

The Great Exorcism Boom

From Manila to Mexico City Catholic priests are leading a new crusade against demonic possession. Exorcism has become so popular worldwide that now it is not only performed on tormented individuals but also on entire nations. A few months ago Mexico, the second largest Catholic country, was exorcised of its demons in an unprecedented rite of exorcismo magno. José Antonio Fortea explained that exorcismo magno is “useful in situations in which great violence has been unleashed in a country,” a reference to the recent drug problem among the cartels in Mexico.

Demand for both Pentecostal and Catholic exorcisms was already booming worldwide, well before Francis became Pope. His informal exorcism performed on a Mexican Catholic in a wheelchair two years ago has made the rite of demonic exorcism even more popular.

Since the late 1980s, competition with Pentecostalism has led to the formation of several Latin American priests affiliated to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), which specializes in “liberation” or exorcism work. As the CCR has expanded among the working classes, demand for physical healing and exorcism has become much greater than in the past. In fact, the current demand for release from demonic possession is so great that some priests even celebrate “liberation Masses” on a weekly basis.

In the Philippines, where the majority of Catholics are Charismatics, there is even a shortage of trained exorcists, which has led the Archdiocese of Manila to recruit dozens of new ones. Many impoverished Catholics, like their Pentecostal counterparts, seek divine resolution of their poverty-related maladies. They typically implore the Holy Spirit to empower them to overcome such afflictions as alcoholism, unemployment, illness, domestic strife, and demonic oppression.

The New Testament explains the symptoms of demon possession, and it clearly indicates that something supernatural was at work, which is very different than the “possessions” today. A study of the details associated with the so-called modern examples of demon possession reveals that these cases bear no resemblance to the genuine examples of spirit possession described in the New Testament. The contrast is dramatic.

The New Testament indicates that demons were under the control of divine authority. Jesus could command them to leave a person, or even to keep quiet (Matthew 8:16; Mark 1:34). The demons that tormented the man in the country of the Gadarenes could not enter the nearby swine herd except by the Lord’s command (Mark 5:12-14).

If the mission of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, was to be effective, the Lord’s absolute authority had to be established. Therefore, demon possession established the comprehensive and supreme authority of the Son of God. He had the opportunity to show His power over every physical realm, and He needed to be able to demonstrate

His authority in the spirit realm as well to show that Satan is not in full control (cp. Luke 10:17-18).

Of course, the main question would be do evil spirits enter into human bodies and afflict people today? Evidence from the Bible affirms that they do not. Demon possession was not allowed to continue beyond the apostolic age, which was the era of miracles. With the close of the first century, the age of the supernatural came to a close. Even the Old Testament prophesied of the cessation of this type of activity (Daniel 9:24). God is not empowering men to operate in a miraculous fashion today. Micah 5:11-12 and Zechariah 13:1-2 are often used to show that not only would “unclean spirits” cease, but also activities relating to witchcraft and soothsaying (modern-day “exorcisms”) would be done away.

If it is the case that miraculous powers have ceased, including the ability to cast out demons, does it stand to reason that God would allow demons to supernaturally assault people today, thus granting Satan an undue advantage over mankind? How would this reconcile with the promise that, “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4; 5:18)? In other words, if the gift of expelling demons no longer exists, is it not a reasonable conclusion that demon possession is obsolete as well? The gospel is God’s power to save (Romans 1:16-17). This would be negated if demon possession could condemn someone.

Even if the miraculous gifts of the early church still existed today, would God be allowing people to work them who do not teach His full plan of salvation? The Bible shows that the steps that lead to the forgiveness of sins are faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and water baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36-38; Romans 10:9-10); but many so-called miracle workers today teach that baptism is not necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, many of these who all claim to be led by the Spirit are going in different directions doctrinally. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Even though demon possession does not exist in our time, people can still be under Satan’s influence. Individuals need to turn to the scriptures and not let Satan rule in their lives through the bondage of sin (Romans 6:7).

Kyle Campbell