Deliver Us From Evil
A Manual of Exorcism
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Deliver Us From Evil
A Manual of Exorcism

Phillip Gagnon
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DELIVER US FROM EVIL: A Manuel of Exorcism
Revised 2015 (addition of Tiber chapter)

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Foreword

This may come as a shocking declaration to many, but Jesus was not given to hyperbole. As C.S. Lewis declares “not some of us once in awhile, but all us all the while live in enemy occupied territory.” Aleksandr Solhenitseyn writes, “If only it were so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” (The Gulag Archipelago, p.168). This treatise on the demonic is not for the occasional person who falls into a crevasse. It is for every pilgrim, every step, 24 hours a day, and seven days a week. The author is inviting each and every Christian to become cognizant, totally aware, that we live out our lives in a war zone. The Body of Christ is the Church militant. Our promised time of rest is yet to come.

Dr. Lee Griffin
Port Angeles, Washington
January 2006
We have good reason to welcome this initiative by Phil Gagnon to provide a manual for pastors and other ministers in this much neglected and misunderstood area of basic Christian ministry. Sound reflection and helpful guidelines are sorely needed right now.

Many of us believe that the time has come to train pastors just as thoroughly and carefully in the dominical mandate to “cast out demons” as we have customarily trained them in the dominical mandate to “preach and heal the sick” (Mark 3:14-15). And the place to do it is the seminary, as the Eastern Churches have shown us. Here the benefits of mature guidance, accumulated experience, sensitivity to signs of abuse, and the corrections of community insight are most available so that sound patterns of practice can be established, from initial response to appropriate action.

It is no longer possible to regard pastoral activity in this area as the pre-occupation of the lunatic fringe. For whatever reasons, we know literally scores of “normal” pastors who have had to scramble hard to equip themselves to confront the realm of the enemy in ways they never dreamed they would have to, all in the course of everyday ministry as it is taking shape in our time.

Nor do we have the luxury of avoiding it, as some twenty Alberta chaplains discovered at a gathering in 1993. The majority had had significant experiences in this area which they had previously shared with few colleagues. As if to confirm the need to address this issue, four requests for help (the usual annual total!)
came to the Bishop's Office within the four days leading up to the gathering. The last of the four involved one of the chaplains and resulted in a Major Exorcism the night before. This chaplain related the story to the whole group while still recovering from the shock and amazement of it.

It hardly seems necessary to document the need for adequate training at the seminary level. For this is surely an area of ministry every bit as subject to distortion, misuse, disuse, and abuse as are the pulpit and the hospital bedside. Trained or untrained, our pastors are increasingly being called upon to deal with real or alleged demonic activity in every imaginable setting, including the parish, the university, and the seminary.

In most instances their response inspires respect and admiration. Faced with an uninvited but inescapable challenge, they have sought sound advice and risen faithfully to the occasion. Few have had ties with the charismatic renewal movement. They are just pastors doing their God-given calling to the best of their ability. Often no one is more astonished at the results than they are themselves.

But in some instances the lack of adequate preparation has led to disasters large and small. Some pastors have been deceived by demonic spirits masquerading as I AM or as friendly spirit-guides. Others have sidestepped the whole issue out of denial or ignorance. In cases like these, Christ’s ministers unwittingly become impediments to Christ’s ministry, for want of essential training.

There are psychiatrists and family physicians who recognize the salient symptoms of demonic possession or activity and who refer patients to Christian clergy for help. When this happens, a competent medical diagnosis has already determined to the satisfaction of the health professional that something more than mental or emotional disorders are involved. This diagnosis is usually correct, and a properly trained pastor can be instrumental in dislodging evil in the name of Jesus Christ, setting free a child of God.

0-281-04261-6) has proved invaluable. Though some interpretations proposed in the book (in particular Perry's own) are open to question, the book has the virtues of bringing together a worldwide range of resources and experiences, of insisting on and providing a guide for thorough diagnosis before proceeding, and of supplying a careful analysis of the full range of possibilities the average pastor might encounter in a normal ministry. Very helpful and effective rites of deliverance and cleansing are provided in an appendix. The Rite of Major Exorcism, supplied only to Bishops who must authorize its use, is comparatively brief and to the point.

In the present manual, Phil also takes a thoughtful and balanced approach. It offers substantial help to pastors and other ministers. But perhaps best of all, it helps us all put the whole issue back on the table where it belongs. For that, let us thank our God!

J. Robert Jacobson
Introduction

The Church in North America has lost the ability to meet the challenge of evil in the form of the demonic. Since becoming a Lutheran in 1985 I have watched as congregations have become infatuated with various spiritual franchises each promising spiritual rewards of one kind or another. I have also seen believers search frantically for someone to help them in the face of demonic affliction or cultic involvement and watched as so many dismissed their experiences as being juvenile or just plain loopy. I have also experienced the confusion of listening to seminary professors “exorcise” the concept of demonic possession from their classrooms only to replace them with revisionist theologies and fads. I have watched my own denomination exchange the doctrine of justification with social justice; in effect supplanting the grace and cross of Christ with good works and a theology of glory. I have experienced first hand the presence of radical evil three times, and each time found freedom and healing only in the cross of Jesus Christ despite the therapeutic approach that was first taught to me.

The writer of Ecclesiastes eloquently testifies, God has set “eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecc. 3:11) and so the echo of Eden continues to resonate within us. The evidence of our searching is universal. It can be seen all around us, everyday. The arts and literature of every culture is replete with the quest for spiritual meaning. Indeed, despite its narcissistic and hedonistic bent, even our modern media implicitly cries out for God. Throughout the centuries, sects splintering in dissatisfaction from their mother faiths have proclaimed that they have found true life. And today, in
the 21\textsuperscript{st} century new religious groups seemingly ubiquitous in their number, each blissfully proclaiming their messiah de jour.

The revisionist theologians such as Bishop Spong, Matthew Fox, and Dominic Crossan among others, paint the essential theological truths of the Christian Faith as archaic archetypal concepts requiring reconsideration or complete abandonment. Jesus has become in many quarters of the Church either; a good man as full of God as any man could be, a cynic sage, husband to Mary Magdalene, homosexual lover, or a man attaining Christ-consciousness. The Church’s orthodox teaching of Jesus’ atoning life, death and resurrection is barely given credence by many. Some even say that Jesus never meant to die for our sins. So much for the vicarious atonement! One could say that the language and life of the Church is being supplanted by the language spoken most eloquently by the Father of lies. As my friend, Father Biztyo, in my seminary days once told me, “the devil is most active in the Church, striving to destroy the truth of the gospel, our symbols and our hope in God’s love.”

In our society flamboyant deception and evil has spread almost organically through education, religion, politics, and the media which means the possibility of falling into deception and possible demonic influence has become increasingly greater. We are drowning in lies and chaos. No wonder Jesus called his disciples as “fishers (rescuers) of men” (Luke 5:10). We have lost, in much of the church, the ability to think biblically, let alone clearly. As St. Paul writes to Timothy, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:2). The “big lie” as Hitler’s henchman Goebbels put it, easily becomes the lie we own within ourselves. Or as a bumper sticker I recently saw said, “With God all things are possible, without God all things become permissible.” Indeed.

The truth of the matter is nothing could bring greater joy to those who would oppose the kingdom of God while exalting themselves in the process. The lies that the pursuit of pleasure is the ultimate good, that God and the devil do not even exist, indeed that humanity is god-like in its attributes and potential are the ultimate repristination of Satan’s first lie to humanity. Such is the state of affairs in our world.
Thankfully this is not the last word. While there is much that can bring despair and discouragement to the child of God, we must never forget that the war is won in Christ! Our work is not in vain as children of God (1 Cor. 15:57). Jesus is victor over sin, death and the devil. This is the truth that the devil would have the world never hear, have us forget, or disbelieve. As Susan Garrett reminds us,

The missionaries message about Jesus as the anointed One is linked to their proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:12). Nonetheless, the Kingdom was yet to be fully implemented. Complete inauguration would coincide with the definitive subjection of all Christ’s enemies including surely the supreme “Enemy,” the “devil” under his feet. In the meantime, every gain for the Kingdom of God through exorcism, healing, or conversion was a loss for the Kingdom of Satan, who uses cunning but mostly futile tactics to try to keep people under his authority. No one, not even Satan, could prevent the inevitable realization of the Kingdom of God.

From my seminary days Rev. Caron Parke, the Schmeider Fellow and Liturgy and Homiletics professor encouraged me to continue writing upon this subject as she saw the Lutheran Church increasingly become ineffective in dealing with raw, supernatural evil. In the course of my research I gained a friend in Father Biztyo, the Saskatoon Diocesan appointed exorcist. He patiently answered my questions over my three years at seminary. A man of great intellect, he was not only a man of wisdom and vast experience but also a professor of theology and philosophy at St. Thomas More in Saskatoon for some years. More recently, I have had the pleasure and honour of coming to know Dr. Lee Griffin as a friendly and brilliant soundboard for my ideas over glasses of scotch and curried dishes. His expertise in theology, psychiatry and counselling especially in dealing with the demonic and the charismatic movement was insightful and essential. Lee’s wonderful and sage wife Cynthia lent her sharp editing skills to help me over the two years we worked together. No matter what happens in the course of time regarding this small venture I am grateful for coming to know and love so many dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Where else, but the community of the redeemed can one find such fellowship, encouragement and love.
I pray that this small book as hoped, will present a balanced perspective upon the subject of demonic oppression/possession and exorcism.

In chapter one I will briefly explore the scriptural and early church background and response to the demonic; and in chapter two, pastoral discernment and the use of the sacraments/sacramentals in relation to exorcism. Offered are two rites of renunciation with three rites of exorcism; the exorcism and blessing of a dwelling, demonic obsession/oppression and a full solemn rite for possession. Additional prayers, blessings and material are also included as helps in the battle.

In the face of much that is negative and destructive, the Church has been called to proclaim the good news that Christ is alive! Jesus has destroyed the power of death by his death and resurrection and has taken “the keys of Death and Hades” forever (Rev. 1:18). The kingdom of God continues to advance step by step even in the face of intense opposition through the mundane and the perverse. And so, while the present spiritual climate is fertile soil for demonic influence (in the form of deception or oppression) we must always remember and take joy in the gift of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Truly, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (Jn 1:5).

My sincere hope is that this small contribution may help equip the disciple of Christ to discern between personal and supernatural evil in order to engage in appropriate spiritual warfare. As such, may the Spirit of Christ guide and sustain you in all things.

Crux Probat Omnia
The Biblical Background

With the words “In the beginning” Genesis begins the narrative of God’s unfailing love and design for his creation. Our first parents, placed in Eden’s beauty were created in the image of the Triune God and fashioned to be in intimate communion with the Creator. But as in all good stories, there are antagonists. They were not alone and neither are we. According to scripture and subsequent church and rabbinical tradition God had also created angels prior to humanity - servants to be faithful to God. But some rebelled against God and all that is good. These fallen angels are called demons or devils.

The gospels abound with references to Satan and the demonic (Mt. 4:1; Jn. 6:70, 8:44; Acts. 10:38; 1 Cor.10:20, 21; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 9:20). Satan is thought to have led other angels or Daemons (Gk) (Mt. 4:1; 7:22) against God and organized them in their machinations against humanity (Eph.6:12; 1 Pet.5:8). People of Biblical times were no strangers to the concepts and reality of those daemons that would inflict evil upon the innocent and not so innocent.

Whereas there are many names for the chief angel who led the rebellion against God; the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), Satan (Mt. 12:26; Mk. 4:15; Lk.10:18; Ro. 16:20), “Beelzebub” (Mt.10:25), Satan is the most often used name for the “Adversary,” or accuser of God and humanity. In the Syriac language he is called achelkartzo “the devourer of calumni,” which most emphatically expresses the delight which he takes in every attempt that is made to blast the character of good men. In the Old Testament, Satan’s
role was often perceived as that of “the royal official” who brings “a misdemeanor to the notice of God.”

Satan was once Lucifer, “son of the morning”, the majestic “guardian cherub” (Ezek. 28: 12-19) who was “blameless” until iniquity was found in him and through his revolt ( Isa.14:12-14) became the Adversary of God.

Under Satan’s leadership, evil spirits were described in the Old Testament as troubling people’s minds (1 Sam.16: 15, 23), deceiving people (1 Kings 22: 22, 23), and inflicting sickness (Ps.91:5,6). Rabbinical teaching included the belief in the existence of evil spirits capable of independent, malevolent direction of will. Nonetheless, these spirits were ultimately seen as “agents...under (God’s) control” (see 1 Sam.16:14).

These evil spirits were variously identified with foreign gods called the shedim (Deut.32:17; Ps.106:37; cf. 1 Cor.10:20) or demons. Other spirits were identified as Se’irim (hairy demons), or in terms of Lilith ( Isa.34:14; a succubus, traditionally thought of as Adam’s first wife), or Mavet (Hebrew for death) the Canaanite underworld god and Azazel, “thought to live in the wilderness.” Other names for evil spirits in Jewish thought were mazzikim and ruhot, “harmful spirits” who entered people and drove them mad or inflicted disease.

Rabbinic literature saw evil as “result(ing) from the imperfect state of the created world or from human misuse of freewill, not from the machinations of a cosmic enemy of the Lord.”

Rather, rabbinic thought conjectured that within each human being were two antagonistic spirits, the yetzer ha-tob (good spirit) and yetzer ha-ra (evil spirit), who tempted or had a tendency to good or evil. However, other legends persisted in the Haggadah where the Devil, “known as Sammuel more often than Satan, is a high angel who falls, uses the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve, and acts as tempter, accuser, destroyer and angel of death.” In the Inter-Testamental literature, Belial (2 Sam. 22:5; Ps. 18:5) is referred to as “the spirit of perversion, the angel of darkness, the angel of destruction.”

As one would expect, the New Testament treats the subject of demons in concert with some of the contemporary thought of the day. Demons were “unclean spirits” believed to have personalities with the ability to inhabit waste places and possess individuals where the afflicted individual’s personality was perverted and sickness could be inflicted (Matt.10:25; Luke.11:15-19). How-
ever, no matter how independent in their actions these demons might seem, these lesser spirits are in subjection to the “prince of this world.” Satan is the chief demon who is in direct opposition to God and God’s anointed people (Mark 3:22; Matt. 10: 25; 12:24). The purpose, according to Jesus, in Satan’s opposition is to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10).

As such, an especially important aspect of Jesus’ mission was to “destroy the works of the evil one” (1 John 3:8). Jesus demonstrated this integral aspect of his ministry repeatedly as he cast out demons and healed the sick by his own authority (Mark 9:25; 7:24-30) as “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). Further, as the kingdom of God displaced the kingdom of darkness Jesus also empowered the apostles and disciples of that day and believers in general, to cast out demons and heal in his name (Matt. 10: 1, 8; Luke 9:1; 10:17; Mark 16:17). The success of the disciples' exorcism was as dependent upon the same type of general conditions as the efficacy of prayer for others and use of charismatic power to heal; in other words to believe (Matt. 17: 15, 20; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:40).

While examples of Jewish exorcisms are not given in the Old Testament, incantations are seen in the Talmud (Schabbath 14:3; Aboda Zara 12:2; Sanhedrin 10:1). These exorcisms took the form of employing the sacred name of God in conjunction with the “names of the good angels” and would be relied upon in a superstitious manner. In the New Testament, the narrative of the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13) illustrates the formulaic understanding of the Jewish exorcism of that time period. However, as Nauman in his work Exorcism Throughout The Ages, points out;

But superstition and magic aside, it is implied in Christ’s answers to the Pharisees, who accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, that some Jews in His time successfully exorcised demons in God’s name: “and if I by beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?” (Matt 12: 27). It does not seem reasonable to understand this reply as mere irony, or as a mere argumentum ad hominem implying no admission of the fact; all the more so, as elsewhere (Mark 9:38,39) we have an account of a person who was not a disciple casting out demons in Christ’s name, and whose action Christ refused to reprehend or forbid.
The early Church Fathers, especially the Apologists were fond of pointing to the efficacy of exorcism in Christ’s name as a proof of the true religion, “As they (the pagans) could not be exorcised by those who used incantations or drugs.” As in the days of the apostles, early Christian exorcism consisted of the invoking of the name of Christ, that is to say, “a simple and authoritative adjuration addressed to the demon in the name of God, and more especially in the name of Christ crucified, was the usual form of exorcism.” As well, though not alluded to in the New Testament book of Acts or the Epistles the making of the sign of the cross is also remarked upon by the Fathers.

Later in the early Church’s liturgy, Holy Baptism (both for adults and infants) included the making of the sign of the cross over the one being baptized, accompanied by the use of exorcised salt, oil, and water, as well as breathing (insufflatio) signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the laying on of hands. The rite of exorcism was performed primarily as a healing rite for a possessed person and as a vital aspect of the sacrament of baptism. The remnant of which can be seen in the renunciation of “all the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises” in the baptismal liturgy of the Lutheran Book of Worship (1978). In terms of possession, the rite typically consisted of the invocation of Christ’s name accompanied by the use of various sacramentals/symbols of the church (consecrated oil, salt, water, and cross) prayer and adjuring the inhabiting or influencing demons to leave the afflicted forever by the authority of Jesus Christ.

Catechumens in the early Church were also exorcised as “a preparation for the sacrament of baptism,” as they were seen to be subject to the effects or power of the devil from the consequence of original sin. The renunciation of the devil’s “works” or “pomps” formed part of their identification with the kingdom of God in baptism and their rejection of the evil one’s dominion from which “the grace of baptism was about to deliver them.” “Exorcism in this connexion is a symbolic anticipation of one of the chief effects of the sacrament of regeneration; and since it was used in the case of children who had no personal sins, St. Augustine could appeal to it against the Pelagians as implying clearly the doctrine of original sin.”
Exorcism was graphically and powerfully seen as part and parcel of the Christian mission validating the message of God’s reconciliation (2 Cor.5: 17-21) and healing in Christ to a humanity suffering from the ravages of the flesh, the world and the Devil. It was and is the gift of God freeing all afflicted from the effects of evil and intimately concerned with God’s mercy and grace to the afflicted, “a continuing sign of man’s Redemption.”\(^{24}\) It was not always theological brilliance that determined who would be called as exorcist in the early Church, despite exorcism being a dominical mandate to the Church. Rather “the exorcist’s faith and integrity play a major determining role in the outcome of the exorcism” (Matt.17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43) in terms of an adult’s possession.\(^{25}\) In comparison to an adult, however, the exorcism of a child was, and is seen by the Church as a work of God in connection with the sacrament of baptism which is God’s work and grace in operation and as such is not dependent upon anyone’s faith.

The early Church recognized the important role exorcists filled in the life of the Church. A strong basic theological understanding as to the task they are being called to, humility and a mature, steady faith in Christ were the pillars upon which an exorcist must stand. Accordingly, included in the ordination of various clerics was the office of Exorcist in whose hands are given, by the bishop, the book of exorcisms and the authority to “lay hands on an energumen, whether baptized or catechumen.”\(^{26}\) The emphasis upon the healing focus of exorcism is evident from Gallican’s prayer of blessing;

*Holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God, vouchsafe to bless by our servant N. in the office of exorcist, that by the office of the imposition of hands and mouth [you may deign to choose him, and] he may have power to curb unclean spirits and be an acceptable physician of your Church, strengthened by the power of the grace of healing.*\(^{27}\)

Priests, however, were not the only people authorized to perform exorcisms in the early Church. Although in the Western church exorcists were ordained as priests to that position, in the Eastern Church priests were allowed to perform the rite without special permission from the Bishop.\(^{28}\) Laity as well were encouraged to pray against evil and exorcise evil as part of the priesthood of all believers.\(^{29}\)
The Sacramentals

In the early Church, religious rites were known as mysterion, the Greek equivalent of the Latin sacramentum, meaning on one hand, “the deposit lodged in the temple by a litigant as a mark of good faith or as a pledge that a fine would be paid. On the other hand, it was also a military term, applied to the oath by which young recruits pledged their loyalty to the symbolic representatives of the Roman Republic.” These symbols of the Church aided believers in strengthening their faith by pointing to the reality they represent: the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These objects or sacramentals, such as exorcised and consecrated water, salt, oil, the cross, insufflatio or breathing upon the afflicted, the signing of the cross in connection with the invoking of the name of Christ and the laying on of hands conveyed the reality of what God had done in Jesus Christ. Whereas these objects do not have any spiritual power or ability, in and of themselves, they transmit or manifest the truth; the revealing of God’s redemptive grace in Jesus Christ in their symbolism. Or, in the words of E. Masure; “There is a sacramental sign or sacrament whenever a religious reality exists both visibly and invisibly, with a relation of causality or at least of significance between the elements, the one falling under the senses, the other unseen by eyes of flesh.”

The symbolic actions and the objects are nothing per se in themselves, but joined to the word of promise in Christ, function as vehicles of grace, for God is present in the rite, the Word and sacraments. Thus, to demons attempting to pervert the truth and steal from humanity the realization of God’s love through deception and distortion, the sacraments and rites of the Church force demons to acknowledge God’s presence, authority, and power in the lives of the petitioners. As The Book of Concord states, the sacrament is “the visible word, for the rite is received by the eyes and is a sort of picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.” Thus, demons are confronted by the presence of God in their midst when confronted by the sacraments/sacramentals of the Church.

Water symbolizes the cleansing action of the baptismal waters, where we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The symbolism of water is rich throughout the Old and New
Testaments, symbolizing the cleansing act of repentance and forgiveness in Exodus 30:18 and 1 Kings 7:23ff developing to fullness in the symbolic cleansing “which can only come from God” (Ezek.16).\textsuperscript{33} Paul’s letter to the Colossians reminds them that they have “been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). And so, water throughout the exorcism rite symbolizes, indeed proclaims the future promise of Christ, in the process of washing and cleansing that comprises the healing of repentance, forgiveness and restoration by God (1 Pet. 3:21). In the New Testament the baptism of repentance is fulfilled by the baptism of the Holy Spirit as promised by John the Baptist (Mark 1:8). Jesus in his ministry joined water with the Holy Spirit, the earthly element or symbol with the heavenly reality, “in the sacramental knot.”\textsuperscript{34}

Oil was traditionally used in the Old Testament in the anointing of kings and priests as the symbol of God’s seal upon them.\textsuperscript{35} In the New Testament Paul continues this theme writing of believers being “marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession-to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14; see 1 Pet. 2:9,10). Oil was also used in the rite of healing the sick. In the letter of James (5:14-16) believers are admonished to anoint with oil, not necessarily because of its medicinal properties, but rather to allow the sick to see, touch, smell and taste God’s forgiveness and healing power through the oil’s presence and the faith of those administering it. Oil then, is seen as symbolizing the setting apart and sealing of the afflicted through the redemptive and healing power of God through the reconciling blood of Jesus Christ.

The act of breathing, or insufflatio, upon the possessed, “symbolized the infusion of sanctifying grace by the sacrament” of baptism.\textsuperscript{36} As well, the laying on of hands not only by Jesus, but by his disciples demonstrated “God’s concern for the total welfare of his people, physical as well as spiritual, and as an active prayer for that person.”\textsuperscript{37}

Salt, as used in the early Church symbolized the purifying activity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers and revealed the holiness of the Triune God as evidenced by the transformation of unbelievers to be salt and light in this world.
The making of the sign of the cross, and the invocation of the Name is a graphic reminder of the costly gift of grace given to creation in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. It is a symbol of God’s act of love and atoning sacrifice for humanity. It is the Great Exorcism of humanity. The devil and the demons cannot bear to see it, as it is the seal of their destruction and the redemption of all who believe and are baptized in the Name of the Triune God.

The Reformation and Modern Times

During the Reformation period, much superstition abounded regarding witchcraft, sorcery, and evil spirits. As well, the Roman Catholic Church was defending itself as it experienced the emergence of various “heretics” challenging its teachings. Considering the theological and political/social turmoil of the reformation period, distinguishing the superstitious from legitimate demonic activity by the Church, was not a priority. However, the existence of Satan and his minions was certainly not doubted in these times and those leading up to them. If anything, belief in evil was superstitious.

The rite of exorcism had not changed significantly during the Medieval and Reformation periods. Just after the time of Luther, the Rituale Romanum of 1605 was essentially the same in content as in the early Church with additional prayers for deliverance from the evil one included. The Roman Ritual included the traditional sacramental signs; the use of oil, salt, and consecrated water as aids to faith as well as the litany of the saints. The sign of the cross and oil being normative as well as the three-fold imprecatory exorcisms interspersed with deprecatory prayers for deliverance from evil.

Martin Luther certainly accepted the reality of the devil. While he was deadly serious about the existence of the devil, his earthy sense of humour was grounded in the gift of grace in Christ allowing him to temper his profound theological insight with such sound advice as,

Mr. Devil, do not rage so. Just take it easy! For there is One who is called Christ. In Him I believe. He has abrogated the Law, damned sin, abolished death, and destroyed hell. And He is your devil, you devil, because He has captured and conquered you, so that you cannot harm me any longer or anyone else who believes in Him.
In his Order of Baptism of 1523 Luther included, in keeping with the early Church, the exorcism of evil spirits from the initiate as well as the admonition for the baptized to renounce the “works” and “ways” of the Devil. He also retained the acts of exsufflatio with the admonition of “depart thou unclean spirit and give room to the Holy Spirit,” the placing of the consecrated “salt of wisdom” [upon the tongue], the anointing of oil and the anointing of the ears and nose with spittle while with the adjuration “but thou, devil, flee; for God’s judgement cometh speedily.”

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

The Dark Kingdom

Just as there is a kingdom of light whose ruler is the sovereign Lord, there is also a kingdom opposed to the will of God. A kingdom led by one who once dwelt in the presence of God: an apostate angel originally created good in whom later was found iniquity, his hubris casting him to the dust of the earth (Ezek. 28:13-19; Isa.14:12-15; St. Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. V, XXIV, 3 PG 7, 1188 A). Lucifer, once “son of the dawn” became Satan, the dark adversary, as he sought to rise above his station in which he had been created (Isa. 14:12; Jn. 8:44).

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

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

The reality of original sin exists in our hearts and actions in the world through societies, institutions and nations. If anything, original sin is the most clearly seen truth of Christian doctrine and faith. The after effects of 9/11, child prostitution, street gangs in L.A, serial killers, theft, adultery, gossip and character assassination continue to plague our lives reaping the bitter fruit they have sown. Evil has always had its willing accomplices. The Devil and his angels are unmitigated in their relentless pursuit and their goal is the destruction of those God loves. As Father Amorth reminds us,

Satan’s true goal is not to make you suffer or to harm you. He does not seek our pain but something more. He wants our defeated soul to say, “Enough. I am defeated; I am a piece of clay in the hands of evil. God cannot liberate me. God forgets his children if he allows such suffering. God does not love me; evil is greater than he is.” This is the true victory of evil.43

In order to combat demonic evil we must first understand our own sin. As the Book of Concord relates, “Knowledge of original sin is a necessity. For we cannot know the magnitude of Christ’s grace unless we first recognize our malady” 44. Original sin, simply put, means that despite our priceless freedom our human nature remains fundamentally vulnerable to self-centred, egotistical actions. Our innocence is past. Eden is but a memory. As Dr. Ted Peters observes, “Evil exists within us, outside us, and before us.” 45 We are all cracked cups. And though Satan pre-dates the garden in his rebellion against the Creator, humanity is volitionally related to our first cousin, all of us “absolutizing the relative and relativizing the absolute” (Fr. Biztyo 1993) 46 in our post-fall quest for power,
control and status. Thus, as Dr. Peters puts it, “If we choose to get what the self wants, we are implicitly placing a higher value on what the self wants than on the good itself. We place ourselves in the position of God, who would otherwise determine and define what is good.”

Consequently, there is a tapestry, so to speak, of evil woven between the realms of the visible and invisible, the natural and supernatural describing in a limited manner the “diverse manifestations of a seamless web of reality opposed to God.” It is a tapestry woven by a common rebellion to God, but not united by concerted intent. Sin or evil, of course, is not limited to Satan. Sin is experienced primarily in the negative acts and attitudes of humanity, which separate us from God, each other, creation and even from ourselves. It keeps humanity ensnared in guilt and spiritual blindness. In short, sin alienates and estranges us from our source of “life and well-being.”

As the Book of Concord teaches,

Concerning the cause of sin it is taught among us that although almighty God has created and preserves all of nature, nevertheless the perverted will causes sin in all those who are evil and despise God. This, then, is the will of the devil and of all the ungodly.

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

As Marva Dawn beautifully reminds us,

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