

Dangers in the Deliverance Ministry

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It is my recent observation that in all sections of North American evangelicalism one now encounters pastors and churches who have become or are becoming involved with the deliverance ministry. I am not speaking of Pentecostal and charismatic churches where one might possibly expect to find such a ministry. I am speaking of evangelicals across the broad theological sector, including even the most conservative among us.

What is happening here is not new historically. In the first four centuries, the church was pervasively involved in what is presently called spiritual warfare and the deliverance ministry (Kelley 1987:150).

Our own experience in this field began in 1963 and has continued intermittently since. The initial case involved a six-week period of day and night warfare, most of which took place on the Nakamun Camp grounds in Alberta, Canada. It was learn quickly or be routed.

As the demonization of North America proceeds and as ever increasing numbers of Christian workers become involved in the deliverance ministry, I feel some flags of warning must be raised.

There are dangers in the deliverance ministry, "The devil knows more judo than you've ever heard of," Dr. A.W. Tozer used to say.

There is no doubt that the Scriptures affirm the ministry of deliverance. The disciples, particularly the seventy, were emphatically given authority to drive out demons (Luke 9, 10). The Great Commission reinforces such authority for all who follow and proclaim Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19).

J. A. MacMillan's *Authority of the Believer* (1980) was first published in 1935 and remains today as the prime text, world-wide, on the authority of the believer. It is the foundational doctrinal undergirding of all understandings of spiritual warfare, not just in The Christian and Missionary Alliance, where MacMillan was an honored leader, but

across a broad evangelical spectrum. There is a tendency to either ignore Satan and his kingdom, or to focus incessantly upon him. C.S. Lewis reminded us that both attitudes are wrong (1982:3). Certainly, these are the *general* dangers in this area of ministry.

But there are significant and *specific* dangers as well.

1. Diacritical Danger. North Americans are just becoming acquainted with exorcism as a possibility, while, unfortunately, we are obligated to begin this article insisting that a diacritical choice be made between true and false deliverances.

But Scripture has always been insistent upon what anthropology belatedly tells us: there are exorcisms in many other religions of the world (Glasser 1989:107). There are true and false

deliverances (Matthew 12:22-28), the magicians of Egypt have always been able to do some things (Exodus 7:14-8:18), and Jesus insists that the kingdom of Satan is not divided against itself (Matthew 12:26). That being so, the great majority of exorcisms taking place in the world, **assuming that real spiritual powers are involved**, fall into the category of false deliverances, what Matthew Henry would call strategic retreats, concords with Satan, which do not affect the outcome of the war but may well strengthen the power of Satan in a victim:

there was a vast difference between the devil's going out by compact and his being cast out by compulsion. . .if he had gone out whenever he saw fit, he would have made a re-entry, for that is the way of the unclean spirit, when he voluntarily and with design goes out of a man. . . The prince of the devils may give leave, nay may give order, to his forces to retreat, or make a feint, to draw the poor deluded soul into an ambush; (Henry 1721:no page numbers, commentary on Luke 11:17-27).

Kurt Koch makes much the same kind of argument regarding divine healing and healing from the counter- kingdom. Koch does not deny

that occult healings can and do come but he insists that those so healed suffer an engram in which "physical illness disappears (but) new disorders appear in the mental and emotional life of the person concerned" (1973:121).

As in healings, so also in deliverances - there is the necessity to distinguish between the polarities. Apart from the well-honed diacritical ability to distinguish between true and false exorcisms, the newly awakened to supernatural procedures will quickly fall into appalling errors. Scott Peck's desire to include "Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, atheists, and agnostics" in a Christian deliverance team is an illustration of this kind of naivete (1983:201). What kind of deliverances were being conducted by the Jews (Luke 11:19)? By the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-20)? What kind of deliverances are conducted in the name of Jesus by those who have never known Him (Matthew 7:22)?

It would be simple if the choice between true and false deliverances was simply between those inside Christianity and those outside it, as in Hinduism, Shintoism and Islam (Nevius 1894; Oesterreich 1930).

Unfortunately, the choices are not so easy. Complicating the diacritical process is Christian occultism, that is, the presence in Christianity itself of false exorcisms. Could an exorcism proceeding in the name of the Virgin Mary be considered a true deliverance? What wonders might a false Christ (Matthew 24:4) be able to do? Would a deliverance that proceeds in the name of an alternate Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4) ever be considered authentic?

CS-At a certain well-known evangelical Bible College a man who purported to have been converted from occultism, being also under the mentorship of a respected but non-discerning faculty member, began to conduct a deliverance ministry. He insisted on dealing with the "demonized" alone, was not under the authority of any pastor, and was finally determined by the fruit of his labors to have been apparently loading demons into his victims, rather than liberating them. Many who were "delivered" came to an end worse than the

first condition. Some were radiant Christians who came to ignominious states through his ministrations.

Authentic deliverances then, are those deliverances which come in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God Almighty, the Divine Subject of the four gospels of the New Testament and the Apostle's Creed. They are the deliverances where the kingdom of Satan is broken down against the enemy's will. All other exorcisms are facades of one kind or another, whether outside of Christianity or ostensibly within it

2. Physical Danger. Just as the sons of Sceva were overcome by venturing into a sphere in which they had little true knowledge (Acts 19), there are sometimes physical dangers involved in doing battle with the one who has the murderous powers (John 8:44). Jesus assured the disciples that they would trample on serpents and scorpions and nothing would "by any means" hurt them (Luke 20:19-20). Those who are naive or silly may "speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8), but mature Christians tread carefully in dealing with the kingdom of darkness. Physical danger can be involved.

It is wise to be especially protective by prayer and authority of children and family members of those who are actually engaged in the battle.

3. Observational Danger. Sharp on the heels of the physical danger is the possibility that Christian workers may become fascinated by the awesome authority of the believer. To observe stubborn powers cringing in fear and fleeing at the authoritative use of the Name of Jesus Christ is heady stuff. It is supernatural. And hard to handle, especially for a novice. Again, Jesus specifically warned, "Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Only a maturity of Christian life and experience allows one to be involved in deliverance ministry one moment and to forget forthwith the fascinating phenomena.

There is also an understandable tendency to erect theological constructs on the basis of observations made in the course of deliverances. These constructs may sound very persuasive, but can easily lead Christian workers astray

CS-A young woman in Montana was discovered to be suffering the effects of demonization. She had committed fornication three times and each time an evil spirit had entered her. In all three incidents, after she divulged the name of the young man involved, and renounced the evil spirit of fornication from _____. (naming the young man), she was delivered.

A case study such as the above offers an opportunity on the basis of observation, to erect several theological constructs, all of which are questionable, i.e.: All who commit fornication always

get an evil spirit in the process. Evil spirits always pass from men to women in all acts of fornication. All acts of fornication involve demonization.

The Scriptures condemn fornication (Galatians 5:19). The Scriptures teach that the devil is not to be given ground (Ephesians 4:27). But it stops there. *Observational constructs which use the words "all," "every," and "never," are especially prone to mistakes and error.*

It is often said that laying hands upon the demonized is incorrect. There are case studies that can be cited demonstrating that the transference of evil through the laying on of hands may occur, especially when the Christian workers involved are not well enough schooled in deliverance matters to issue restrictive commands. But there are those who affirm that sometimes part of the healing process in deliverance may be the laying on of hands. If, as is suggested in Matthew 4:23-24, some sicknesses are demonic, then there may be occasions when the laying on of hands is appropriate in the deliverance ministry. John Nevius said, "The scriptures do not confound demon-possession with diseases, but uniformly make a clear distinction between them" (1894:181).

The Scriptural principle having to do with the ordination of ministers is this: "Lay hands suddenly on no man," (1 Timothy 5:22). The unbiblical construct would be to arbitrarily carry that principle over into the deliverance ministry, and thereupon to pronounce that Christian workers must "never ever lay hands upon the demonized," forgetting that there may be persons both sick and demonized who deeply need the laying on of hands. Jesus laid His hands on the woman with the spirit of infirmity and she was immediately delivered (Luke 13:13).

4. Methodological Danger. Sometimes deliverance methods are advanced which do not have a biblical base. The counseling response to Multiple Personality Disorder is an illustration of this. MPD often emerges through severe trauma. In the case of children, it may result from ritual abuse in satanism.

Multiple Personality Disorder has been described by one counseling team as being always demonic when a fragment of the personality has been exposed (Ensign and Howe 1989:9b). Another esteemed educator affirms that the ability of the human mind to create multiple personalities is God's grace to traumatized persons (Timothy Warner, panel discussion [paraphrased], Sioux City, Iowa: February 1990). Divergent views we can understand, (and I admire both authorities just cited,) but the methodology that may emerge is something else again.

Certain counselors familiar with the MPD have come to believe that each personality must be brought to Christ, or at least informed of the true faith of the real person involved. The result is a strange kind of evangelism indeed.

Similarly, following patterns in spiritism (Ensign and Howe 1989:245-247) some counselors will transfer a stubborn evil spirit from its victim to a willing host and collaborating Christian worker so that it might then be more easily dispelled, the warning against giving place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27), being contravened in the process.

Such procedures as I have just described may seem to work. But pragmatism is hardly truth. It is itself a theory of truth which must be

repudiated (Flew 1982:265; Tozer 1980: November 14). For the Christian worker in deliverance ministry, truth is scripturally revealed.

An additional word is also in order. The Scriptures may be searched in vain for specific, step-by-step deliverance methodology. What is found are the broad strokes of authority and deliverance. The Lord Jesus Christ who came in the flesh is the Great Deliverer. Methodologies can and will vary (Reese 1985).

5. Dispensational Danger. With the occult invasion of North America an ongoing reality (McCandlish Phillips 1970), the deliverance ministry is emerging in bastions of dispensationalism where likewise dangers are evident. Many of the dispensationalists would affirm that the supernatural spiritual gifts are no longer for today. They tend to proceed in areas of deliverance on the basis of believers' authority and in conformity to counseling methods.

Dispensationalism, then, may become vulnerable in two areas. One is the assumption that deliverance properly takes place in a counseling context with appointments, receptionists, and doctors of psychiatry in attendance. If they are dealing with evil supernaturalism, which the deliverance ministry assumes, they are seeking to deal with "sign" phenomena in a secular setting. It is an extremely difficult thing to do. The moral wreckage among counselors who have attempted to deal secularly with supernatural evil is pervasive and worrisome. The contagion, or "transference" of evil has sometimes made the counselors themselves victims. Garbage in has become garbage out.

This is not to say that some professional counselors have not developed a biblically based ministry of counseling that is spiritually oriented. Many have done exactly that.

The second area of dispensationalist vulnerability is that conversations with evil powers sometimes become extended and counter-productive. Origen, somewhat heretical himself, warned that we ought not to be listeners to or disciples of the demons (Oesterreich 1930:166). But if spiritual gifts are themselves not believed in or accepted, and if there is not implicit acceptance of the direct guidance

of the Holy Spirit, the Christian worker in such cases becomes unduly dependent on demonic utterances for unravelling the intricacies of occult subjection. The result can not help but be confusion. Jesus Christ conversed but briefly with Legion (Mark 5:9). The verb "torment" which the demons ascribed to Jesus' conversation with them does imply some ongoing and distressing kind of conversation for them. Jesus also kept saying, "Come out of him," implying repetitious commanding (Mark 5:8). The sons of Sceva heard some truth from the counter-kingdom: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" (Acts 19:15). But going beyond such limited boundaries in counseling is extra-biblical and trouble-prone procedure.

6. Psuedo Danger. It is often assumed that the deliverance ministry is one form of the Charismatic movement If by that one means the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements which focus on glossolalia then the conclusion is unfounded.

The deliverance ministry, in fact, consistently contradicts some the basic tenets of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. More and more of the literature offers case studies which cite numbers of deliverances from demonic tongues (Birch 1988; Dickason 1987; McGraw 1974).

Incidences of "Jesus" spirits are also very high in deliverance ministry, but the Jesus is not the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Birch 1988:160-161).

Our own observation in this sphere is that many deliverances undertaken in the evangelical context involve the extrication of Pentecostals and Charismatics from their false Jesus and false gift manifestations.

In conversations with many others involved in deliverance ministry, my observation is that most counselors' experiences parallel our own.

7. Practical Danger. To set up a counseling center and invite all and sundry with their psychic problems to take a number invites exhaustion and failure. It is certainly possible to stir up more snakes

than one can kill. Deliverance ministry, in the wrong place and at the wrong time, has the capacity to displace legitimate ministry, deprioritize and destabilize pastoral ministry, and to carry Christian workers to weakness and frustration.

"These signs shall follow them that believe;" (Mark 16:17). "The Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). The deliverance ministry is intended to follow the teaching and preaching of the cross. (We are aware that the validity of the texts just cited is questioned by some, but the principles inherent in them are underlined elsewhere in the Scripture: Acts 8:1-7; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Hebrews 2:4.)

The Great Commission comes first A lost world is to be informed. God's method is anointed preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21). A phenomenon that follows and results from that activity is deliverance ministry. Signs do not lead, they follow. Practical theological procedures which allow the warfare to take precedence over evangelism, the making of disciples, and church planting are suspect at first, and flawed at last.

8. Focal Danger. The danger of an out of focus or an inadequate view of the cross is one of the most serious concerns in handling the deliverance ministry. The Apostle Paul was determined to preach Christ crucified. He declined to favor either the philosophers or the miracle seekers. He would pander to neither the Greeks nor the Jews. He would preach Christ and the cross (1 Corinthians 1). He identified himself as crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), and he insisted that the flesh must be mortified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13).

The cross where Jesus died was the place where His blood was shed and His flesh was torn. It was the incarnate Christ who died on Calvary. John plainly states that every spirit that refuses to continually confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God (1 John 4:1-3). The incarnation is furiously resisted by the counter-kingdom because it leads directly to the cross where the prince of this world was cast out and judged (John 12:31; 16: 11).

The work of the cross in the sanctification of the believer must be understood lest there be great confusion in dealing with manifestations which may emerge in persons seeking assistance. The self-life cannot be cast out - it has to die. An inadequate view of holiness and the place and power of the cross in the life of the believer may engender an inordinate belief in the pervasive presence of demons of every description. It is a flaw which easily gives rise to fanaticism and error.

9. The Final Danger. The great and final danger is that some may never be set free. Those imprisoned by evil powers can be released only by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only One who sets captives truly free. Many thousands of the demonized will hear us preach the gospel. Apart from Spirit-empowered witness and the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Lord, there is no other way for persons long bound to finally escape the grasp of the evil one. Some who come to Him will be set free from evil powers from the moment of belief. New believers are often freed from counter-kingdom encumbrances and do not really even know what has happened to them.

Others who have been led to Christ by Christian workers unfamiliar with the principles of apotropaic renunciations and repudiations of Satan which are of ancient tradition in the church (Kelley 1987:150) will possibly need more ongoing care and concern. There are deliverance battles to be fought and won. They will not be won by the faint-hearted. Those who proceed solidly upon biblical order, refraining from experience-oriented biases, and correctly ordering their priorities, will do exploits because they know their God and the wonder of His ways.

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