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Editor's Preface - from "Counseling and the Demonic"

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Five centuries ago, two Dominican monks in Germany published a famous book titled *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Witch Hammer). The treatise argued for the existence of witches, described the signs by which they could be detected, and gave instructions for their elimination. Throughout Europe the book was read widely and used as justification for the torture and violent deaths of hundreds of thousands of mentally ill men, women, and children, all of whom were thought to be demon possessed. Physicians, clergy, and laypersons all assumed that psychopathology was the result of witchcraft or demonic influence. Many people would have agreed with a sixteenth-century physician named Daniel Sennert who believed that demon-infested bodies should be treated so violently that the demons would be forced to leave.

A few voices challenged this kind of thinking. In the mid-1500s, for example, Johann Weyer wrote a book to refute the *Malleus*. Weyer argued against the existence of witchcraft and

demonology. Despite criticism and abuse from his colleagues, the doctor maintained that mental illness was evidence of sickness and he condemned both exorcism and the practice of torture.

At the time, Weyer was accused of being a protector of witches, but slowly his views began to prevail—perhaps in reaction to the horrible and inhumane mistreatment of so many mentally disturbed people. Treatment became more compassionate, and thinking about mental illness also changed. Belief in demons was discarded along with the torturous methods that had been prevalent for decades.

As a result, modern books on psychiatry or abnormal psychology rarely mention the demonic, except as evidence of the ignorant and superstitious thinking of a bygone prescientific era.

A few flamboyant evangelists and exorcists have always clung to sensationalist views of the demonic, but these perspectives have tended to be dismissed as evidence of scientific ignorance or fanaticism. Some more modern and better-informed believers have developed detailed theories of demonology based on their exorcism experiences and supposed conversations with demons. But such theories have not always been taken seriously because they fail to show an understanding of clinical psychopathology, they rarely have much if any scriptural basis, and they often overlook the fact that Satan and his hosts are liars (John 8:44) who can't be expected to reveal truth about themselves.

Within recent years, however, there has been increasing interest in the demonic. Even some secular writers have acknowledged that evil forces do exist, forces that are not explained by scientific knowledge.

This awareness is not news to students of the Bible. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul warned that believers (this includes Christian counselors) are in a battle, “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12 NIV). In ourselves, we are powerless to resist these forces or to stand against the “devil’s schemes.” But according to the Bible, the devil and his cohorts are already defeated. They can be resisted by believers who are humble men and women of prayer,

standing “firm in the faith,” and able to use “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Several years ago, the Christian Medical Society sponsored a conference on the demonic for a group of evangelical physicians, counselors, and Bible scholars. About fifty of us gathered for three days at Notre Dame University where we discussed papers and considered the nature of demonism. The tone of the discussion was friendly, but often we disagreed about what was demonic and what was pathological. Some seemed to think all deviant behavior was demonic—even when there was evidence of clear physical and psychological pathology. Others appeared to be skeptical of any reference to satanic forces. The Notre Dame conference did not anticipate the heat of debate that swirls around this topic today.

When I first proposed a book on counseling and the demonic, my colleagues at Word and I agreed that such a book should not be written by an author who would explain away the demonic; but neither did we want someone who tended to see a demon behind every evidence of unusual behavior. I believe Rodger Bufford is a writer who brings an admirable balance to this debate. Trained and experienced as a professional psychologist, he is also a Bible scholar (as the following pages show) and professor of counseling in a respected evangelical seminary. At a time of confusion, excesses (even among some evangelicals), and disagreement, Dr. Bufford brings clarity and balance.

It is significant that we include a book on counseling and the demonic in a series of volumes that are intended to be practical and helpful. Written by counseling experts, each of whom has a strong Christian commitment and extensive counseling experience, the books in this series are meant to be examples of accurate psychology and careful use of Scripture. Each is intended to have a clear evangelical perspective, careful documentation, a strong practical orientation, and freedom from the sweeping statements and undocumented rhetoric that sometimes characterize writing in the counseling field. Our goal is to provide books that are clearly written, useful, up-to-date overviews of the issues faced by contemporary Christian counselors. All of the Resources for Christian Counseling books have similar

bindings and together they are intended to comprise a helpful encyclopedia of Christian counseling.

Rodger Bufford, the author of this book, is chairman of the department of psychology and director of the doctoral program in counseling at Western Baptist Seminary in Portland, Oregon. As an author, counselor, teacher, and conference speaker, he frequently comes in contact with pastors, professional counselors, and others who have questions about the demonic. The pages that follow reflect careful thought, detailed examination of the Scriptures, a familiarity with the increasing professional literature in this field, and personal counseling experience. As an added plus, Rodger's wife Kathleen is a professional writer whose expertise has helped to make this an especially clear and well-written volume.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that a book on counseling and the demonic will be controversial. Some may disagree with the author's conclusions, but his work gives a fresh look at an old but increasingly relevant subject. This is a volume that surely will be studied carefully by counselors and others in the years to come. I am glad to have it in this series of counseling books.

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