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Demonic Influence and the Christian: Issues and Implications for Counseling

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Running Head: DEMONIC INFLUENCE

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Issues and Implications for Counseling

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(About 7500 words)

Demonic Influence and the Christian:
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Abstract

The question of whether Christians can be demon possessed is both controversial and complex. The issues involved include the nature of possession, the possibility of demonic deceivers, the fact of two spiritual kingdoms, the fact that Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit, the activities of Satan and demons, the possibility of wolves appearing in sheep's clothing, the difficulty of discerning tares and wheat, the possibility of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, the problem of Christians walking after the flesh, and the complicating roles of the world and the flesh. As whole beings, spiritual and psychological factors interact; assessment and intervention must reflect this. Suggested strategies include spiritual disciplines, practical spiritual equipping, and counseling or psychotherapy; ideally these are carried out by a team of helpers who work together effectively and conceptualize the problem holistically.

Demonic Influence and the Christian:
Issues and Implications for Counseling

The issue of whether Christians can be demonically possessed is both controversial and complex. In approaching the question of Christian possession, most people traditionally responded with a simple yes or no. The more common view, largely based on interpretations of Scripture, was no. It was reasoned that those indwelt and sealed with the Holy Spirit belong to God and could not also be demon possessed. In contrast, a number of persons prominent in the deliverance movement contended that Christians can be subject to demonic oppression. Generally, they arrived at their conclusions on the basis of their experiences with deliverance (e.g., Bubek, 1984; Dickason, 1987; Ensign & Howe, 1989; White, 1990). Ensign and Howe (1989), for example, stated:

There is an abundance of evidence that many are suffering from demonic oppression today . . . We have empirical evidence that Christians have been invaded by evil spirits, for we have extensive notes on more than one hundred fifty with whom we have worked in securing a deliverance by the Lord Jesus Christ. Some audio tapes were made in which one can hear the evil spirits speaking through the mouths of Christian brothers and sisters. (pp. 135-136)

Initially, there seemed to be no adequate resolution to this disagreement. Recently, however, there has been a shift toward conceptualizing demonization as a continuum of influence rather than as the presence or absence of possession (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Bufford, 1988; 1989; Ensign & Howe, 1988; Green, 1981). In part, the shift parallels an evolution in the use of the term “possession”.

To fully grasp the issues involved, one must understand both the contents of Scripture and the observations on which those who believe in possession of Christians base their views.

Demon Possession and the Christian

In considering whether Christians may be demon possessed, several factors must be examined. These include the nature of possession, the possibility of demonic deceivers, the existence of two spiritual kingdoms, the fact that Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit, the activities of Satan and demons, the possibility of wolves appearing in sheep's clothing, the difficulty of discerning tares and wheat, the possibility of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, the problem of walking after the flesh, and the active reality of the world and the flesh. We will consider each of these in turn before turning to the practical implications for counseling. Table 1 provides a summary of these issues.

The Nature of Possession

Possession is not, strictly speaking, a biblical concept. According to White, "the idea of ownership is foreign to the New Testament word and its usage" (White, 1990; p. 44). The Greek words used in the New Testament share a common root and are translated variously as "under the power of a demon, to be possessed, having demons, having the spirit of an unclean demon, in the power of an unclean spirit, or troubled with unclean spirits" (Bufford, 1988; p. 36). Perhaps the best translation is "demonized" rather than "demon possessed."

Demonization may involve varying degrees of influence, control, or inhabitation, but not ownership. Dickason (1987), for example, stated "the term possessed is misleading. . . The real concept is invasion and control to some degree, lesser or greater; but never ownership" (p. 89; italics original). Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines possession in the following manner:

- 1 a: the act of having possession or taking into control,
 - b: control or occupancy of property without regard to ownership
 - c: ownership
- 2: something owned, occupied or controlled: property

- 3 a: domination by something (as an evil spirit, a passion, or an idea)
- b: a psychological state in which an individual's normal personality is replaced by another
- c: the fact or condition of being self-controlled.

Although demon possession has commonly been thought of as ownership, ownership is suggested only in definition 1c. Influence or control, however, is a theme of several definitions. (Definition 3c, self-control, seems anomalous at first, but is consistent with expressions such as "possessed of sound mind," a common expression in legal contexts.) As we shall see, there is considerable biblical evidence that demons can influence, affect, and even to some degree control Christians. If the control definition is accepted, the question becomes one of the extent of influence rather than one of demonic ownership of Christians.

A foreign army may attack, gain control, occupy, and use land belonging to another country without owning it. Remnants of that army may continue to hold territory within the country even when defeated. The conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua illustrates some of these principles; though given by God to Israel, the land initially remained in Canaanite possession. Only gradually were the Canaanites conquered and expelled; thus for a time they still dwelt in the land and possessed it, though they no longer owned it. Like an invading army, demons may at times attack, gain control over, and use believers to serve their evil purposes. Interestingly, many scholars view the conquest of Canaan as a metaphor, or type, for the process of gaining victory over personal sin in the life of the individual believer. Here it is proposed that gaining freedom from Satanic and demonic influence is one aspect of this spiritual growth process.

Closely linked to the notion of a continuum of influence is the question of human responsibility, agency, and choice. It appears that for unbelievers and Christians alike there is a limit to what Satan and demons are able to do without the individual's cooperation. My view is that all demonic influence involves a degree of choice by the individual. The affected individual cooperates with Satan and demons. If this view is correct, then even the most demonically

dominated individual is not merely a puppet to do with as Satan and his demons desire, apart from human cooperation--however grudging or coerced that cooperation may be. At first glance, the sexually immoral man in Corinth (1 Cor 5:5) may appear to be a counter-example, as may those described in Romans 1 (Rom 1:28-32). However, in each instance the personal decision to engage in systematic sinful practices gave opportunity to Satan (cf. Eph 4:26-27). Demonic influence requires some degree of human cooperation. Arnold (1997) articulates a position which is similar to this.

Demonic Deceivers

Reports of Christians who manifest demonic presences often appear credible. However, major difficulty arises about how they are to be interpreted. The cases typically involve two key elements. First, the individuals profess to be Christian--and typically are believed to be so by others who know them. Second, in response to the commands of the one performing the deliverance process, demons manifest themselves, give their names, ranks, and functions, and imply that they have been inhabiting the person (e.g., Bubek, 1984; Dickason, 1987; Ensign & Howe, 1989).

There are two problems with such evidence. First, we may be mistaken about whether the individual is actually a Christian (see discussion below about false prophets and false believers). More importantly, demons cannot be trusted; their chief is the father of lies (Jn 8:44), and they, too, are deceivers. Even when they actually tell the truth they may do so in ways which are misleading or otherwise distort the truth (for example, see Mt 4:1-11; Gen 3:1-5f). Another consideration is that demons are spirit beings. As such, they may act in ways which do not fit our understanding of material objects. They may appear to inhabit or come out of physical bodies, and may exhibit control over those bodies. Thinking of these events in human space-time terms may be misleading.

Any satisfactory interpretation must also be consistent with our understanding of scriptural teachings about these matters. At times it appears that greater credence is given to experiential accounts, including the testimony of self-proclaimed demons, than to Scripture in

interpreting the accounts of deliverance. A secondary problem is that there are important disagreements about interpreting the relevant biblical passages.

While it is true that Jesus in one instance asked for the name of a demon (Lu 8:26-39), in other instances he apparently did not (Mt 12:22/Lu 11:14; Mt 15:22-28/Mk 7:25-30; Mt 17:15-18); on more than one occasion he even forbade the demon(s) to speak (e.g., Mk 1:23-26, 34; 3:11-12). Further, these are historical accounts; there is no clear guidance in the related biblical contexts about how we are to proceed in our encounters with demons. Thus the matter remains problematic, and we need to proceed with caution and humility.

Two Spiritual Kingdoms

Third, Scripture indicates that there are only two spiritual kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. All humans belong to one of these two. Salvation involves a change of citizenship from one kingdom to the other (c.f., Mt 12:30; Jn 8:31-45ff; Ac 26:18; Eph 2:1-3; Col 1:13; 1 Cor 10:14-20). Thus a foundational principle in understanding the role of Satan and demons in the life of believers is recognition that believers are members of the kingdom of God. More emphatically, Christians belong to God, having been bought by the death of Christ (1 Cor 3:23; 6:20).

Christians are Sealed by the Holy Spirit

Closely linked to the notion of two spiritual kingdoms is the fact that believers are described as sons of God (Ro 8:14-17; Ga 4:4-6) who bear God's seed within them (1Jn 3:9) and are sealed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30). The Holy Spirit's presence serves as evidence of their belonging to God and of the promise that God will ultimately transform them into the likeness of Jesus Christ at His coming (1 Cor 15:51-52f; 1 Jn 3:1-2). Just as unbelievers belong to Satan (Jn 8:39-44; Col 1:13), Christians belong to God's kingdom, and are indwelt with the Holy Spirit; thus they cannot be owned ("possessed" in this sense) by Satan.

The Activities of Satan and Demons

Fifth, believers are not immune from the attacks of Satan and demons. Satan and demons are actively involved in sifting, tempting, pricking, attacking, and accusing believers. Eve was accosted and tempted by Satan (Gen 3:1-5). Job was stripped of his property, family, and health at Satan's hand (Job 1:1-22). Jesus was tempted by Satan (Mt 4:1-11). Satan was permitted to sift Peter "like wheat" (Lu 22:31). The Apostle Paul was afflicted by "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" (2 Cor 12:7) which God allowed him to experience.

Satan is also described as "the accuser of our brethren" (Rev 12:10) before God. Doubtless he fosters guilt and shame among believers--perhaps among all persons. As believers, we must be equipped with the armor of God (Eph 6:10-17) and be on guard against the attacks of the devil (1 Pet 5:8), who is our adversary. Apparently such Satanic attack can, God permitting, extend to the point of physical destruction, as Paul proposed for the man who practiced sexual immorality in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-5), and as possibly occurred with Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:1-10). Thus the question is not whether Satan and demons can be influential in the lives of believers; on that point there is widespread agreement. The disagreement revolves around the questions of how Satan and demons are active in the lives of believers, and how extensively they are involved.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

A closely related consideration is that servants of Satan can also disguise themselves as believers, even as apostles, prophets, and servants of righteousness (2 Cor 11:13-15; 2 Jn 6-7; Jude 17-21). Christians are warned that there will be false prophets in sheep's clothing who are inwardly ravaging wolves, and instructed that we can recognize them by their fruits (Mt 7:15-23). We can expect to find individuals who profess themselves to be Christian, who outwardly appear Christian, but who are actively involved in Christian ministry only as secret agents for the kingdom of darkness. Surely such people may be influenced by demons since they belong to Satan's kingdom.

Some instances in which professing believers are reported to have been delivered from demons may actually have involved the apparent [or pretended] deliverance of unbelievers who posed as Christians. Without presuming to judge, in recent reports it has been suggested that Mike Warnke may be such an individual (Maxwell, 1992; Stafford, 1992); alternatively, he may be a believer who was not currently walking according to the Spirit in the sense spoken of below. In any event, we may be confident that false prophets exist. The existence of such secret agents for the kingdom of darkness and their involvement in intentional deception makes the discernment of genuine deliverance more difficult.

Tares and Wheat

Sixth, some individuals are self-deluded, apparently believing themselves to be Christian, though they are not (Mt 7:21-23; Jas 1:22, 26). Jesus foretells that in the day of judgment these will claim to have performed deeds in God's name; yet He will say to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness" (Mt 7:23). Many of these false believers may be recognized because they do not practice God's word (Jas 1:22-27; 1 Jn 1:6; 2:15; 3:9-10). But some may be difficult to distinguish from Christians in terms of their external appearance; they will be tares among wheat, allowed to grow up together until the judgment day (Mt 13:24-30). Like wolves in sheep's clothing, the presence of false believers also complicates our understanding of the role of demonic influence in the lives of Christians.

Grieving and Quenching

In addition to alerting us to the fact that believers may be subject to varying degrees of demonic influence, Scripture also indicates that believers can grieve (Eph 4:30) or quench (1 Thess 5:19) the Holy Spirit. These latter stand in contrast to the biblical call to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), and suggest that the degree to which believers are influenced or controlled by the Holy Spirit ranges from one extreme of quenching to the other of being filled. The sexually immoral man of Corinth may illustrate the former, while the Apostle Paul perhaps exemplifies the latter. Grieving/quenching, or being filled by the Holy Spirit, are the counterparts to cooperating with or resisting Satanic/demonic influence. In each case, the person chooses to

cooperate with spiritual influence. The choice is between being enslaved to sin--and Satan, and becoming a servant to God--and righteousness (Rom 6:16-18).

Walking After the Flesh

Even as believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we still choose how we live. This is implicit in the previous point. We can live and walk "according to the flesh" (1 Cor 3:1-3; Gal 5:19-21; Phil 3:17-19; also see 1 Jn 1:5-7) or according to the Spirit (Rom 6:4, 12-13; 8:1-15; Gal 5:16-18, 22-25). The decision to walk according to the flesh, which may itself be a response to temptation that comes to us by way of direct Satanic or demonic influence, also makes us more susceptible to subsequent demonic influence. Essentially, the more one cooperates with Satan and demons, the more one becomes susceptible to subsequent Satanic and demonic influence.

Myers (1978) showed that a number of psychological principles may also be at work here, including the foot-in-the-door principle, progressive escalation, cognitive dissonance, and so on; these we might term the effects of the world. It is helpful to recognize that Satanic/demonic influence and the world's processes are two sides of the same coin, working together to produce our patterns of behavior. Even as Christians, our choices today are a factor in determining what will influence us in the future. The Apostle Paul contrasts Godly and Satanic influence as slavery to sin or bond-service to righteousness (Rom 6:14-23).

Mary and Bill. Perhaps an illustration will help to clarify some of the issues. Several years ago a couple came to see me. Mary described Bill (names changed to protect identities) as an alcoholic. Mary indicated that Bill neglected her and the children, squandered time and money drinking with friends and coworkers, and was at times abusive of her. Bill acknowledged he drank, but viewed it as social drinking, and argued that drinking with potential supporters was essential to his job as a promoter. Bill and Mary reached an impasse on this issue, and she eventually divorced him. Recently I learned that, although now divorced, Bill and Mary are once more living together much as if husband and wife. Consequently, Mary's divorce has had little practical affect on her daily life.

In a similar way, though they no longer belong to Satan's kingdom, believers can continue to participate in deeds of darkness and remain to greater or lesser degrees under the influence of Satan and demons. In many respects they can still live like citizens of the kingdom of darkness. As Christians they are children of God and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit; yet they may choose to remain under demonic influence to a lesser or greater degree. The sexually immoral man of 1 Corinthians 5 may be an extreme example of the outworking of such choices.

The fact that Christians may live as if they have not changed spiritual kingdoms is so significant that, for example, the Apostle Paul devoted much of chapter 4 of Ephesians to the theme of laying aside former ways and practicing godly living.

Dissociative Identity Disorder. Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID--formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder or MPD) is a psychological condition which dramatically illustrates some of the difficulties involved in changing such patterns of behavior. DID is a condition in which the individual has the following symptom pattern:

1. (The existence of) two or more distinct identities or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self).
2. At least two of these identities or personality states recurrently take full control of the person's behavior.
3. Inability to recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; p. 487)

An additional provision is that “the disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance . . . or a general medical condition” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; p. 487).

DID is largely beyond the scope of this discussion; the interested reader is referred to Braun (1986), Friessen (1991), and Putnam (1989). However, one issue is significant for our discussion. With DID, one or more alter personalities may be readily accessible or open to demonic influence or control (ie., cooperate with Satan or demons), while other personalities

may function like relatively mature Christians. Further, these various personalities may have little or no knowledge of each other.

While the split among alter personalities in DID is extreme, it is important to realize that similar though less extreme separations among different aspects of the individual are quite common. Denial, projection, distortion, and other defense mechanisms allow most of us to function with limited awareness of some aspects of our own behavior and personalities. These very areas then become potential avenues in which we may "give the devil an opportunity" (Eph 4:27). It is perhaps in this manner that such prominent individuals as Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart were apparently able to function in religious ministry while at the same time allegedly being involved in a systematic and recurrent pattern of sexual--or other--misconduct.

“The heart is deceitful--who can know it” (Jer 17:9-10). All believers at times indulge their fleshly desires; in doing so, they follow the world system and cooperate with Satanic purposes. Because of defense mechanisms and denial we are also able to minimize our awareness of this reality.

The World and the Flesh

Those who believe that Christians can be possessed often largely discount or ignore two other important principles: the role of the world system in which we live, a system which is bent against God and seeks to press us into its mold; and our own fallen human (natural) desires and sinful actions. These can be simply termed the world and the flesh.

Classically, Christians have been concerned about the roles of (a) the world, (b) the flesh, and (c) the devil. The tendency to attribute all problems experienced by Christians to the devil and demons is a serious error. In its extreme form, this view suggests that Christians do not willfully sin, and discounts the possibility that they may have long-established patterns of sinfulness which need to be transformed through the ordinary process of discipline for godliness. Yet discipline for godliness is precisely what Scripture emphasizes. We are repeatedly instructed to put off the deeds of darkness and to practice righteousness (e.g., see Gal 5:13-26; Eph 4-6; Phil 2:1-4; Col 3:1-14; 1 Thess 5:1-11; Jas 1:21-27; 1 Pet 2:11-12f; 1 Jn 3:1-7). This process of

working out our own salvation in cooperation with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit at work within us is the central theme of the New Testament Epistles. In this way, we overcome the adverse effects of the world system and the sin-bent desires and habits of the flesh.

It is not always easy to distinguish among the roles of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In a helpful discussion of these issues, White noted that “there are subtle, often indefinable lines that run between self, sin, and satanic influence” (White, 1990, p. 28; italics original). He continued:

Most of what you and I deal with daily are the faults, foibles, and physical infirmities of our own natural selves, with all the emotional and psychological baggage that we carry through life. Beyond that, each of us has individual areas of besetting sin that nag at us and drag us down with discouraging regularity. If this were not enough, the covetousness, pleasure, and humanistic appeal of the world system presses upon us all. Now alongside, and sometimes in and through these battles, the devil takes what he can get and aggravates our unresolved emotions, problems, besetting sins, and willful blunderings. (White, 1990, p. 38)

The antidote to the unholy trinity of the world, the flesh, and the devil is the spiritual transformation that occurs as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, practice righteousness, discipline ourselves for godliness, and renew our minds.

In summary, all humans are subject to the attempted influence of Satan and demons, and all are susceptible to these influences to some degree. A survey of Scripture shows that this influence occupies the pages of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Examples of such influence include Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), possibly King Saul (1 Sam 18:8-12), Jesus (Mt 4: 1-11), the Gadarene demoniac (Mk 5:1-20), Peter (Lu 22:31-32), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), Elymas the Sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11), the fortune-teller/diviner of Macedonia (Acts 16:16-18), the sexually immoral man in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-5), and the Apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:7-10). Figure 1 shows how these individuals might fall along a continuum of

influence from minimal in the case of Jesus to total domination in the case of the Gadarene demoniac.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Practical Implications

The complexities described above regarding the possibility of demonic influence in the life of the believer have major implications for counseling or psychotherapy. Clearly we cannot dismiss demonic influence as of no concern for believers, nor can we attribute all severe problems among Christians to demonic influence or possession. Scripture does not provide criteria that enable us to clearly and simply distinguish the presence/absence of demonic influence as a factor in any given individual. Rather, we must look carefully at the individual and the circumstances of his or her life in attempting to discern the role of demonic influence in her/his current difficulties.

One of the most significant problems in dealing with demonic influence in people's lives involves the tendency to view practical interventions (such as medication and psychotherapy) as unrelated--or even antithetical--to spiritual interventions (like deliverance and spiritual disciplines to promote growth in godliness). The first and foremost practical implication of the view of demonic influence proposed here is that we see these practical and spiritual interventions as two sides of the same coin. Anderson (1991) stressed this point. In Anderson's view, spiritual, psychological, and physical are inseparable; I concur. We function as whole beings. What affects us spiritually has physical, psychological, and social ramifications. Conversely, the physical, psychological, and social have important spiritual implications as well.

In intervention with persons suspected of experiencing demonic influence, several principles need to be considered. First, we need to take the reality of demonic influence in the

life of believers seriously. We need to take into consideration all aspects of human functioning, including biological, psychological, social, and spiritual. We need to recognize both the value and limitation of deliverance. Use of spiritual disciplines and other spiritual interventions in the pursuit of godliness should be encouraged. We need to avoid viewing the problem exclusively in terms of demonic influence, thus neglecting the role of the world and the flesh. This means that it will likely be necessary to involve others in the process, including physicians and pastors or spiritual mentors. It is in this broad context that Christian counseling or psychotherapy should be considered as well (see Bufford, 1997).

In interventions with persons experiencing demonic influence, several factors need to be considered. These include taking a multi-dimensional approach; understanding the problem of credit, blame, and responsibility; spiritual interventions; spiritual disciplines; prayers of deliverance and exorcism; counseling and psychotherapy; and the challenge of fitting all the pieces together into a coherent intervention strategy. Table 2

 Insert Table 2 about here

summarizes these principles. Each will be addressed in turn.

Demonic Influence and Dissociation

See JPC, 19, (2000) issue for discussion of DID from a Christian perspective, including relationship to demonic influence. Allison (2000), Mungadze (2000), Rosik (2000). JPC, 19, (2000)

Taking a Multi-Dimensional Approach

Bandura (1986) proposed triadic reciprocity--the notion that thought, feeling and behavior interact continuously, with each influencing the others and in turn being influenced by them. Within the spiritual domain, we must recognize that the world, the flesh, and the devil

provide three interacting causal influences in human spiritual disease. Thus in dealing with spiritual difficulties, including demonic influence, we need a balanced concern about all three.

Bufford (1988; 1989) pointed out that discipline for godliness is the central teaching of Scripture regarding the life of the believer, and that there is no specific instruction regarding the process of deliverance from Satanic/demonic influence apart from the brief passages in Ephesians 6:12-18 and 1 Peter 5:8-9, which emphasize the process of spiritual discipline rather than prayers of deliverance/exorcism.

In short, spiritual disciplines are necessary to deal with the world and the flesh, are the focus of Scripture, and may serve to bring freedom from demonic influence as well. Further, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and spiritual factors (including the interacting factors of the world, the flesh, and the devil) are intertwined. Because of this complexity, reductionistic approaches to humans can never be fully adequate. In helping persons, attention must thus be paid to the interacting influences of each of these dimensions.

Credit, Blame, and Responsibility

Another important principle to remember is that deliverance (or exorcism) is not magic. It is calling upon God to act in accordance with His character and power. Thus the outcome depends not so much on the minister of deliverance, on the afflicted one, or even on the two of them together. Rather, it depends vitally upon God. Of course, Satan and the demon(s) will also actively resist being driven away. But it is God, who is greater than all, and who has all power and authority, who will carry the day according to His sovereign will. The victory is His!

A related principle is that deliverance, by itself, is inadequate, even dangerous. Unless the person invites filling by the Holy Spirit in place of demons, and practices righteousness rather than sin, the person may actually be harmed by attempts to deliver her or him from demonic influence (cf. Lu 11:24-26).

Spiritual Interventions

Recommendations for spiritual interventions have developed along three major lines. Two we have already discussed at least in part. The first is deliverance. Second is discipline for

godliness. The third is study and meditation on Scripture. While conceptually distinct, these are nonetheless overlapping and interacting processes. Deliverance emphasizes freedom from the power and influence of Satan and openness to the power and influence of God. Discipline for godliness emphasizes the behavioral process of practicing righteousness. Finally, study and meditation emphasize the cognitive or intellectual process of growing in the knowledge of God. Many Scriptures suggest that these processes are intertwined (e.g., Jn 8:31-32; Heb 5:12-14). Spiritual intervention may begin in any of these areas, but ideally will go on in all three areas at once. Two specific principles of intervention in the spiritual domain warrant further discussion: spiritual disciplines and spiritual protection.

Spiritual Disciplines

In recent years the notion of discipleship and spiritual formation has gained renewed interest and support, both in the church (e.g., Foster, 1988) and in the context of Christian approaches to psychotherapy (Adams, 1994; Adams, Harp, & Stratton, 1991; Moon, Bailey, Kvanisky, & Willis, 1991; Jones, Watson, & Wolfram, 1992; Stratton, 1994; Tan & Jones, 1991; Worthington, 1986; Worthington, Dupont, Berry, & Duncan, 1988). While space and time limits preclude developing this topic, it may be helpful to consider the specific disciplines suggested: celebration; confession/repentance; deliverance; discernment; fasting; fellowship; forgiveness; giving; healing; journaling; concrete and abstract meditation; obedience; praying in the Spirit; contemplative, intercessory, and listening prayer; rest; service; Scripture; simplicity; solitude; spiritual history; study; worship. One suggestion is that those disciplines which are least practiced hold the potential for greatest benefit for a given individual.

Spiritual Armor and Protection

The use of spiritual armor could readily fit under either spiritual interventions, or spiritual disciplines (as above). It is further discussed here because it has come to occupy a special role for many involved in deliverance ministry. The spiritual armor includes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit--which is the Word of God, and prayer as an act of submission

to God (Eph 6:12-18). In an extended discussion of spiritual armor, Anderson (1991) suggested that some parts of the spiritual armor are “already on” while we are to “take up” other pieces of this equipment. A careful review of the elements of the armor, and especially of their spiritual significance, suggests that there are ways in which each piece is already in place following justification, as well as ways in which each must be appropriated through the process of sanctification. While spiritual protection is already present, at least in germinal form, when we enter God’s kingdom, discipline for righteousness is required to make the protection of practical value, much as training is needed in order for a soldier to learn to use battle equipment effectively.

As believers, each of us needs aid in frequently reminding ourselves that we belong to God's kingdom, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and have access to the power of God within (e.g., helmet of salvation). We must develop practical ways for making key spiritual qualities function effectively in our lives. We need to become seekers after truth, to acknowledge personal sins, and to recognize the sins of others by setting aside defenses; to come to know the God of truth and Jesus--who is truth (belt of truth). We need support and encouragement in the practice of righteous living which leads to freedom from guilt and punishment (breastplate of righteousness). We require aid in reconciling broken relationships (shoes of the gospel of peace); and so on. Ideally the counselor helps the needy person develop a pattern of doing these things which the person can then continue independently. Table 3 summarizes this information and provides additional detail regarding the function of spiritual armor in the life of the believer.

 Insert Table 3 about here

Prayers for Deliverance/Exorcisms

Prayers for deliverance, or exorcisms, conducted in overt and public ways, pose some important problems for counseling and psychotherapy. These include ethical and financial issues as well as questions regarding acceptable practices. These factors are not neatly separated.

Financially, when a “third party” pays for counseling or psychotherapy, important considerations arise regarding whether the payor would approve such interventions as legitimate--imagine requesting Blue Cross or Aetna health insurance to pay for an exorcism.

Ethically, informed consent involves some delicate issues, since the individuals who most need such deliverance--those under almost complete demonic domination (Bufford, 1988)--may be least able to make informed consent to the process. Finally, most mental health professionals are likely to discount the appropriateness of conducting deliverance in the counseling context. These problems are significant enough that Bufford (1988) proposed that such activities be conducted by persons within the spiritual community of the patient, rather than by mental health counselors. At minimum, these factors must be weighed carefully in each individual case. On the other hand, the private prayer of the counselor, the prayers of the patient, and prayers of those in the patient’s spiritual community may normally be encouraged.

Breshears (1991) recognized this. He suggested that, in general, what can be accomplished by deliverance can also be accomplished by the process of spiritual discipline.

A prayer which rebukes the demon is no more effective than prayer to God for power to resist temptation. Prayer against Satan's attacks is vital, but victory does not depend upon rebuking a particular demon as the cause of a particular sin. It is not necessary to rebuke the demon specifically to achieve victory over the temptation, sin or obsession. The believer can be delivered from any sin by walking in the Spirit. (p. 3; emphasis added)

Breshears went on to say, "A prayer binding Satan is no more effective or necessary than prayer to God for his power and protection" (p. 4).

In short, neither prayers of deliverance, nor exorcisms, are essential for Christians to be delivered from demonic influence. Further, rituals of deliverance and exorcisms pose some major complications which make their use in the context of counseling and psychotherapy problematic.

Counseling and Psychotherapy

The role of the Christian counselor or psychotherapist includes confronting the individual with his or her responsibility for self-discipline, providing support and encouragement in the

process, and helping to identify and remove obstacles--especially those of the social/emotional sort. A related function which the counselor may serve is that of identifying and enabling the person to utilize other resources, including those in the Christian community (for related discussion see McMinn, 1996).

Could it be that, just as deliverance depends on God, in an analogous way the outcome of psychotherapy is not entirely up to us as therapists and patients? Might God's sovereignty also play a role here? Most of us, I am confident, believe this when we consider the outcomes of surgery or other medical interventions. We need to recognize the same possibilities with counseling or psychotherapy as well.

Acknowledging God's role in the outcome of psychotherapy has major benefits. We will not take undue credit or blame on ourselves. Likewise, we will be less likely to blame failure on our clients. Rather, we will continue to faithfully do our part while we wait on God to act in His way and time to produce fruit and reward.

Putting it Together

For the purpose of our discussion we have distinguished between spiritual interventions and counseling or psychotherapy. However, since we function as whole beings, such distinctions are at least partly arbitrary and misleading. One way of conceptualizing this is to suggest that Christian faith emphasizes the spiritual domain, including principles and practices of godly living. Psychology, psychotherapy, and counseling emphasize practical human wisdom for daily living, especially in those instances where significant difficulties develop in social-emotional functioning. Since we function as whole persons, these conceptually distinct domains overlap in their practical outworking. Moreover, this view of overlapping domains is encouraged by Scripture, especially in Proverbs. Thus persons who are demonically influenced may be helped in practical ways to overcome problematic habit patterns (besetting sins), refocus their thinking, engage in spiritual disciplines, and so on. Furthermore, these measures may be as effective as other, more dramatic interventions, while remaining less controversial (both in the Christian community and with those outside it) and receiving more widespread support.

An example may help to illuminate some of these issues. A basic principle of biblical teaching is the “work to eat” principle (1 Cor 9:9-10; 1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:10). The practical training in the skills and discipline of work, however, is left for parents and teachers. In a similar manner, biblical instruction, and counseling or psychotherapy, may work together in the formation of character as well as in dealing with problems in emotional/psychological functioning.

Conclusion

In summary, there is ample reason to believe that Christians may be influenced by Satan and demons. Whether Christians can be possessed is controversial, and depends significantly on how demon possession is defined. The issue is complex. We must consider (a) the nature of Satanic/demonic influence, (b) the fact of two spiritual kingdoms and that persons may belong to only one, (c) that believers are indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit, (d) that unbelievers can effectively masquerade as Christians, (e) that believers clearly can come under the temptation and attack of Satan and demons, (f) that unbelievers are sometimes difficult to distinguish from believers, (g) that believers choose how they live--whether after the sinful flesh or according to the Spirit, (h) that the primary source of evidence for possession of Christians is based on the unreliable testimony of professed demons, (i) that believers can choose to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit, and (j) that those who believe in the possession of believers tend to discount the role of the world and the flesh, attributing all to Satan and demons. Finally, regardless of one's views on demon possession of Christians, the clear emphasis of Scripture is on the process of discipline for godliness. This should be kept central in our focus regardless of our views about possession.

Differences of opinion about the possession of believers may have little or no practical significance in many cases. Many in both camps--those who believe that Christians may be possessed and those who do not--advocate discipline for godliness as an adjunct to deliverance. The view that Satan and demons are real, active, powerful, and should be taken seriously is

entirely consistent with Scripture. As believers we need to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit, to repent of our sins, to practice righteousness, to equip ourselves with godly qualities for our own protection, to be praying for God to be active in our lives and in the world around us, and to resist the activities and influence of Satan. We must consciously resist the tendency to accept the materialistic worldview of our culture, which denies the reality of God and the spiritual world.

However, we must also avoid the opposite error of "spiritualizing," or spiritualistic reductionism, which views the problem as entirely within the spirit realm, to be resolved by deliverance alone. In this view the afflicted believer need only pray and believe God for deliverance. Responsibility to work out his or her own salvation (Phil 2:13) and to discipline him- or her-self for godliness is forgotten. It is this neglect of personal responsibility and of the significance of the world and the flesh that is contrary to the basic teachings of Scripture.

Taken together, these suggestions imply the need to advance more or less simultaneously along two lines in dealing with suspected demonic influence in the life of the believer if we are to successfully address both the spiritual aspects and practical daily effects of the believer's afflictions. Indeed, I believe that these same lines of intervention should be thought of as normative for all clients. The first involves aiding, fostering, supporting and encouraging the process of discipline for godliness, spiritual growth, and faithfulness on the part of the client; this process has traditionally been known as spiritual formation, a practice that has gained renewed interest and support in recent years. Deliverance falls broadly within the scope of spiritual disciplines, and thus is included here. The second line of intervention involves much of what we know traditionally as psychotherapy or counseling. Moreover, these processes need to go on simultaneously insofar as possible. Ordinarily they will involve the ministry of more than one person.

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Table 1
Issues in Apparent Christian Possession

1. The nature of possession
 2. The possibility of demonic deceivers
 3. The existence of two spiritual kingdoms
 4. The fact that believers indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit
 5. The activities of Satan and demons in sifting, tempting, pricking, attacking, accusing
 6. The possibility of wolves appearing in sheep's clothing
 7. The difficulty of discerning tares and wheat
 8. The possibility of grieving & quenching the Holy Spirit
 9. The problem of walking after the flesh
 10. The reality of the world and the flesh as complicating factors
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Table 2

Intervention Principles

1. Take demonic influence seriously, even for believers
 2. Take into consideration biological, psychological, social and spiritual factors
 3. Remember that deliverance has limited benefits
 4. Encourage the use of other spiritual interventions
 5. Encourage the practice of spiritual disciplines
 6. Avoid spiritualizing
 7. Practice teamwork
 8. Recognize the appropriate role of Christian counseling and psychotherapy
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Table 3

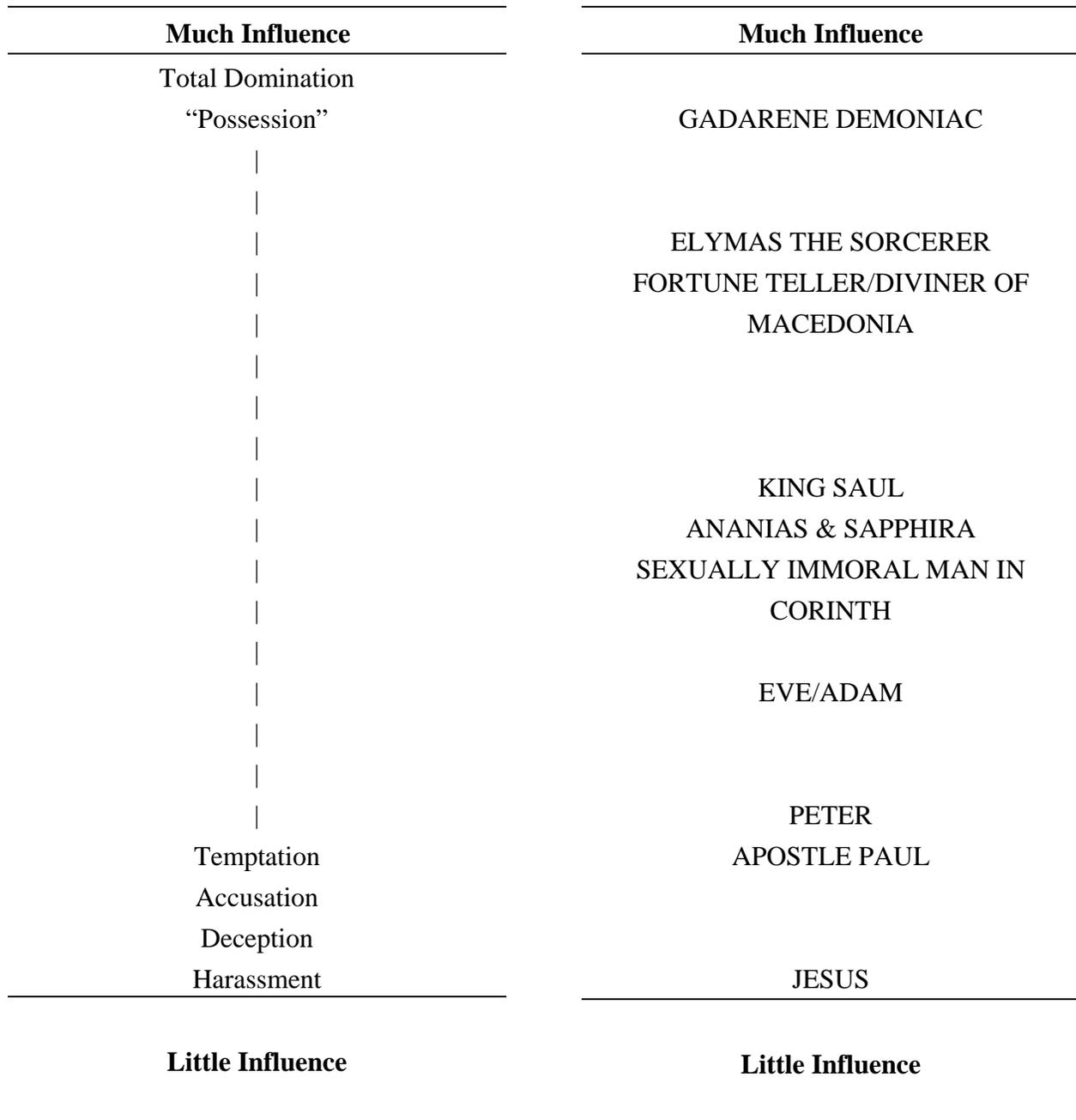
Equipping with Spiritual Armor

Armor Metaphor	Spiritual Quality	Effect
<i>Defensive Armor</i>		
Helmet	Salvation	Enter new spiritual kingdom New loyalties, new comrades new bonds of service, new source of help
Belt	Truth	Confess sin/agree with God Know Jesus Christ, The Truth; recognize lies as such
Breastplate	Righteousness	No condemnation: freedom from guilt & punishment Practicing righteous living
Shoes	Gospel of Peace	Peace with God Practice peacemaking
Shield	Faith	Able to trust Growing in faith; free from undue worry
<i>Offensive Armor</i>		
Sword	Word of God	Accept Bible as source of propositional truth Use as offensive weapon to pierce lies

Based in part on Anderson, 1991.

Figure 1

Biblical Figures as Examples of the Continuum of Satanic/Demonic Influence¹



Note: Placement on the continuum of influence is approximated for illustrative purposes.

Notes

1. Address: Graduate School of Clinical Psychology, George Fox University, 414 N Meridian, Newberg, Oregon 97132-2697; phone, 503 554-2750; fax, 503 537-3834; e-mail, rbufford@georgefox.edu. Appreciation is expressed to all those, who over the years have contributed to my growing knowledge about demonic influence; special appreciation is expressed to John Garrison and Heather Bufford, whose thoughtful suggestions and comments have significantly shaped the final form of this manuscript.
2. An earlier version of this material was presented at the Second International Congress on Christian Counseling, Atlanta GA: November, 1992.