomenon, cases of which abound in the history of religion.'"⁴ This, however, gives a wrong impression because Oesterreich, who wrote a book on possession (Die Bessessenheit) in the 1920's, did not believe that actual demons took possession of human beings. He considered possessed people to be neurotics and the supposed demons that possessed them to be nothing more than an aspect of their own personalities. Strictly speaking, therefore, in our terms we ought to say that Oesterreich himself does not believe that there are any demoniacs at all, but only many people who believe themselves or who are believed by others to be possessed of demons.

It is obvious that there are many neurotics who imagine themselves to be possessed. Michelet, for example, records the case of a nun in France who declared that she had three devils, one was a good-natured Catholic devil, the second was a bad devil, a freethinker and a Protestant, and the third was the demon of impurity. Michelet says that she forgot to mention the demon of jealousy.⁵ In Baroja's study of witchcraft we are told that there was a proliferation of cases of possession in Spain in the late 1600's. He believes that it was provoked by "too much reading of books on witchcraft and demoniacal possession written by influential theologians."⁶ We may be in danger of the same sort of thing today.

When Gesland accepts only four out of 3,000 alleged cases as genuine, it is clear that statistically speaking he agrees almost fully with Oesterreich, even if on the philosophical question of the possibility of true demonization they are poles apart. For this reason also the Roman Catholic Church insists that before any exorcism can be performed legitimately, the subject must first of all be examined by medical doctors and psychiatrists to weed all those who suffer from one sort of neurosis or another. Malachi Martin speaks of a neurological condition called "Tourette's syndrome," which manifests some of the typical symptoms of devil possession, such as "profanity, obscenity, grunts, animal noises, facial contortions and which he considers to be a disease involving a chemical abnormality in the brain."⁷ The disease yields to drug treatment. From that Martin concludes that it can not be possession. Whether this is a proper conclusion may be questioned, since there seems to be a widely held opinion that the onset of possession may be occasioned by drug use. If the use of certain drugs can make it easier for the devil to invade the personality, then it could conceivably also be true that the use of other drugs might inhibit the activity of demons.

While we must be on our guard against a naive and gullible attitude, it seems to me that the evidence presented to demonstrate that there is such a thing as devil possession today is so overwhelming that it is more difficult not to believe than to disbelieve. Only someone who is predisposed to deny the existence of the supernatural would have a good logical premise on which to base his rejection of the evidence. On the other hand it also seems well established that much of what appears to some people to be demonization is neurotic imagination, which may be encouraged by leaving the impression that possession is a common occurrence.

CASES

In 1968 Kregel's publishing house reprinted a book dealing with the subject of demon possession which had first been printed in 1894. The author was John B. Nevius, a man who had served as a Presbyterian missionary in China for almost forty years. Nevius says in his book that when he first came to China in 1854 he brought with him "a strong conviction" that a belief in demons, and communication with spiritual beings, belongs exclusively to a barbarous and superstitious age, and at present can consist (coexist?) only with mental weakness and want of culture."⁸

After about twenty years Nevius was convinced by his experiences that devil possession was rather common in China and that the coming of Christianity had a tendency to reduce the number of demoniacs in a region. He therefore wrote letters to other Christian missionaries asking them to supply him with information concerning possession in their area. In his book he cites many cases which were reported to him as a result of this letter, and he says that he consciously used only material for which he had the personal testimony of intelligent observers.

Even more striking is the evidence presented by Malachi Martin in his book Hostage to the Devil. Martin, as we have already noted, is a Jesuit professor. In Hostage to the Devil he tells the story of five exorcisms based on actual tape recordings made at the exorcism sessions. He writes,

The following five cases are true. The lives of the people involved are told on the basis of extensive interviews with all of the principals involved, with many of their friends and relatives, and with many others involved directly or indirectly in minor ways. All interviews have been independently checked for factual accuracy wherever possible. The exorcisms themselves are reproduced from the actual tapes made at the time and from the transcripts of those tapes.⁹

The first story he tells is that of Marianne K., a young Polish Catholic girl in New York who gradually slipped into an unbelievably depraved and immoral life. The facts as they are recorded by Martin are utterly revolting. As an example of her depravity we might only mention that she refused to see her parents, and when her mother left a food package at the door of Marianne's apartment, the girl sent her mother's gift back to her in a dripping and smelly package in which she had mixed excrement and urine with the food her mother had left.

Marianne had a married brother to whom she had been very close. When he came to New York he went to visit her. On his mother's insistence he took with him a crucifix, which she wanted him to leave somewhere in the apartment. When Marianne left the room, he placed the crucifix under the mattress of her bed. According to Martin's account,

No sooner had Marianne returned and sat on the edge of the bed than she turned white as chalk and fell rigidly to the floor, where she lay jerking her pelvis back and forth as though she were in great pain. In seconds the expression on her face had changed from dreamy to almost animal; she foamed at the mouth and bared her teeth in a grimace of pain and anger.¹⁰

In this state she was taken to her parents' home, where she remained for weeks in a comatose state, but when the parish priest came she had "terrifying fits of rage and violence. She was examined by doctors who could find nothing organically wrong. Almost unbelievably a psychiatrist "pronounced her normal within the definition of any psychological test."¹¹

Marianne's parents finally asked the diocesan authorities for permission to have an exorcism performed. The exorcism lasted for nineteen hours before the demon was finally cast out and Marianne returned to normal. The record of the exorcism taken from the actual tape recordings made at the time is so coarse and so blasphemously diabolic as to be frightening. What struck me, however, as being of particular significance is the fact that the exorcist was a Hebrew scholar and the girl spoke to him in Hebrew during the course of the exorcism.¹² I wish Martin had investigated the question of whether she had ever come into contact with the Hebrew language in her college training.

The second case described by Martin is that of a priest, who had adopted a thoroughly naturalistic theology and who began to change the words of the liturgy under compulsion, so that instead of "This is My body," he would say instead "This is My tombstone." While the record as Martin gives us of this possessed priest does not contain the same kind of obscenity that is found in the case of Marianne K, yet when we are told that instead of "This is My

blood" he would consecrate the wine with the words "This is My sexuality," we surely recognize this as a type of obscenity that is even more depraved than the mere spouting of four-letter words. He would baptize babies in the name of "the sky, the earth, and the water." Side by side with his service in the Catholic church he conducted another type of worship for a congregation in a rented apartment. In the regular worship service he found it almost impossible to make the sign of the cross, and finally once when he was saying mass he was catapulted away from the altar and thrown to the floor of the sanctuary. It was then that his superiors finally came to the conclusion that he was possessed. The priest who tried for two years to exorcise the devil became possessed himself for a time, and the case is particularly interesting because it illustrates how the dogma of evolution serves the devil's purpose.

The third of Martin's examples is that of a man who had gone through a sex change operation. At the first attempt at exorcism, the officiating priest was physically attacked by the demon and was hurled across the room and slammed against the wall. The account in some ways is reminiscent of the attack on the seven sons of Sceva recorded in the book of Acts (19:13-16). At the final exorcism session some weeks later, after the priest had recovered from the attack, an unbelieving psychiatrist was present. One of the witnesses later testified that the expression on the face of the psychiatrist changed from one of business as usual, to incredulity, to impatience, and finally to fear. The psychiatrist regained his composure and interfered in the exorcism with results that terrified the whole group present, especially the psychiatrist. It is also interesting to note that when the spirits finally left the possessed person, they said of the psychiatrist that the exorcist could not have him. They asserted, "We already have his soul. We claim him. He is ours. And you cannot do anything about that. We already have. He is ours. We needn't fight for him."¹³ Martin believes that the psychiatrist may have been a case of "total possession," for which there is no cure.

We can not, in the time available to us, discuss in any detail the two other cases described in Martin's book, but one of the cases might be mentioned because it differs markedly from the other four. It is a case of what Martin calls "familiarization." In familiarization, according to Martin, the physical violence, the stench, the social aberrations and moral degeneracy that is characteristic of other forms of possession are absent. The "familiar" seeks to live with the victim, but does not take over his personality. Martin says that the intelligence of familiars is very low, and that they are bound by rules and are in strict dependence on a "higher" intelligence. Nevertheless it is clear that they are evil, and in the case described, the familiar twice almost convinced the possessed person to commit suicide. At the same time, however, the victim, who was a radio announcer, received a great deal of help from his familiar who called himself "Uncle Ponto."

SYMPTOMS OF DEMONIZATION

The question of how demonization differs from mental illness is one that is very important. We have already noted that the hierarchial authorities of the Roman Church do not authorize exorcisms at the present time unless the candidate for exorcism has been pronounced psychologically normal by competent examiners. Martin tells of a young boy who was treated for epilepsy for a period of years and finally was sent to a hospital for treatment. After thorough examination he was declared nonepileptic and completely healthy, but when he returned home the "dreadful disturbances began all over again in a much more emphasized way." The attacks ceased only after the boy was exorcised by the same priest who exorcised Marianne K.¹⁴

In Kurt Koch's book Occult Bondage and Deliverance, the Christian psychiatrist, Alfred Lechler, discusses the distinction between disease and the demonic at some length (pp.133-190).

It is striking to note as one reads the literature on the subject how the same themes occur again and again whether the background is Chinese or American, whether the author believes in the supernatural or not. The symptoms remain the same. T. K. Oesterreich, for example, says that the typical distinguishing marks of possession remain constant through the ages. He writes,

The descriptions by the New Testament writers bear the stamp of truth, even if they should prove to be partially or even in every case unhistorical. They are typical pictures of conditions correctly reproduced.¹⁵

CHANGE IN PERSONALITY

One of the symptoms that is regularly noted is that there is a complete change in the personality of the possessed person. In the early stages of possession this may seem to be a normal change. A young man or young woman, for example, may at first manifest nothing more than juvenile rebellion against authority, which may be viewed by many as a part of the maturation process.

The type of change that takes place varies greatly. Some may become ecstatic while others become morose and even suicidal. Between attacks the afflicted person may seem to be completely normal. Up to this point there is no special reason to suspect demonization.

Together with the change in personality there is often a pronounced change in facial expression. At one moment the eyes may be normal and the next a pleasant face will be replaced by a grimace that can only be described as diabolical. There may even be a rapid series of changes in appearance.

At the beginning, it seems, the invading spirit will usually pretend to be only another side of the patient's personality, but eventually the spirit will begin to speak of the possessed person as a distinct individual. Many times the spirit, though he is using the voice of the patient, will speak of himself in the first person, to other people in the room in the second person, but will use the third person when speaking of the one possessed. Often the plural of the first person is used. Malachi Martin says that during an exorcism the spirit always makes a special effort to pretend to be the possessed person, but as this pretense begins to break down, the filth and violence increases, until finally, at what he calls the breakpoint, the spirit for the first time speaks of the possessed in the third person.

Unger believes that this use of the third person is one of the marks by which possession can be distinguished from insanity. He says that an insane person may believe that he is someone else, but in possession two personalities are clearly in evidence.¹⁶ This is not the case in cases of multiple personality. It seems that when one personality in such instances is replaced by another, the consciousness of the first personality is completely blocked out.

CHANGE IN VOICE

In very many cases of demon possession there is a remarkable change in the voice quality of the possessed person. This is a phenomenon that is repeatedly mentioned, perhaps because it is so obvious. Robert Peterson, who was a missionary in Borneo, says that at the new year's ceremony Chinese priests actually pray for demons to enter their bodies, and when the priest enters into the possessed state his voice no longer comes from his throat but from his stomach.¹⁷ This may also be related to the flatulence which is mentioned by many writers in connection with demonic seizures. Peterson also speaks of a possessed woman whose voice in the possessed state came from deep in her stomach,¹⁸ and he lists as a symptom of possession "a voice not apparently emanating from the vocal chords."¹⁹ He says that

even though he had often counselled mentally ill people, he had never heard this kind of speaking from any of them.²⁰

Kurt Koch tells of a young boy who displayed the symptoms of epilepsy but who spoke in a deep voice and said, "We are three."²¹ He also quotes Oesterreich as saying that a voice may suddenly change from soprano to bass²² in a way that is beyond all explanation of medical science.²³ The German psychiatrist, Dr. Alfred Lechler, lists a "double voice" as one of the symptoms of possession.²⁴

It is, however, not only the pitch of the voice that is changed. Some observers speak of the unearthly quality of the voice that issues from the patient. Martin speaks of a "horrible voice,"²⁵ and several times he speaks of a voice or voices that make themselves heard in the exorcism room which seem to issue from nowhere in particular. In one place he describes the voice as "mourning for an ineluctable sorrow."²⁶

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Coupled with this change in voice is a phenomenon that might be classified as speaking in tongues. The Roman Catholic Ritual of Exorcism lists as one of the peculiar symptoms of devil possession "when the subject speaks unknown languages with many words or understands unknown languages."²⁷

That this actually happens seems to be borne out by the tape recordings made at Roman Catholic exorcisms, and it is a phenomenon often mentioned in the discussion of possession. We have noted that Marianne K., whose case is described by Malachi Martin, spoke in Hebrew, (she also spoke in Latin) and Robert Peterson speaks of a possessed woman in Borneo who was able to speak in Malay, even though she had never learned that language and was unable to speak it when she was normal.²⁸ Kurt Koch sees such speaking in tongues as evidence that there is a sharp distinction between insanity and possession. He writes,

A mental patient will never be able to speak in a voice or a language he has previously not learned. Yet this is exactly what has happened and still does happen in many cases of possession.²⁹

Something very similar is reported by Nevius who says that a Chinese Christian who had some experience with possessed people told him that people who cannot sing and those who are unable to compose poetry are able to do so with ease when in a state of possession.³⁰ We may be reminded here once more of what was said about Mohammed in the previous lecture.

This is something that we might keep in mind also in assessing charismatic speaking in tongues.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Another symptom that is met frequently is physical violence. The acts of violence may be performed by the possessed person, or they may be acts of violence suffered by the possessed. The phenomenon is seen in the Scriptural accounts of possession. It will be remembered that the possessed priest whose case is described in Hostage to the Devil was thrown backward from the altar. Many concrete examples of such violence are found in that book. For example, in the case of Marianne K., the neighbors heard sounds of violence from her apartment for four or five hours until they finally overcame their reluctance to become involved and called the police. When the police broke down the door, they were met by a stomach curdling stench and a freezing temperature even though it was the middle of summer. The room was in complete chaos and the girl was lying on her bed with her eyes open in a coma and with blood dripping out of her mouth. When the ambulance arrived she suddenly

recovered and in a normal voice assured everyone that she was all right, explaining to the police that she had fallen while fixing the curtains.³¹

This manifestation of physical violence is mentioned by practically all the writers who deal with the subject of possession.

SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH

Closely related to the physical violence that is characteristic of many cases of possession is the superhuman strength that is displayed by those possessed. The Gadarene demoniac seems to be a typical example of the sort of thing that is still met with today. A Roman Catholic exorcist is always accompanied by several strong men whose duty it is to hold the patient in order to keep him from doing violence to himself or to the exorcist. But often even strong men find it very difficult to control even a frail girl or a child. Such supernatural strength is listed in the Roman Ritual of Exorcism as one of the major indications of possession, and it is repeatedly mentioned in the literature. Kurt Koch, for example, says that it often takes three or four strong men to hold down a woman or even a child,³² and he tells of one case in which three adults were hardly able to hold down a ten year old boy.³³

A rather strange occurrence which does not indicate supernatural strength in the possessed but would seem to indicate a completely independent force involved is described in connection with one of the exorcisms treated in Hostage to the Devil. Four strong men were simply unable to lift the body of the patient from the floor to which he had fallen until the exorcist commanded the demon to cease pinning him to the ground.³⁴

OBSCENE LANGUAGE AND MORAL DEPRAVITY

Another symptom of possession mentioned often and demonstrated in Hostage to the Devil is the obscene language employed by the subject. Many years ago I once asked a fellow pastor in the Missouri Synod who served as chaplain in a mental hospital whether he thought that there might be cases of demonic possession today. He told of a girl who appeared at times to be perfectly normal but whose eyes would suddenly without warning be filled with a look of indescribable hatred and from her lips would come a torrent of obscenity. He said that she used all the dirty words he knew and many which he had never heard before; but, he said, "I could tell that they were filthy even though I did not know what they meant." He also said that he knew that she could not have learned all those words in her environment. Perhaps this is another case of knowledge of a foreign language. I know also that I do not recognize many of the evidently obscene words in Martin's book. The depravity manifested there can only be described as pure, diabolic evil.

Joined with this obscene language one often finds that the life of the possessed becomes one of indescribable moral depravity.

OPEN HATRED OF CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS

Together with this immorality goes an open hatred against Christ and all sacred things. Luther says in the Large Catechism that the devil can be driven away by making the sign of the cross. The study of demon possession would seem to underscore Luther's words. We have noted the reaction of Marianne K. when her brother hid a crucifix under her mattress. Both Protestant and Catholic writers note this aversion to all sacred things. Blasphemy against Christ and the Holy Trinity seems characteristic of demon possession. Nevius, for example, says,

Prayer or even the reading of the Bible or some Christian book, throws the patient into a paroxysm of opposition and rage; and persistence in these exercises is almost invariably followed by the return of the subject to the normal state.³⁵

In heathen countries, on the other hand, the demons often appear to be very religious and urge the people to worship their idols.

KNOWLEDGE OF SECRETS

A final mark of demonization is the knowledge of secret things. Possessed people often know when the pastor is coming or if he has entered the house even if they are in a different room. Such knowledge often leads to paroxysms of violence.

During exorcism the spirits often taunt the exorcist by reminding him of secret sins which he had committed many years before, and openly proclaiming those sins to the assistants of the exorcist.

IMMEDIATE CURE

One of the characteristics of possession that would be in harmony with the conclusion that a case has been correctly diagnosed as actual invasion of the personality of a human being by another personal being is found in the repeated observation that after a successful exorcism there is an immediate cure. All the abnormal and supernatural manifestations disappear, many times after an open spoken announcement on the part of the demon or demons that they are leaving. While such a radical change in behavior might be reconciled with the concept of autosuggestion or hypnosis, yet when it is coupled with the symptoms on the basis of which the diagnosis of demonization is made, it surely points also to the correctness of the conclusion that devil possession is one of the facts of life.

POLTERGEIST PHENOMENA

Closely related to the demoniac possession of persons is the possession of places. Stories of haunted houses are common in America but even more common in Europe. I suppose that all of us are inclined to write off such storîes as the pure products of an overactive imagination. While we surely ought to be on our guard against naive credulity, yet the conclusions of trained observers would seem to indicate that some of these accounts are based on actual occurrences that defy a natural explanation. Parapsychologists usually speak of such "hauntings" as "poltergeist phenomena." A researcher in this field, who does not believe in the existence of spirits, nevertheless says,

The reality of this ghostly force is still controversial; but, to many of those engaged in parapsychological studies, it is thoroughly documented, and its existence is beyond dispute.³⁶

The German word "polter" means to "cause noise by knocking things about." A poltergeist, therefore, is a ghost that knocks objects around in a noisy way. The phenomenon is aptly named. According to reports that occasionally appear in the newspapers and that have often been investigated, strange and unexplained events take place as a result of haunting by a poltergeist.

Unusual noises are heard for which there is no explanation. They are described as moanings, groanings, scratching, pounding, rapping, and even actual speech. Dishes rattle

or even fly around the room. Rocks whose source is obscure fall or are thrown. Sometimes they fall slowly in apparent violation of the law of gravity, or they fly in a curved pattern that cannot be accounted for by any of the laws of motion. When the rocks are picked up, they are found to be either unnaturally hot or cold. Heavy furniture is moved without anyone being near it. Objects mysteriously appear or disappear. The temperature of a room may be mysteriously raised or lowered. Fires, for which there is no apparent cause, may be kindled, and sometimes floods of water appear from nowhere. Sometimes apparitions are seen which are identified as previous tenants in the house or castle, very often people who have been murdered or committed suicide. Strong odors often manifest themselves.

Many of these phenomena are associated with spiritism and devil possession. Martin, for example, says that in the presence of a possessed person

objects fly about the room; wallpaper peels off the walls; furniture cracks; crockery breaks; there are strange rumblings, hisses, and other noises with no apparent source. Often the temperature in the room where the possessed happens to be will drop dramatically. Even more often an acrid and distinctive stench accompanies the person.³⁷

Even people who accept the supernatural find it difficult to believe that such things really happen and that they are caused by spirits, or, if they do suspect that they might be true, they may find it difficult in this materialistic age to admit to such secret doubts about the closed character of this universe of ours.

But the explanations for the cases that cannot be accounted for naturally, given by those who deny the spiritual origin of the phenomena, are even harder to believe. Because the unnatural occurrences often are associated with specific individuals, especially children, and because the strange happenings often cease when the person with whom they are associated is removed from the house, or are even transferred to his new residence, it is concluded that there is a mysterious force in the individual involved. Some scientists speak of "disassociation" as an explanation. According to this view, frustrations or resentments in the child become motivating forces that operate outside the child in a way that would seem to indicate that they have a separate existence.

To deal with the problem, sometimes spiritistic mediums are engaged to contact the poltergeist and persuade it to leave. Sometimes they appear to be successful. In heathen countries offerings and sacrifices made to the spirits sometimes seem to remove the annoyance. In Christian countries the houses are exorcised and the spirits are commanded to leave in Jesus' name. The Catholic Church has a special ritual for the exorcism of places. This, too, is said to bring an end to the "haunting" in many cases.

THE CAUSES OF DEVIL POSSESSION

Not much is said in the literature about the causes of devil possession. In a general way, of course, we must say that when Adam and Eve listened to the suggestions of Satan in the garden they opened the door to the influence of the devil in the lives of their descendants.

The dogmaticians also see a close connection between the ability of the devil to enlist men in the service of sin and what we today call devil possession. In fact, they view all unbelievers as being, in a sense, devil possessed. They have Biblical justification for this view. For that reason also the old Lutheran liturgy of baptism contained an exorcism which survives only in our question, "Do you renounce the devil with all his works and all his ways?" Our brethren in the LBK in Sweden, because of the widespread denial of the existence of the devil and original sin, reinstated the exorcism as a protest against that unbelief.

While it is difficult to pinpoint specific causes for demonization in its extraordinary form, it would seem that the consent of the possessed is somehow necessary. Some people, who become possessed, consciously permit and even invite the devil to make use of their physical and mental faculties. It is a rather common practice for witch doctors and heathen priests to invite demons to take over control of their minds and bodies.

Those who have made a study of demoniac possession often speak of the use of drugs as a factor in the onset of the affliction. Experimentation with divination and spiritism are also often in the background. Even exorcism of others may contribute to the possession of the exorcist. The possessed parapsychologist in Hostage to the Devil seems to have started down this road by the practice of something that sounds very much like Transcendental Meditation.

It seems also that when the devil seeks to gain possession he makes all kinds of promises or threats to the intended victim. The persons approached may not be fully aware of the nature of the temptation, and yet, after exorcism, they often admit that they knew that it was something evil. That at least tacit acceptance of the condition of possession is necessary is asserted by Martin, who writes, "At every new step, and during every moment of possession, the consent of the victim is necessary, or possession cannot be successful."³⁸ This, at least in the case of Christians, agrees with the Scriptural injunction, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jm 4:7).

There is one feature in the onset of possession that I wish I had paid more attention to from the beginning. I do not know whether it is significant, but in a number of cases people who later appear to have been possessed had spirit playmates when they were children. Edgar Cayce's secretary reports that in his childhood he played with fairies and elves.³⁹ This point is also made in the novel The Exorcist.

EXORCISM

In all cultures attempts are made to cure devil possession by means of exorcism. In heathen countries this is done by magic spells and charms or by inflicting pain on the possessed person.⁴⁰ Something similar to this we meet in the apocryphal book of Tobit, where the smell of the burning liver and heart of a fish drives the demon away (Tob 6:16). Josephus tells of exorcisms which he had witnessed in which incantations were used that had supposedly been composed by Solomon (Antiq. VIII, 2).

In the Bible, exorcism is a rather simple process. The Savior and the apostles spoke a short word of command to the demons and a cure immediately followed. It would surely be indicated by all that we know of the matter from Scripture that if exorcism is to be practiced at all, it ought to be still such a simple affair. The German expert on possession T. K. Oesterreich said that in certain areas of the foreign mission field, "Christians have had the courage when faced with possessed persons, calmly to command in the name of Christ the evil spirit to depart, for it is a matter of course to them that the demon will then leave the unfortunate person."⁴¹ Nevius also records a number of instances in China in which possession was cured by prayer in the name of Jesus.

Most of the exorcisms which have come to the attention of the general public in our time have been performed by Roman Catholic priests. The case of exorcism described in the novel The Exorcist is based on an actual case in which a Roman priest exorcised a Lutheran boy. This is also the case in every one of the exorcisms described by Martin in Hostage to the Devil.

In times gone by, every Roman diocese had an official exorcist and this is still true today in most major dioceses according to Martin. Before any exorcism may be legitimately

performed, however, the exorcist must have the consent of the bishop. Before such permission is given the subject must receive a thorough medical and psychiatric examination to establish the fact that neither physical nor mental illness is involved.

When permission is given and a place for the exorcism has been chosen, the room is prepared for the actual rite. It is recommended that all movable objects be removed from the room and that the windows be covered or boarded up. Only a bed or couch and a small table on which are placed a crucifix, candles, holy water, a prayer book, and a relic or picture of a saint are left. In many modern exorcisms a tape recorder is used to preserve a complete record of the session.

The exorcist is usually accompanied by an assisting priest and four laymen whose duty is to hold down the victim if he should become violent. Martin says that the assistants must be people who are able to endure foul and obscene language, blood, excrement, and urine, and that they must be prepared to have their darkest secrets screeched in public. These, he says, are routine happenings in exorcisms.⁴² They must also be persons of great stamina for a Roman exorcism is a long-drawn-out process, lasting for many hours, sometimes for several days. Often, too, the exorcism sessions are repeated over a period of weeks or months. One case recently reported in Time Magazine⁴³ was carried on for ten months. During the course of the exorcism forty-three tapes were made of the sessions.

The Roman Church has an official ritual of exorcism, which need, however, not be followed strictly, since according to Roman doctrine, the rite is not a sacrament and therefore its efficacy does not depend on the exact repetition of the forms but depends rather on the faith of the exorcist. The exorcist says a mass before the exorcism begins. The "Litany of the Saints" is recited by the exorcist and his assistants, after which the spirit is summoned and commanded in the name of God to make himself known. Gospel selections are read and the exorcist lays his hands on the patient with a prayer for his recovery. The evil spirit is then directly addressed and special note is taken of words or phrases which cause the most violent reaction so that they may be repeated often to cause the demon as much distress as possible. The Athanasian creed is recited and psalms are read.

When the pretense of the spirit has been broken down, he is asked for his name and then finally he is commanded to leave and never return.

It will be evident immediately that a Roman exorcism bears little resemblance to the simple biblical accounts of the casting out of devils. While the biblical reports are a clear demonstration of the power of the name of Jesus, the Roman rite lays far greater stress on the power of the exorcist. It is true that the name of Jesus is considered to have great power but it is difficult to escape the impression that it appears to be used almost like a magical incantation, especially in view of the Roman doctrine that the efficacy of the rite depends upon the authorization of the church authorities and the faith of the exorcist.⁴⁴ One thing that is made clear by every one of Martin's cases is this that in the final analysis the ultimate success of the exorcism depends on the staying power of the exorcist. Martin says that there are six stages that are passed through in exorcism. The one immediately preceding the expulsion is called the "clash," which he says is a struggle of will between the priest and the demon to force the demon to give its name.⁴⁵ The relation between this approach to the Roman doctrine of salvation will be obvious.

One other great difference between biblical and Roman exorcism is indicated also by the title of Martin's book. The title "Hostage to the Devil" has reference to the Roman view that the priestly exorcist offers himself literally as a hostage to the devil in order to fight in behalf of the exorcisee the battle he cannot fight for himself. The Roman doctrine of the sacerdotal office is clearly mirrored in that conception.

Coupled with that sacerdotalism is the theme that recurs often in Roman exorcisms,

namely, that in performing exorcisms a priest suffers physical or psychical damage. In the book The Exorcist the priest performing the exorcism dies. In one of Martin's cases, the priest himself becomes at least partially possessed. Such conceptions surely do not accord with the biblical doctrine that Christ has destroyed the power of the devil over his people.

That may not mean that a Christian cannot be possessed. That question we may never be able to decide this side of eternity. But we can rest assured that a Christian who fights this battle in the faith that Christ has set us free from the old evil foe will be victorious finally over every diabolic onslaught.

He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done.
One little word can fell him.

FOOTNOTES
Lecture IV

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3. Malachi Martin, Hostage to the Devil, New York, Reader's Digest Press, 1976, p. 298.
4. Martin, op. cit. 11.
5. Michelet, op. cit., p. 171.
6. Baroja, op. cit., pp. 138.
7. Martin, op. cit., p. 11.
8. John B. Nevius, Demon Possession, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1968, p. 9.
9. Martin, op. cit., p. 24.
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11. Ibid., p. 59.
12. Ibid., p. 62.
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14. Ibid., p. 35.
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16. Unger, Demon Possession, p. 103f.
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21. Kurt Koch, Occult Bondage, pp. 8f.
22. Ibid., pp. 216f.
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24. Ibid., p. 256.
25. Op. cit., p. 241.

26. Ibid., p. 244.
27. Martin, op. cit., p. 460.
28. Op. cit., p. 117.
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31. Martin, op. cit., pp. 55f.
32. Christian Counselling, p. 217.
33. Ibid., p. 251.
34. Op. cit., p. 305.
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39. Carter, op. cit., p. 73.
- Nevius, op. cit., p. 54.
- Kurt Koch, Christian Counselling, p. 250.
- Op. cit., p. 12.
- Op, cit., p. 16.
- Time, Sept. 6, 1976 (108,10) p. 68.
- Martin, op, cit., p. 459
- Ibid., p. 21.