



*The Practice of
Exorcism & Healing*

1. The importance of the matter

A few years ago I studied Paul's letter to the Romans in Urdu with a Muslim graduate of the al-Azhar University, who had trained in Cairo for three years to become an orthodox religious teacher back in his own country. During our study of the Epistle's references to the Holy Spirit, the question of power and authority arose and the young man said he had power over nine kinds of snakes.

About three years later, he submitted himself to the Lord Jesus Christ and became his follower. He renounced demonic power and found spiritual power in his new relationship with God. He was publicly baptized in a nearby town. Despite opposition, he continues to live in his native village.

Perhaps it was the same teaching and similar experience that led the profligate poet, John Donne (1592-1631), to adopt a new seal after his conversion. He renounced his family seal and before his ordination (he later became Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London) took a new one which depicted Christ extended on an anchor. He had several copies of this seal made on bloodstone, which he gave to his intimate friends, notably Isaac Walton and George Herbert. Of the change of seal he wrote:

A sheaf of snakes used heretofore to be my seal,
The crest of our poor family.

Adopted in God's family, so our old coat lost, Unto new arms I go.'

It is interesting that in the early church very definite renunciation of the devil and all his works was required of the catechumen and became part of the baptismal service. Such a renunciation of the devil and his works is still part of some baptismal liturgies.

After spending over 32 years in the Muslim world, I have come to the conclusion that Christians have underestimated the hold of folk religion. The church in minority situations is often hampered by folk religion, sometimes even adopting some of its practices. Christians in some places visit Muslim holy persons (pirs or walis) and go to makers of Charms (tawiz) to purchase what may meet their special need.

Some authorities claim that 70 percent of the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent are involved in the practices of folk Islam.¹ This may be an underestimate. In recent years there have been definite evidences of more integration of the orthodox and the popular. For example, the well-patronized exhibition at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, appeals to the Sunni and Shia alike with its 27 relics of the Prophet of Islam and some of his closest associates. Muhammad's sandals, underwear and walkingstick are venerated, along with Fatima's prayer mat. The sight of some dust from the battlefield of Karbala brings tears to the eyes of visitors who expect a blessing from such near contact with holy relics.

The practice of *dhikr*, or constant repetition of Allah's names, also strengthens the bridge between what is orthodox and what may be magical. One example from a book giving guidance on the repetition of the 99 names of Allah, is the use of the name *Al-Halim*, the Forbearing One.² "If one writes this Name on a piece of paper, and puts it where his seed is sown, no harm, disaster or calamity will befall his crop."

In a system in which form is as important as meaning, if not more important, in which the exact detail must be correctly carried out or the meaning is rendered void, there may be a binding of the mind as well as of the will. Without doubt, very many are involved with the occult and so the past and the occult must be totally renounced at baptism. Inadequate renunciation may be why some return to their former religion.

In reality we are contending with the power of darkness and not just with people and concepts. If baptism is delayed or there is no baptism and teaching prior to

it, the question will arise as to how and where the necessary renunciation of the devil and all his works will occur. Can one really say that Jesus Christ is Lord without first renouncing the devil? The bonds must be broken.

In view of a greater synthesis of folk religion with orthodox teaching and practice and the hold of the occult, there is a need for more than intellectual persuasion and head knowledge. Theology has its place but teaching should be clinical, practical and event-oriented so that its relevance is apparent.

Power demonstrations related to consistent teaching are very convincing, especially when the teachers are members of a loving, spiritual community – the local body of Christ. Such a loving, extended spiritual family will draw in outsiders, as we have seen recently in one Muslim city where literally the lame walk, the deaf hear and the blind see (Lk. 7:22). Many Muslims come for teachings, and healing services are held for all regularly. Christ gave his own mandate to his church:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Lk. 4:18-19 RSV).

I would like, therefore, to look at a small section of this mandate as it is fulfilled in the practice of exorcism of people and places, and the practice of healing, together with some of the teaching which should be part of it.

2. The Exorcism of people

In a remote part of an Asian Muslim country, Muslims and nominal Christians have found new life in Christ. Some were delivered from demons and others were healed from various illnesses. The focus was not on “signs and wonders”, but on preaching and teaching (Rom. 15:19). The national pastor leading this work only prayed for

deliverance or healing when the Holy Spirit specifically guided him to do so, and it was always after one or more teaching sessions. Sometimes a family would stay with his extended family for four or five days to receive teaching and perhaps healing. This pastor had come with his wife and family to this remote area seven years prior to this writing, in response to a clear call from God. He worked mainly as a free-lance evangelist, attending a local congregation but not under the direct authority of any church.

About three years ago people began coming to him with requests for prayer for healing. Some principles may be illustrated by two case histories. It should be understood that the influence of the occult on both Muslim and Christian communities is extensive. This probably comes from an underlying animism, accretions from Hinduism, the prevailing faith before the arrival of Islam some centuries ago, and the deliberate practices of Islam (for example, constant repetition, incantation and mechanical reading which may themselves be used by demonic forces).

Case History 1. A Muslim father gave his very young daughter, Farida (names have been changed in these factual accounts), a charm (tawiz) in an attempt to win her affection to himself and away from her divorced mother. After receiving the charm she sometimes had fits, spoke in unrecognizable words and called out for her father. During these abnormal times she spoke in a different, harsher voice and her appearance changed. Her face and tongue became long. Sometimes these fits lasted 24 hours.

When she became an adult she came to Inayat to request prayer for healing. Once when Inayat prayed, she squirmed and then foamed at the mouth. Three men were unable to hold her still. Inayat prayed very much for her in private and also fasted. When he prayed with her, her mother said she had never come out of a fit so quickly before. The mother expressed her belief that God would heal her daughter.

Mother and daughter came regularly over a period of three months and also at any time that the child had trouble. One morning she came complaining of pains in different parts of her body. She became blind and then dumb. After more prayer and reading of Psalm 138, she was better and could see and speak. When she went to the local hospital to get a medical certificate to give her employer to explain her absence (she works as a librarian), the psychiatrist was amazed at the improvement in her.

Farida gradually became better and better and, during the period between Christmas and Easter, began to read a small New Testament, asking questions from time to time. At the Good Friday service she testified to the Lord's healing. Through her testimony several nominal Christians became believers. She invited her Muslim cousins, the daughters of a religious teacher (maulvi), to meet Inayat and his wife. He prayed for them.

When Inayat prays for Muslims, they are seldom healed instantly. Time is needed for teaching. But after the first prayers they receive a touch from the Lord which convinces them that they will be healed, and so they come regularly, sometimes from considerable distance and at much expense. They tell others of the power of prayer in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

The cousins report that they have seen changes in Farida's life. Farida asked Inayat for the blessing he had, so that she could pray for others. He told her to repent and believe. She said, "I have repented many times." Inayat counseled her to ask Jesus Christ to forgive her. She did so, and for the first time received assurance of the forgiveness of sins, as did her younger sister. The cousins are now reading the New Testament.

Case History 2. Yakub, a nominal Christian, was afraid that demons would kill him. He is now a landowner with a wife and three children. When he was a young athlete, a competitor had given him a charm in a portion to drink and he became ill. Over the years, he received some medical treatment, but suspecting that he had

been given a magic potion unawares, he had gone to various shrines and holy places to offer prayers for healing. His health improved and he married but soon became thin. His health deteriorated and soon he could not even work.

Finally, in the summer of 1986, demons took over at times and spoke through him, even “preaching” sometimes. One day they said, “If you don’t get us cast out within two days we are going to break your neck.” Yakub was extremely frightened and sent a request for help to Inayat. Inayat went to Yakub’s village and found him uttering blasphemies. Inayat started to pray, grabbing his hair. Yakub vomited and then was better. Later, a service of worship and teaching (attended by many Muslims) was held in the church. All the village knew about Yakub’s problems. A prayer and healing service followed and then another worship and preaching service in the evening was held, as well the following morning.

Inayat and his wife invited Yakub to their home where he stayed for four days of prayer, teaching and fellowship. He stopped vomiting and set out for his village home. All the villagers, hearing that he was coming, turned out to welcome him, amazed and glad that he was still alive. They garlanded him and led him in procession back into the village, where he told them all that the Lord had done in giving salvation and how he was healed after 13 years of sickness. During the next weeks Yakub spent several sessions in prayer and study of the Bible with other believers. Then a thanksgiving service was held, attended by many Muslims and Christians. Various believers gave testimony to new life in Christ and Inayat preached. Many came for prayer and all claimed to be healed.

There had been no emphasis on healing but this ministry was thrust upon them.

A team of 15 believers from Brethren, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Episcopal background has formed with Inayat as leader. The verse “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35), is being lived out. Inayat sometimes sends some team members to minister in one place

and some in another as requests for ministry increase. All are lay volunteers. The team members stress that physical healing is not enough – it is only for this life. A healing of the soul is needed for this life and the next – the abundant life which Jesus gives (Jn. 10:10).

The emphasis is on team ministry. It is a ministering team, itself under training, with individuals learning from each other and from Inayat. There appears to be need for on-going prayer times with some who have been healed. Inayat and his band seek to pray in the way that God guides them and not just because the patient requests prayer for healing. In these last few months the following facts have been emerged:

1. Many more Muslims than before have come for healing and then, having been in some measure touched by the Holy Spirit to repent, have started to read the Bible.
2. The influence of believing cleaners in Muslim households is evident. Through their testimony, employers have come for help (compare this with the influence of the Israelite maid in the house of Naaman, the Syrian commander, as recorded in 2 Kgs. 5). Believing nurses also share with their patients. Thus the Good News is permeating society.
3. Everyone who receives spiritual blessing, whether literate or illiterate, is constrained by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the team to pass it on and help others.
4. Inayat puts great emphasis in his teachings on God's word and God's promises. He questions those who come for healing. He asks, "Have you been to a medical doctor? Have you been to a religious holy man (pir)?" Before he prays for anyone he requires them to repudiate, take off and throw away any charms they might be wearing. He keeps a large urn for castoff charms.
5. He teaches Muslims to pray for themselves using short prayers. For example:

Thanks be to God.

Praise be to God.

Lord, have mercy on me.

Lord, forgive my sins.

6. On the first Friday of each month, new believers from both Muslims and Christian communities come to a house-meeting for a service of praise, thanksgiving and teaching. Believers continue to live and witness in their Muslim homes, and Christians continue their previous church links.

My own experiences and observations lead me to emphasize the following principles for the practice of exorcism in relation to people:

1. *Whenever possible, deliverance should be a shared ministry* with a team of two or three or more who are of one mind, who are walking in God's light and who believe that God has called them to help in this particular situation.
2. *Correct diagnosis is essential.* Some questions and tests as to whether a person is demonized are:
 - a) What does the person think about his condition?
 - b) Does he think he is possessed by an evil spirit or evil spirits?
 - c) Does he want to be released?
 - d) What has led other people to believe that he is demon possessed?
 - e) How does the patient respond to counseling?
 - f) How does he react when invited to join those around him in praising God?
 - g) How does he react if he reads or hears a portion of Scripture in which there is a mention of the blood of Christ, for example, 1 John 1:5-9?
 - h) Do the spirits answer if commended to do so in the name of Jesus?

3. *Consistent teaching is vital for the person and those around.* Exorcism is not an isolated act by one person. In fact, exorcism in isolation can be dangerous and does not bring glory to God (Lk. 11:24-26). If there are counseling and teaching both before and after, and if the act of exorcism is seen as part of deliverance and healing of the whole person, then the gospel is proclaimed and many will be influenced spiritually.

3. The exorcism of buildings

The bible contains no record of the exorcism of a building. High places used for Baal worship were cast down and destroyed (2 Ch. 17:6). Land could be polluted (Jer. 3:2). In practice, however, I believe there is a strong case for cleansing a place or a building and then dedicating or rededicating it. One never knows what has taken place on that territory or in that building through the centuries. Too many buildings have been dedicated to the glory of God without the basic cleansing.

Christian workers, underestimating evil powers, have purchased “haunted” houses at very cheap prices when the local people have been afraid to buy them and to live in them. These Christians sometimes thought that dedication of such houses was adequate, but this was not the case. Through the years, guests and residents have been troubled. In some instances it has been observed by neighbors that evil spirits live in the houses occupied by believers in Christ. Surely this is a dishonor to Christ.

I spent my second Christmas in the Indian subcontinent, living in a former Moghul courthouse which still was not free from strange manifestations 50 years after its purchase by missionaries. In some countries workmen, thinking to protect themselves, seek to appease satanic forces by fixing a figurine at the highest point of the building. As the building rises, so does the mascot.

Would not a building built in the fear of demons require cleansing before dedication? I believe more Christians, both national and expatriate, would be more effective workers for Christ in the Muslim world if it were a general practice to cleanse and then dedicate every building, constructed or rented, in which they live or work.

Sometimes those who are not Christ's followers have more perception about what is happening in the unseen world and, when Christ's authority is used, they are challenged by it. I remember an Asian family who were living in an Arabian city. After moving to a new home in another section of the city, they had severe health problems for several months, whereas previously they and their children had kept very well. Finally, after discussion and prayer, several of us joined the husband and wife to form a team, with the intention of cleansing and dedicating the home. In each room we:

1. Prayed in Christ's name for the casting out of any evil spirits and that they would remain bound in the appointed place for them until the judgment day, thereby troubling no one else in the future.
2. Praised God in song or with words of Scripture.
3. Prayed for the particular room and the people who would use the room and the activities for which it was designed – for example, the bedroom for sleeping and the dining room for eating.

In that particular home a Muslim neighbor visiting the next day commented on the change of the atmosphere and the better health of the child. The Christian explained the service which had taken place and witnessed to the power of Jesus Christ.

I have taken part in many such services in recent years, and I know that Christ's power has been made evident to Muslims as well to Christians.

Some crucial principles which emerge are:

1. The ministry is a team ministry exalting Christ in prayer and praise and through the use of Scripture.
2. Those participating must be prepared themselves spiritually, and must be practicing and obedient followers of Jesus Christ.
3. It is not wise to talk unnecessarily about such ministry.
4. Obedience to Christ in cleansing and dedication of buildings results in increasing fruitfulness and blessing.

One of the Church's most ancient prayers of exorcism is as follows:

God, the Son of God, who by death destroyed death, and overcame him who had the power of death, beat down Satan quickly. Deliver this place (room, house, church) from all evil spirits; all vain imaginations, projections and all deceits of the evil one; and bid them harm no one but depart to the place appointed for them, there to remain for ever. God, incarnate God, who came to give peace, give peace. Amen.

Years ago I learned the importance of commanding the evil powers to go "to the place appointed for them". On one occasion we failed to do this while cleansing a room. Our nextdoor neighbor was greatly scared by an inrush into his room and had a great awareness of evil powers rushing through. This happened, we discovered later, at the exact time that we had commanded, in Christ's name, the spirits to leave a certain room where they had been troubling guests. Ten years later I asked this man if he had ever had another similar frightening experience and he said he had not.

In October, 1986, I took part in the cleansing and dedication service for some new conference rooms. The service was very short and was based on the following hymn:

For this purpose Christ was revealed
To destroy all the works of the evil one,
Christ in us has overcome,
So with gladness we sing.

And welcome his kingdom in.
(two-part chorus – men and women)
Men: Over sin He has conquered...
Women: Hallelujah He has conquered.
Men: Over death victorious...
Women: Hallelujah, victorious.
Men: Over sickness He has triumphed.
Women: Hallelujah, He has triumphed.
All: JESUS REIGNS OVER ALL.
In the name of Jesus we stand,
By the power of his blood
We now claim this ground.
Satan has no authority here,
Powers of darkness must flee,
For Christ has the victory.⁴

Such services can take many forms, but the casting out of evil in Jesus' name, praise of God, prayer and the reading or reciting of Bible portions are essential ingredients.⁵

4. The practice of healing

In this brief space I cannot deal adequately with the vast subject of healing. I would like to approach the subject with emphasis on the sentence, "By his stripes you are healed" (Isa. 53:5 and 1Pe. 2:24).

In some way beyond our understanding, Christ's sacrificial death can bring healing to every part of a person's being. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the anti-Nazi German Lutheran

pastor, chose to preach on this text on the day of his execution in prison in April, 1945. The doctor present at his execution said he had hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.⁶ No doubt, Bonhoeffer saw death as the ultimate healing, for it meant to be with Christ in his glory.

Illness may have many causes. It is significant that Luke, the physician, recognized Satan's hand in some illness and understood that healing could be miraculously given when Satan was rebuked, as in the case of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38-39). Some illnesses are not so straightforward – there may be a satanic element but medicine and surgery may be required. Thus, everything should be done with prayer, for the Lord God is our healer. In a Muslim context, it is good if we can be seen to be who we are. Too often, Christians misinterpret the verse about shutting one's door and praying in secret (Mt. 6:6). Daily chapel prayers for hospital staff and for patients, if they are able and willing to come, are a clear witness even though this may not be the intention. A few minutes in public prayer for a patient and the relatives and staff before an operation or during informal visiting is generally much appreciated. If we fail to pray publicly and rely only on our lives and not our words to commend the gospel, then many will see our good works and conclude that we are acquiring merit for ourselves. We have to consider not only what we do but how others perceive us.

Christians who have spent their lives healing and teaching have made significant contributions to planting churches by their breaking down of barriers through love and service. We are all familiar with the work of medical missions over the last century in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The American Mission Hospital in Bahrain, founded by Samuel Zwemer, is not only a reminder of a ministry of healing and compassion but is a visible demonstration of love for Christ's sake. Here, in a materialistic society where host exploits guest and vice versa, an institution established before the discovery of oil in the Gulf is a symbol of

another set of values. Its history gives credibility to its work today. Let us not ignore history.

However, just as some are tempted to see exorcism as an isolated act and not just a part of the making of an individual whole in Christ, so there has been a tendency to isolate medical ministry and not to see it as part of service to the whole person in his total community. N.H. Antia, in an article in the *British Medical Journal* entitled “The Mandwa Experiment. An Alternative Strategy,” described an experiment carried out between 1973 and 1983 in a rural area of the Indian state of Maharashtra. The purpose was to look at the health problems and explore ways in which the available medical technology could be applied.

The Mandwa experiment report noted that a few leaders in the community held political and economic control while the majority of the population of thirty thousand were poor. Most problems were related to maternal and child health, so a local woman, motivated to serve her neighbors, was chosen from each village and trained through weekly informal discussion groups. Most of the project staff were local people and were well accepted by the community. The project’s health results were encouraging and were far above the national figures. However the Mandwa project had to leave the area and hand over its assets, partly because it was seen by the powerful local leaders and by some health professionals as a threat. N. H. Antia concludes:

Sadly, even well-intentioned doctors see health as a problem rather than as a subsystem of the social, economic, and political structure of the country... The Mandwa experiment may either be seen as a failed community health project or as an experiment that shows that simple knowledge and technology can help poor people overcome their fears and develop self-reliance. Before health can be improved appreciably, however, education, especially of women, must be developed and the political will generated to effect change.⁷

In recent years there has been a refreshing emphasis on Christian community development programs. For the last six years I have been linked to a small community development program as a consultant on spiritual issues and outreach. The team of ten, comprised of nationals and foreigners, men and women, works in a rural area where literacy is low and poverty and disease are prevalent. Evangelism is seen as the responsibility of each individual, and the group together at special times such as Christmas and Easter.

The purposes of my visits have been to meet the team, see their work, lead them in spiritual retreat and guide their study and reading, as events in a process. It has been rewarding to see influence they have had within the communities that have welcomed them. One of their objectives is the emergence of new congregations in villages where there are none. As Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel have said:

The scope of the Kingdom of God extends not just to the community of the King that consciously acknowledges Jesus as Lord, but is also seen in God's kingdom activity in the world beyond the church.⁸

In this wide context the practice of exorcism and healing can involve Christ's followers through that which we have inherited, seeking to appropriately transform, for example, Christian hospitals through work with the local church, through work with the community and through work with the government. God's promise is shalom ("peace") in the sense of total well-being (See Ps. 85:8)

Endnotes

¹M. Geijbels, "Aspects of Veneration of Saints in Islam, With Special Reference to Pakistan," *The Muslim World* (July 1978).

²Shems Friedlander, *The Ninety-Nine Names of Allah with al-Hajj Shaikh Muzaffereddin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978)

⁴Graham Kendrick, *Songs of Faith* (n.d.), no. 364.

⁵Vivienne Stacey, *Christ Supreme over Satan: Spiritual Warfare, Folk Religion and the Occult*. Ch. 1.

⁶Norman Hare, "Fresh Light on Bonhoeffer," *Church Times* (september 19, 1986).

⁷N.H. Antia, "The Mandwa Experiment, an Alternative Strategy," *British Medical Journal* 292 (1986): 1181-1183.

⁸Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel, "Mobilizing for Wholistic Ministry," (unpublished, n.d.)