

**EXORCISM IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ACCORDING TO GABRIELE  
AMORTH**

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## **Abstract**

*This work seeks to explore the reality of the existence of demons and devil and their influence on humanity and give the true sense of exorcism, its importance and the situations that requires exorcism. The work argues that, since the beginning, there has been tension between God and devil as God constantly intervenes in the affairs of humans to deliver them from evil spirit the devil employs to control man and makes him live in disharmony with God and creation.*

*Through scriptural proofs, the practice of exorcism in the Church's Tradition and its teaching and practice in the Church, the study revealed that Jesus Christ through his Church is the only power that overcomes ultimately all the pranks of Satan. This revealed that the church plays her role of sanctifying the world, specifically by the ministry of exorcism to deliver and set free all those possessed by Satan. Therefore, God continues to deliver man through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church in what pertains the exorcist, to be able to live the gifts of faith and discernment.*

*The work revealed that, the belief that With demonic possession in the synoptic gospels, Jesus' ability to exorcise demons introduced a sharp struggle between good and evil. The work concludes that Jesus Christ through his Church is the only power that overcomes ultimately all the pranks of Satan through exorcism to deliver a possessed person from the hands of the devil in the name of Jesus*

**Keywords:** *Exorcism, Catholic church, demonic possession, Holy spirit*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the Christian sense of hierarchy the higher authority over evil is Jesus Christ. This view is based on the belief that the Devil, his demons, and evil spirits are creatures of God. Coming out from the Sea of Galilee Jesus Christ entered the land of the Gerasenes. He confronted a man living among the tombs. The man was said to be possessed of an unclean spirit. Nothing could bind this man, not even chains. He lived in the mountains, crying, and cutting himself with stones. But, seeing Jesus approaching, the unclean spirit in the man recognized Jesus. Jesus then commanded the unclean spirit to depart. "My name is Legion," he replied, "For we are many".

Jesus Christ sent them into a herd of swine which rushed off the cliff and drowned (Mark 5:1-13). Jesus does not need higher authority because he himself is the authority.<sup>1</sup> Jesus cast out demons and He also gave authority to His disciples to continue to cast them out. (Matt.10:1). From these two biblical passages and others, Christians believe that they have the power to cast out the Devils and to heal.<sup>2</sup>

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Exorcism is not an uncommon word or reality in our world today. However, its understanding and practice is far from being unanimous. It is therefore a phenomenon which raises many questions and hence needs thorough and analytical investigation. It is therefore plausible to portray that the contemporary society does not hold the same view on the reality of exorcism and the need for liberation from evil spirits. This does not however reduce in any manner the importance of exorcism. This is because many religions and people have in one way or another experienced the reality of exorcism. Exorcism is a term which refers to the ‘belief in spirit possession.’<sup>3</sup> It is defined as the belief that an evil force has entered a person and is controlling him or her. Many words that give rise to exorcism may include witchcraft, black magic, the evil Eye, demonic attack among others.<sup>4</sup>

There are genuine beliefs held by families, career and religious leaders, congregations and the individual themselves that evil forces are at work. Some families and children can be deeply worried by the perceived evil that they believe is threatening them, and abuse often occurs during the attempt to ‘exorcise’ or ‘deliver’ the child. In this sense, exorcism is defined as attempting to expel evil spirits from a child.

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<sup>1</sup>Rosemary Ellen Guiley, “Demonic Exorcism” in *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts On File, 1989), pp. 87-89.

<sup>2</sup>M. F. *Biblical Demonology* (Grand Rapids, IL: Kregel Publications. 1994), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Bazak, B; Rabbi Kook, *As an Exorcist* (Shana be-shana, 1976), pp.387-391.

<sup>4</sup> Bonner, C, *The Technique of Exorcism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1943), pp. 39-49.

There can be many instances where abuses are carried out in the name of evil possession. There are people said to be possessed by evil spirits and are therefore subjected to exorcism. Some of these persons are in truth not suffering from any demonic attack. If there is an unfounded conclusion that a person is possessed, and thus made to undergo the rigors of exorcism, it can be affirmed that there is an abuse in exorcism. Most often, these abuses are often carried out by the person's family members and guardians. The abuses can be physical, emotional or psychological and sexual.<sup>5</sup> Conclusions might be arrived at that the person is possessed and needs to be exorcised simply because he or she is facing adolescent or youthful exuberance or any genuine problem. In these cases, exorcism is wrongly required or recommended. The individual can themselves come to hold the belief that they are possessed and this may be harmful in itself and can significantly complicate their rehabilitation. This work seeks to explore the reality of the existence of demons and devil and their influence on humanity and give the true sense of exorcism, its importance and the situations that requires exorcism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Biblical perspective to the existence of the devil**

In order to understand the existence of devil, the work explores both the Old Testament and New Testament. At the onset of creation, we see the emergence of the deceiver (cf. Gen 3:1-6). In the form of a snake and considered to be the most subtle of all the wild animals (cf. Gen 3:1), we see already the appearance of a creature that comes to instigate Adam and Eve to disobey God. There is already the Hebrew consciousness that presents the “existence of a principle of evil who was jealous of the human race.”<sup>6</sup> The cunning tempter also called the devil led to the downfall of men. The intervention of the cunning creature portrayed him as one capable of

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<sup>5</sup> Patai, R, and Xenoglossia, *Exorcism* (Wayne: State University Press, 1983), pp. 314-325.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm>.

exercising certain power and control over man. Also, with the story of the *Nephilim* in Genesis chapter 6, we see the sons of God resorting to women and having children with them. This appears to be a challenge to God's authority over man. This event depicted how human beings are moved by the spirit of wickedness (cf. 6:5-6). We see in I Sam 19:9 how Saul was possessed by an evil spirit. The evil spirit rendered Saul violent and aggressive to the point of attempting to take away David's life. Equally, in the book of Job chapters one and two, we see an individualization of Satan. He is seen as a fallen angel and an intruder who is jealous of Job. He eventually caused death and great pain and sorrow to Job and his household. In Zechariah 3:1-3, Satan is presented as a false accuser who seeks the condemnation of the innocent one. Ultimately, behind the experience of the "fall of our parents" lies a

"seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil." The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing."<sup>7</sup>

The Devil therefore, is seen as the cunning spirit that comes to disrupt the relationship within the human person and thus with God. He is an enemy of God's plan in the human person. He turns to bad that which is good. Having rebelled against God, Satan induces man to do the same, thus his constant effort to possess man and destroy the human-divine harmony. Thus the Church holds that "Satan or the devil and the other demons are fallen angels who have freely refused to serve God and his plan. Their choice against God is definitive. They try to associate man in their revolt against God."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CCC 391.

<sup>8</sup> CCC 414.

The Devil is a reality in the world. Despite his influence, he cannot claim the world to himself. God, the creator of the world continuous to exercise a loving power and authority over his creation, and this is manifested by the event of the incarnation. Hence Scripture “witnesses to the disastrous influence of the one Jesus calls “a murderer from the beginning,” who would even try to divert Jesus from the mission received from his Father. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus came to show the true image of the Father who is love. As such, any action that goes against the principle of true love is contrary to God’s love. The devil is found in the category that propagates hatred and division. The Lord Jesus confronted the Devil and gave his disciples the same authority.

In the New Testament, Jesus had several encounters with the evil spirit and the question of the presence of Satan cuts across all of the New Testament. Therefore, in New Testament times,

“the idea of the two spiritual kingdoms is clearly established. The devil is a fallen angel who in his fall has drawn multitudes of the heavenly host in his train. Our Lord terms him "the Prince of this world" (John 14:30); he is the tempter of the human race and tries to involve them in his fall (Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 12:7). Christian imagery of the devil as the dragon is mainly derived from the Apocalypse (9:11-15 and 12:7-9), where he is termed "the angel of the bottomless pit", "the dragon", "the old serpent", etc., and is represented as having actually been in combat with Archangel Michael.”<sup>10</sup>

This outlines the fact that the notion of the devil is not a figment of human imagination. It is a reality that permeates the Scriptures. What the Hebrew Bible generally refers to as Satan does not “have the autonomous status of Satan in the

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<sup>9</sup> CCC 394.

<sup>10</sup><http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm>.

gospels, but acts only in conjunction with God.”<sup>11</sup> In the gospels, for example, where Jesus responds to the accusation of casting evil spirit by the power of the same evil spirit (Mark 3:23-30), Satan is opposed to God. There is a dualism between good and evil, God and Satan and between the Holy Spirit and the unclean spirits.<sup>12</sup> With demonic possession in the synoptic gospels, Jesus’ ability to exorcise demons introduced a sharp struggle between good and evil. When Jesus cured a demoniac, he removed all threatening spirit in the person.<sup>13</sup> The Church continues Jesus’ mission of exorcism.

The Christians faith stands against all demonic torture and hence combats it through exorcism. The Christian faith holds that “*daimones* became demons and took on purely negative connotations. Christian writers gradually accepted the notion that Satan, Beelzebul, or the Devil is a metaphysical antithesis to God.”<sup>14</sup> The New Testament depicts that Jesus’ presence indicates the end of the reign of Satan. That is why Jesus exorcised the possessed. Jesus’ coming signifies the overthrow of Satan. When Jesus’ exorcisms free some individuals from the domination of demons, his victory over the “ruler of this world” is anticipated.<sup>15</sup> Jesus’ presence established God’s kingdom on earth where Satan has no place. Despite this, we are not ignorant that some person do not ascribe to the existence of the Devil.

### **Demonic possession, oppression and obsession**

The complexity associated with the phenomenon of demonic operation has left many spiritual writers and theologians doubtful and sometimes conflicting concerning the

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (ed.), *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (ed.), *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (ed.), *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (ed.), *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. CCC 550.

modes of operation of the devil and demons. Accordingly, the notions of demonic possession, oppression and obsession remain largely controversial issues among spiritual writers and theologians.<sup>16</sup> Gabrielle Amorth in his book “*An Exorcist Tells His Story*” underpins the fact that Demonic possession occurs when Satan takes full possession of (the body not the soul); he speaks and acts-without the knowledge or consent of the victim, who is normally blameless. Possession is the cruel and most spectacular form of demonic afflictions.<sup>17</sup> A possessed person can only be delivered through exorcism. The Ritual for exorcisms written by the Catholic Church outlines some spiritual activities such as speaking in tongues and extraordinary strength in revealing the unknown. Since this act of dispelling the devil or evil spirits is meticulous, it requires purity, faith, firmness and courage from the part of the exorcist. “Ordinary attacks of the devil consist in the many temptations while cases of demonic possession are extraordinary attacks of the devil.”<sup>18</sup> The exorcist must separate demonic oppression from obsession. In further differentiating demonic possession from demonic oppression and obsession; Amorth maintains that in the latter, the devil has partial control of the person, leaving other areas of their lives free from his control.

However, in demonic possession the devil has complete control of the human personality. Real possession is called when an alien evil force submerges the individual's personality. While demonic possession is a rare phenomenon, demonic oppression and obsession are relatively common.<sup>19</sup> The phenomenon of demonic possession received credibility since the time of Jesus. Jesus himself dealt with the influence of alien powers, unclean spirits, evil spirits, demons and satanic forces that possessed people. However, to speak of demonic possession immediately, suggests ownership. Hence, to say that one is possessed by the Devil or demons means a

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. See R. H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 2234-2237.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Amorth Gabriel, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, (New York: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Nicolas Corte, *Who is the Devil* (New York: Hawthorn, 1958 ), p.113.

<sup>19</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus a New Vision* (New York: Ignatius Press, 1993), pp.63-64.

person is owned by a devil or demon. Instead of demonic possession, one can rightly opine that people are only subject to demonic influence.<sup>20</sup>

Diabolical oppression on the other hand varies from very light degree to serious mind illness. In respect to diabolical oppression; “There is no possession, loss of consciousness or involuntary action and word.”<sup>21</sup> From the Holy Scriptures, we are made to understand that there were certain figures who suffered oppression without being possessed; among them include Job, (who was afflicted, lost his children, his goods and his health), the woman with the bent back, and the deaf and dumb man who were healed by Jesus. These were not subject to total possession but there was demonic presence that caused physical pain and severe torture. Paul the apostle admitted that he suffered affliction in the hand of the messenger of Satan by the thorn that was laid upon his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). The above instances showed that there could be demonic oppression without possession. The Christian teaching accepts that this can occur when and only when God allows it.<sup>22</sup> As for Diabolic obsession, Marcus identified the symptoms to include: “sudden attacks, at times ongoing, of obsessive thoughts, sometimes even rationally absurd, but of such nature that the victim is unable to free himself”<sup>23</sup> The resultant effect of obsession is the subjection of the victim to desperation, attempts at suicide and hate.

Generally, authors identify problems concerning the compatibility of possession with radical freedom of the human will and divine justice. Following this principle, it can be argued that the degree of culpability and blame of the victims of possession is reduced since consciousness; knowledge and the memory of the persons are reduced. However, the person has his or her own responsibility. This is because he or she voluntarily handed over his or her will completely to the power and authority of the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Nicolas Corte, *Who is the Devil*, (New York: Hawthorn ,1958 ), p.115.

<sup>21</sup>Bufford, R. K., *Counseling and the Demonic*, (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1995), p 21.

<sup>22</sup>Cuneo, M. W., *American Exorcism*, (New York: Doubleday.2001), p.72.

<sup>23</sup>Bufford, R. K., *Counseling and the Demonic*, p 21.

devil. This is obvious in cases of persons who were baptized, but later surrendered their bodies, hearts, and wills to the devil.<sup>24</sup>

However, there are several reasons for diabolical possession. One of the major reasons for diabolical possession and obsession is related to both personal and collective fallen nature of humanity caused by sin. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, says St. Paul in his letter to the Romans 3:23. Therefore, sin is the source of all social evils and wrongs. It is a disorder in relation to God and creation. Personal sin constitutes uncontrolled passion and lust to satisfy one's selfish desires. These may include indulging in practices such as idolatry, sorcery, hatred, unforgiveness, malice, enmity, murder, strife, anger, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness and carousing.<sup>25</sup> (cf. Gal 5:16-21). Continuous involvement in any of the above may attract evil spirits that may require spiritual deliverance or cleansing. Apart from personal sins and the falling nature of human beings, in our daily experience of life, there are other reasons that may necessitate individuals to be taken over by the power of darkness. Some of these are: Divine will; Voluntary or involuntary involvement with the occult spirits; Involvement in fortune-telling; spiritism; and being under a curse.

### **Exorcism and psychotherapy**

The relationship between exorcism and psychotherapy is one that has occasioned diverse opinions from both secular and spiritual writers. Even though psychotherapy deals with a scientific and systematic method of medical treatment of psychic illnesses, it is presented by some authors as related to Exorcism, which generally concerns the expulsion of evil spirits from possessed persons.<sup>26</sup> This relationship is derived from an ancient biblical misconception of mental illnesses, which many have

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<sup>24</sup> Augustine. E. Momoh, *Discernment for Diabolical Possession*, p.15.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Augustine. E. Momoh, *Discernment for Diabolical Possession*, p.17.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Baltimore, MD. *Psychotherapy as Exorcism* (London: Johns Hopkins University press, 1976), p. 153.

masqueraded as demonic possession. According to Baltimore, most common ailments dealt with as demonic possession in the New Testament were merely mental illness by the standards of modern scientific methods. However, it must be stated that mental illness occurs as a result of a psychological disintegration occasioned by uncertainties and complexities which are commonly found in biblical times. Part of the reason for attributing demonic to the devil possession in the bible may be due to a lack of knowledge in those days of scientific diagnosis of nervous and mental disorders. Elmer also expresses this line of thought. For him, possession resembles pathological states known to modern clinical psychology because it precludes normal human consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

On account of this semblance between demonic possession and pathological states or mental illnesses, Karl Truhlar, in his book “*Possession Diabolical*,” “exorcism and Psychotherapy go hand in hand in the struggle against possession.”<sup>28</sup> Consequently, he advocates that in view of the remarkable similarities between possession and symptoms that can be observed in psychiatric clinics, extreme reserve is necessary in diagnosing a case of possession.” Truhlar insists that “if something which is really pathological is taken to be supernatural on grounds which are not absolutely compelling, the harmful consequences ensures that the illness is ultimately encouraged and re-enforced, instead of being cured.”<sup>29</sup>

It is important today that psychiatrists should know about demonic spiritual illnesses that have the appearance of psychological illnesses. In his view, such illnesses do not improve despite psychotherapy. It can be asserted here that despite the closeness and differences between the two; demonic possession cannot be reduced to pathological problems. They exist, they are real, and need to be handled squarely and spiritually.

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 384.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Vladimir Truhlar, *A Soul Stirring Account of Diabolical Possession* (New York: Lowa House, 1994), p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Vladimir Truhlar, *A Soul Stirring Account of Diabolical Possession*, p. 19.

## **Deliverance from demonic possession**

Deliverance has always appeared as kindred issues associated with humans as a resultant effect of demonic possession, thus in need of exorcism. For some, there exists only a thin and an almost indiscernible difference between these concepts. As such, in many literatures, healing and deliverance are commonly treated as synonyms. However, some theological and spiritual writers identify both as conceptual and yet others opine that there exist some practical differences between these concepts, while others insist on handling these same issues. Francis McNult, in his book "*Exorcism*" explicates that "deliverance is understood as being part of healing. To talk of deliverance as devoid from healing is to empty it of its content mid meaning."<sup>30</sup> While deliverance according to him is understood to be a process mainly through prayer, of freeing a person who is oppressed by evil spirits, healing covers the wide spectrum of restoration to health of mind, body and spirit.

Deliverance is a relatively common occurrence in Christian communities especially when compared to exorcism. Even though both deliverance and exorcism deal with prayer to free a person possessed by evil spirits, exorcism refers more to a formal ecclesiastical prayer. This subtle distinction between exorcism and deliverance in the Catholic Church that is reserved to priests who have received permission to exercise this ministry from their bishops while lesser forms of deliverance prayer are permitted generally to Christians, by those baptized Catholic who have special charism in prayer and praying ministry.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, insisting on the similarity between exorcism and deliverance, both exorcism and deliverance deal with the process of expelling evil spirits and treating, healing as an encompassing ministry in the church. Healing as an act or restoring a sick person or an impaired phenomenon to health or its original state. It evokes victory through struggle to restore order and harmony to the affected area, an area

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<sup>30</sup> Francis McNult, *Deliverance from Evil Spirit*, p.41.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Francis McNult, *Deliverance from Evil Spirit*, p. 42ff.

whose territory has been invaded by an aggressor. According to Jude Mbukanma, in his book “*Charism of the Holy Spirit*,” exorcism is “When someone has an ailment and you pray and the whole disease is removed, such an act of God is called healing.” Just like in deliverance and exorcism, healing deals with man's liberation from the domination by alien spirits, which are responsible for his sickness. However healing covers a wide area of both spiritual healing and medical healing. Relief in Christian exorcism does not dispense one from having recourse to medical care. Religious factors do not replace medical care. They help for recovery, not by directly acting on the level of biological, chemical, or physiological realities, but by strengthening the life of the sick person. More so, a Christian exorcism deals with miraculous dealing, which is due to supernatural intervention and sacramental healing. Sacramental healing has a religious character and comes primarily from the sacrament of anointing of the sick and in partaking in the Eucharist. Generally, most authors agree with the fact that exorcism and deliverance all play vital part in the restoration of man's integrity and God's friendship.

## DISCUSSION

### Biblical foundation of exorcism in the Old Testament

Exorcism means restoring one to his or her normal life. In the Old Testament Yahweh is seen as a healer who heals directly or through the agency of prophets or through medicine by the agency of physicians. In Gen. 20:17, he exorcises Abimelech, his wife and slaves of their illness with which was due to Abimelech's misconduct.<sup>32</sup> God as an Exorcist is shown to be a central theme in God's covenantal relationship with his

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 13-41.

people Israel. Yahweh exorcises both spiritually and physically (cf. Numbers 12:13). God exorcised Miriam after inflicting her with leprosy because of her slander to Moses. In Exodus 15:26. God called himself Yahweh your healer. God is acknowledged as a healer in relation to human restoration from divine chastisement, forgiveness, deliverance from danger and renewal from wounded spirit of man (Ps 30:2, 41:4, 103:3, 107:19-20, 347:30, Is 6: 10. 19:22, 30:26, Jer3:22, Ezk34:16, and 37). Prophets were agents of the healing and exorcism ministry of God. Elijah restored to life the son of the widow of Zeraphath . Elisha cured Naaman the Syrian (Kgs 17:8-23,-2kgs5:I-15).<sup>33</sup>

God has always desired to restore man to wholeness and grant fulfillment to all those who suffer one agony or the other (Gen 3:14-15). Children were given to barren women like Sarah (Gen 18:10, 14), to Manoah's wife the mother of Samson (Jg 13:5. 24), to Hanaah (I Sam: 19-20) and to the shunamite woman (2kgs4:16-17). Ps 41:2-4 presents healing as a reward for charity. In Isa 19:22, there is a serious appeal to Israel to come back to God and be healed. Yahweh's interest for the wounded and the sick is manifested in Ezk 34:4.<sup>34</sup> Exorcism in the Old Testament is seen in David's ministry to Saul who was tormented by evil spirit (cf. 1Sam16:I4, 18:10, 19:9). Sign of exorcism could also be seen in the instruction for purifying Tobias' marriage (cf. Tob 6:7, 17: and 8:3).<sup>35</sup> These instances typify God's constant desire to heal man from all that terrorizes his existence and affect his wellbeing.

### **Biblical foundation of exorcism in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, especially in the synoptic gospels, the meaning of exorcism becomes clearer in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus drove out unclean

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<sup>33</sup> Werner Foerster, "Daimon," *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, vol.2, (New York: Grand Rapids, 1964), pp. 2-3.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Malbon. E.S., "Mythic Structure and Meaning in Mark" (Semeia 1980), pp.103-107.

<sup>35</sup>Kee, H. C. "The Terminology of Marks Exorcism Stories" (NTS 14 1967-1968), p. 243f.

spirits at Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28, Lk4:31-37, Mk5: 1-20) and from the Syrophoenician woman (Mk7:24-39). All these demonstrate Jesus' power and authority over all demonic possessions. Exorcism as part of Jesus' ministry was prominent in the public ministry of Jesus Christ. The Jews in the New Testament times practiced exorcism by the Spirit of God (cf. Mtt 12-27).<sup>36</sup> At Ephesus, a band of itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to cast out Demons in the name of Jesus of whom Paul preached had ineffective results (cf. Acts 19:13-16). The New Testament inherited its demonology from the Hellenistic Jewish environment familiar to Jesus and his first generation followers. Although demonic possession appear throughout the New Testament literature, exorcism became explicitly clear only in the writings of the Synoptic authors. The demonic possession that is subject to exorcism affects human psychology that can render their victims impure.<sup>37</sup> The New Testament also made use of exorcism as means of visualizing its eschatological message of the kingdom of God overcoming the power of Satan, which may also have held social connotations for early Christian.<sup>38</sup> In the light of this therefore, exorcism has eschatological implications. Being delivered in the name of Jesus portrays how God is offering his consolation to his children. Exorcism therefore allows people to have a taste of the eternal happiness that awaits them in the Lord Jesus.

The synoptic gospels and the Acts of the Apostles would serve as literary examples for exorcism in early Christianity. Paul's writings would serve as an interpretive basis for what it meant to be possessed. By restoring the victims of demonic possession from an impure condition to a perfect state of well-being, exorcism would serve as a preliminary act to the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Christ restored

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Bultmann, R. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 215f.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Jeffrey Birton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 202.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*. (New York: Penguin Books. 1993), p. 75.

the broken filial relationship between God and man and then cured the psychological sickness of people to keep body and soul wholesome.<sup>39</sup> The exorcism of Jesus was for the whole human person, spiritual, moral, psychological, and physical (cf. Matt 6:23-24, 12:9-15, Jn 8:7, Lk 19:9, Jn 5:14). Jesus manifested power and competence as the physician of both soul and body because he is the Savior of the whole world.

### **Exorcism in the early church**

Prayer for physical and inner exorcism was a common experience among the group of scholars, writers, church leaders and saints who lived in the first centuries after Christ. Irenaeus born in Asia Minor around the year 130 A.D, testified to a wide variety of healings during his life. He saw exorcism as a natural activity of Christians that channels the creative power of God through prayer.<sup>40</sup> Origen, another scholar of the early church, related how Christians expelled evil spirits and performed many miracles and cures in the name of Jesus. He believed that the name of Jesus could cause a total healing in a person's life.<sup>41</sup> Cornelius, who lived around 251-253 A.D, in his letter to Fabius bishop of Antioch, insinuates that the church has always taken seriously the ministry of exorcism. Exorcism highly impressed the pagans in the early church which led to conversion of many. Jesus had transmitted the power to exorcise to his Apostles. He invested them with the power of exorcism as Sacred Scripture strongly teaches.<sup>42</sup> Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure any kind of diseases and illnesses... Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, cast out devils. You received without charge,

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<sup>39</sup> Gerald Messadie, *A History of the Devil* (New York: Kodansha International, 1997), p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 263.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey Barton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Early Christianity* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986) p. 142.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Linda Malla, “A Fresh Look at a Remarkable Document: Exorcism” in *Theological Review* 2000, pp.65-88 (Report of a Commission Convened by the Bishop of Exeter).

give without charge (cf. Matt. 10:1-8). Exorcism therefore, is the mandate of Christ himself.

In many passages of the Scripture, we see the apostles and disciples of Jesus manifesting this miraculous power of exorcism bestowed on them by Christ. In Acts 2:42-47, the early Christian community described that the most impressive of all that was done was through signs and miracles. The many miracles and signs worked by the apostles made a deep impression on everyone. This gave credence to the fact that the main motive for the explosive growth of Christianity in the first three centuries were primarily because pagans were impressed that Christians healed the sick and drove out devils.<sup>43</sup>

The signs and wonders worked by the apostles and disciples helped in the gospel evangelization and acceptance of the Word. Philip's mission to Samaria was successful because of the signs and great exorcism that followed his ministry. Peter and John cured the lame man at the beautiful gate in the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 3:1-10). Hence exorcism forms an integral part of the disciples' mission, to be carried out till the end of times.<sup>44</sup>

The ministry of exorcism was central in the ministry of the Church in the early Patristic period. This fact has been stated by Justin the martyr, Irenaeus, Cyprian and Tertullian in their writings. For instance Irenaeus writes that some people incontestably drive out demons so that those very persons often become believers.<sup>45</sup> In the third century, the favor which exorcism enjoyed began to decline. Anointing with oil also faded as regards its purpose, having been seen as a mere symbolic act for the forgiveness of sins of a sick person whose condition is only terminal. But with the edit of Milan in 313 A.D, through which religious

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses* 11. 32. 4, (Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau (eds), 1982), p. 340.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Tertullian, *Apologeticum XXIII.* 15-16 (CCSL 1:132-33).

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Tertullian, *Apologeticum XXIII.4* (CCSL 1:131).

freedom was restored to Christianity by Emperor Constantine, there was peace and with it came a decline of interest in exorcism.<sup>46</sup>

In the fifth century, the fathers of the church had already developed a view that the body's suffering is preferably for the sake of the soul. Gregory the Great for instance, held this view.<sup>47</sup> The Platonic, Stoic and Manichean dualistic thoughts infected Christian spirituality. These philosophies dominant in the world of early Christianity saw man's body as a prison that confines his spirit and hides his spiritual growth under the influence of the Desert fathers. Severe asceticism was held up as a model of Christian perfection. Henceforth, man's body is to be put to death through various mortifications and penance."<sup>48</sup> St. Augustine (354-430), a convert and a bishop, is recognized as one of the persons that helped shape of Christian theology. In his thinking, the world is sustained by the immanent power of God. He said that exorcism is no longer necessary and had, in fact ceased in the church. Nevertheless, pastoral experience led him to change his position. Within the space of two years, almost seventy attested miracles had taken place in his diocese. And three years before he died, in 427, in his book of Retractions, Augustine recanted his earlier position which he had expressed in his earlier writings '*De veraReligione*'. The ministry of exorcism gradually faded in the time of the Fathers because of the abuse and influence of Hellenistic dualism on Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, the ministry of exorcism did not fade away completely for it continued but at a minimal level.

### **In road to demonic possession**

#### **Witchcraft**

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<sup>46</sup>Cf. J. G. Davies, "Deacons Deaconesses, and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," in *Church Ministry, and Organization in the Early Church Era*, (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 237-251.

<sup>47</sup>Gregory the Great, *Dialogues II.16.1* (SC 260:184-186).

<sup>48</sup>Gregory the Great, *Dialogues II. 4.2-3* (SC 260:152).

Most Africans attribute most evil and misfortunes to activities of witches. A witch hunt can be defined as the activities that are diabolical and malignant in their effects. The word is from the English word 'wicca' which meant 'wisdom' or 'knowledge. The word is mostly used for women who engage in witchcraft while their male counterparts are known as wizard or warlock.<sup>49</sup> Witchcraft in Africa in general is a fact that many people accept without much hesitation. Ajaji opines that it is foolhardy to begin to rationalize the existence or non-existence of witchcraft since its reality permeates and troubles in a most disturbing manner the life of the people. Witches are believed to be wicked and their activities are frightening as some misfortunes in African Traditional Society are attributed to the devilish activities of witches.<sup>50</sup> Their activities are so bad that they affect not only the spiritual spheres of man's life but also the social and moral spheres. Some activities associated with witchcraft include causing accidents, broken marriages, impotency and barrenness, fatal illnesses and other diabolical effects.<sup>51</sup>

## Occultism

This is another reality that finds expression in the African context of diabolical activities. The word occult is from the Latin word “*occultus*” which means the esoteric, hid secret, dark, mysterious or concealed. It describes the world beyond the ordinary, which transcends the five senses. Occultism has four main divisions. They include superstition, fortune telling, magic and spiritism. These divisions constitute the evidence through which occultism can be detected. One manifestation of occultism in African context is the scandalous outbreak of

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<sup>49</sup>Cf. Brian P. Levack, *Possession and Exorcism Articles on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology* (New York: Garland, 1992), pp.2-19.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Stanley A, and Ruth S. Freed, “*Spirit Possession as Illness in a North Indian Village*, (New York: The Natural History Press, 1967), pp.295-320.

<sup>51</sup>Cf.Walker, Sheila S., *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in Africa And Afro-America*, (Leiden: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 293-297.

cult groups in different societies. This is noticeable in the confusion and cries of sorrow and bereavement in some homes, schools and institutions today. The effects of these cultic groups have left heartbreaking experiences among individuals, families and communities. Sometimes an entire family is eliminated in the name of cultism.<sup>52</sup> Some are now seeking for help from places and individuals that have ended up worsening their conditions. One of the aspects of occultism worthy of noting is spiritism.

Spiritism evidently has to do with the spirits interfering in the physical sphere. Emmanuel Milingo in his book “*Face to Face with the Devil*” gave a summarized understanding of what he found common in the practice of witchcraft, spiritism, Satanism and other demonic occults. He writes thus that these include cannibalism, human sacrifices, black masses, sex, cemetery and pact with the devil. In black masses, there is a display of total denial of morality as established by natural law or by any existing religious denomination. Regarding sex, Milingo affirms that it is the greatest instrument to destroy human conscience, and is the climax for the celebration in both the black masses and the witchcraft festivals. The cemetery is considered a place of worship and ceremonies. The initiates have to experience the cemetery life. Then they undergo lots of transformation. They also take pacts with the devil which makes them explicitly disavow the Christian faith.<sup>53</sup>

Spiritism thus involves all that the evil spirits which make the human undergo that will lead him lose all control of human reality. It is the spirit that therefore has the total control over the person. With specifications to the African situation, witchcraft is the worst and the most common practice of spiritism. Its purpose is to “harm others through magic... which intends to contact the spirit of the dead or superior spirits...The medium is the intermediary between spirits and men, lending

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Canaan, T., “Haunted Springs and Water Demons in Palestine”, in *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, 1 (1920), pp. 153-170.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Milingo, *Face to Face with the Devil* (Australia: Scripture Keys Ministries, 1991), p. 86.

his energy (voice, gestures, writings, etc.) to the spirit who wants to reveal himself it may happen that these spirits –who are always demons –will possess some of those who participate in the séance.”<sup>54</sup> Spiritism is thus a reality in Africa that torments the equilibrium of many Africans. Many hence, are in need of deliverance.

On another aspect of spiritism referred to as spirit guide, Father Amorth the Exorcist shares touching experiences of spirit guide. Here are two of them: In Turin there's someone who to have Elvis's Presley guiding spirit, a suicide! It appeared that at most it was the spirit of someone who was close to the singer and was able to transfer himself onto this man, a faith healer who admired Presley to the point of idolatry. In another case is that of an artist who committed suicide at the age of forty. His art seemed so divine that the family of a girl considered him a god. In this climate of admiration-idolatry, the girl one day discovered that she had the spirit of the artist as a spirit guide, to her parents' joy...until she was strongly tempted towards suicide, and was saved thanks to the prayer of liberation.<sup>55</sup>

Spiritism, also referred to as spiritualism, obviously entails the engulfment of a person by a spirit that takes complete control of the person and leads him or her to destruction. The person identifies himself completely with the spirit of the other that definitely influences the person to be totally misbalanced. However, the Holy Spirit through the gift of exorcism has the final word on the possessed person. Therefore, there is always hope for the person under the spell of spiritism.

### **The teaching of Catholic church on exorcism**

Exorcism in the Catholic Church is the use of exorcism in the Roman Catholic faith for those who are believed to be the victims of demonic possession. In Roman

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<sup>54</sup> Gabrielle Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 94.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Mareo Tosatti, *Father Amorth Memoirs of an Exorcist: My Life Fighting Satan* (An Interview)

Catholicism, exorcism is sacramental<sup>56</sup> but not a sacrament, unlike baptism or confession. Unlike a sacrament, exorcism's "integrity and efficacy do not depend ... on the rigid use of an unchanging formula or on the ordered sequence of prescribed actions. Its efficacy depends on two elements: authorization from valid and licit Church authorities, and the faith of the exorcist."<sup>57</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism."<sup>58</sup> The Catholic Church revised the Rite of Exorcism in January 1999, though the traditional Rite of Exorcism in Latin is allowed as an option. The ritual assumes that possessed persons retain their free will, though the demon may hold control over their physical body. Exorcism involves prayers, blessings, and invocations with the use of the document Of Exorcisms and Certain Supplications.

### The rite of exorcism

The 1952 Roman Ritual stipulates that a priest who is expressly and particularly authorized by the Ordinary to exorcise, when he intends to perform an exorcism over persons tormented by the devil, must be properly distinguished for his piety, prudence, and integrity of life. He should fulfill this devout undertaking in all constancy and humility, being utterly immune to any striving for human aggrandizement, and relying not on his own power, but on the divine power. Moreover, he ought to be of mature years, and revered not only for his office but for his moral qualities. Therefore, the authorized exorcist is called upon to be upright

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<sup>56</sup> Gabriel Amorth, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, p. 43.

<sup>57</sup> Martin M., *Hostage to the Devil: The Possession and Exorcism of Five Contemporary Americans*, (Harper San Francisco, 1976) p. 68.

<sup>58</sup> Cuneo, Michael W., *Exorcism: Contemporary American Religion*, (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1999), p. 243.

before God and man. He must ensure not to scandalize for the devil is always on the watch of his weakness.

In order to exercise his ministry rightly and effectively, the exorcist must ensure to carry out a thorough study of the matter. He has to be well informed from experts both theoretically and through experience on the nature of the situation in question that claim to require exorcism. Hence, for the exorcist to conclude that a person is possessed by an evil spirit and therefore in need of exorcism, he has to ascertain the signs by which a person possessed can be distinguished from one who is suffering from an illness, especially one of a psychological nature.

To better understand the victim, the exorcist is advised to inquire about the possessed person. This can be done by investigating into the previous experience of exorcism of the victim. In doing this, the exorcist is to be attentive to experience of body and soul undergone by the victim and the words used to effectively intimidate the devil. This knowledge will permit the exorcist to use these words with greater stress and frequency. Also, he will be on his guard against the arts and subterfuges which the evil spirits are likely to use in deceiving him. For oftentimes they give deceptive answers and make it difficult to understand them, so that the exorcist might give up, or so it might appear that the afflicted one is not in any way possessed by the devil. The devil is indeed cunning and terribly deceptive. This is because once in a while, upon realizing that their plan is unveiled, the evil spirits conceal themselves and leave the body practically free from every molestation, so that the victim believes himself completely delivered. In this case, the exorcist must not desist until he sees the signs of deliverance.

Moreover, the evil spirits place whatever obstacles they can on the way, so that the patient may not submit to exorcism, or they try to convince him that his affliction is a natural one. Meanwhile, during exorcism they cause him to fall asleep, and dangle

some illusion before him, while they seclude themselves, so that the afflicted one appears to be freed. Some reveal a crime which has been committed and the perpetrators thereof, as well as the means of putting an end to it. Yet the afflicted person must beware of having recourse on this account to sorcerers or necromancers or to any parties except the ministers of the Church, or of making use of any superstitious or forbidden practice. Sometimes the devil will leave the possessed person in peace and even allow him to receive the holy Eucharist, to make it appear that he has departed. In fact, the arts and frauds of the evil one for deceiving a man are innumerable. For this reason the exorcist must be on his guard not to fall into this trap.

The exorcist therefore, is to be mindful of the words of our Lord (Mt. 17:20). Hence, there is certain type of evil spirit who cannot be driven out except by prayer and fasting. These means (prayer and fasting) are to be well explored by the exorcist in imploring divine assistance to expel demons. With regards the milieu to carry out exorcism, where possible, the possessed person should be led to church or to some other sacred and worthy place, where the exorcism will be held, away from the crowd. But if the person is ill, or for any valid reason, the exorcism may take place in a private home. The subject, if in good mental and physical health, should be exhorted to implore God's help, to fast, and to fortify himself by frequent reception of penance and Holy Communion, at the discretion of the priest. The victim is also encouraged to entreat God with firm faith and in all humility.

However, if he is grievously tormented, he ought to bear this patiently, never doubting the divine assistance. He ought to have a crucifix at hand or somewhere in sight. If relics of the saints are available, they are to be applied in a reverent way to the breast or the head of the person possessed (the relics must be properly and securely encased and covered). One will see to it that these sacred objects are not treated improperly or that no injury is done them by the evil spirit. Nonetheless, one should not hold the

holy Eucharist over the head of the person or in any way apply it to his body, owing to the danger of desecration.

As for all jesting, laughing, and nonsense on the part of the evil spirit, the exorcist should prevent it or condemn it. He should rather exhort the bystanders (whose number must be very limited) to pay no attention to such distractions. It is also not advisable for the bystanders to refrain from asking any question to the subject. Rather they should intercede for him to God in all humility and urgency. Let the priest pronounce the exorcism in a commanding and authoritative voice and at the same time with great confidence, humility, and fervor. If the person afflicted is experiencing a disturbance in some part of his body or an acute pain or a swelling appears in some part, he traces the sign of the cross over that place and sprinkles it with holy water, which he must have at hand for this purpose.

The exorcist is to pay attention as to what words in particular cause the evil spirits to tremble, repeating them the more frequently. And when he comes to a threatening expression, he recurs to it again and again, always increasing the punishment. If he perceives that he is making progress, let him persist for two, three, four hours, and longer if he can, until victory is attained. The exorcist should guard against giving or recommending any medicine to the patient, but should leave this care to physicians.

While performing the exorcism over a woman, it is recommendable for the exorcist to be assisted by several women of good repute, who will hold on to the person when she is harassed by the evil spirit. These assistants ought if possible to be close relatives of the subject, and for the sake of decency the exorcist will avoid saying or doing anything which might prove an occasion of evil thoughts to himself or to the others. During exorcism, it is preferable that the exorcist uses words from Holy Writ, rather than forms of his own or of someone else. Moreover, he shall command the devil to tell whether he is detained in that body by necromancy, by evil signs or

amulets. If the one possessed has taken the latter by mouth, he should be made to vomit them; if he has them concealed on his person, he should expose them; and when discovered they must be burned. Also, the person should be exhorted to reveal all his temptations to the exorcist. Finally, after the possessed one has been freed, let him be admonished to guard himself carefully against falling into sin, so as not to offer any opportunity to the evil spirit of returning, lest the last state of that man becomes worse than former.<sup>59</sup>

### **The gift of the Holy spirit**

#### **Trinitarian and Christological horizons of the gifts of the Holy Spirit**

In order to grasp the profound reasons of the relationship between the hierarchical and charismatic gifts, it is appropriate to recall their theological foundation. In fact, the necessity of overcoming every sterile contraposition or extrinsic juxtaposition between the hierarchical and charismatic gifts is required by the economy of salvation itself, which embraces the intrinsic relation between the missions of the Word incarnate and of the Holy Spirit. In reality, every gift of the Father implies the reference to the joint and differentiated actions of the divine missions: every gift comes from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit in the Church is bound to the mission of the Son, accomplished definitively in his Paschal Mystery. Jesus Himself connects the fulfillment of his mission to the sending of the Spirit upon the community of believers.<sup>60</sup> Through this, the Holy Spirit can in no way inaugurate an economy other than that of the divine incarnate Logos, crucified and risen.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> [www.catholic.org/prayers](http://www.catholic.org/prayers). November 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Jn* 7:39; 14:26; 15:26; 20:22.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), p. 9-12.

In truth, the whole sacramental economy of the Church is the pneumatological realization of the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit, therefore, comes to be considered by tradition as the soul of the Church which is the Body of Christ. The action of God in history always implies the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit, who, in Irenaeus of Lyon's evocative words, are called "the two hands of the Father".<sup>62</sup> In this sense, every gift of the Spirit cannot but be in relationship with the Word made flesh.<sup>63</sup> The bond in origin between the hierachal gifts, conferred with the sacramental grace of Orders, and the charismatic gifts, freely distributed by the Holy Spirit, has its deepest roots, therefore, in the relationship between the divine incarnate *Logos* and the Holy Spirit, who is always the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. Precisely to avoid equivocal theological visions that would posit a "Church of the Spirit", distinct and separate from the hierarchical-institutional Church, it must be repeated that the two divine missions mutually imply each other *in every gift* bestowed freely upon the Church.

In reality, the mission of Jesus Christ already implies within itself the action of the Spirit.<sup>64</sup> John Paul II, in his encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, had shown the decisive importance of the action of the Spirit in the mission of the Son.<sup>65</sup> Benedict XVI deepened this insight in his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, recalling that the Paraclete "already at work in Creation (cf. *Gen* 1:2), is fully present throughout the life of the incarnate Word". Jesus Christ "is conceived by the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mt* 1:18; *Lk* 1:35); at the beginning of his public mission, on the banks of the Jordan, He sees the Spirit

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<sup>62</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*, IV, 7, 4: *PG* 7, 992-993; V, 1, 3: *PG* 7, 1123; V, 6, 1: *PG* 7, 1137; V, 28, 4: *PG* 7, 1200.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 12: *AAS* 92 (2000), 752-754.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 50: *AAS* 78 (1986), 896-870; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp.727-730.

<sup>65</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 12: *AAS* 99 (2007), p.114.

descend upon Him[self] in the form of a dove (cf. *Mt* 3:16 and parallels); He acts, speaks and rejoices in the Spirit (cf. *Lk* 10:21), and He can offer Himself in the Spirit (cf. *Heb* 9:14). In the so-called ‘farewell discourse’ reported by John, Jesus clearly relates the gift of his life in the Paschal Mystery to the gift of the Spirit to his own (cf. *Jn* 16:7). Once risen, bearing in his flesh the signs of the passion, He can pour out the Spirit upon them (cf. *Jn* 20:22), making them sharers in his own mission (cf. *Jn* 20:21). The Spirit would then teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Christ had said (cf. *Jn* 14:26), since it falls to Him, as the Spirit of truth (cf. *Jn* 15:26), to guide the disciples into all truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13). In the account in *Acts*, the Spirit descends on the Apostles gathered in prayer with Mary on the day of Pentecost (cf. 2:1-4) and stirs them to undertake the mission of proclaiming the Good News to all peoples”.<sup>66</sup>

Awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the first disciples were assiduous and united in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus (cf. *Acts* 1:14). She had perfectly accepted and made fruitful the singular grace with which she had been superabundantly enriched by the most Holy Trinity: most importantly, the grace of being the Mother of God. All of the Church’s children can admire her complete docility to the action of the Holy Spirit: faultless docility in faith and transparent humility. Mary, therefore, testifies fully to the obedient and faithful reception of every gift of the Holy Spirit.

As the Second Vatican Council teaches, the Virgin Mary, by her maternal charity, “cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cares, until they are led into the happiness of their true home”.<sup>67</sup> Since she “let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service

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<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 12: *AAS* 99 (2007), 114ff.

<sup>67</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, # 62.

and fruitfulness, today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn.”<sup>68</sup> For this reason therefore, Mary is recognized as the Mother of the Church and we, full of confidence, have recourse to her so that, through her efficacious help and powerful intercession, the charism abundantly bestowed by the Holy Spirit among the faithful, may be received with docility and bear fruit for the life and mission of the Church and for the good of the world. In what pertains the exorcist, to be able to live the gifts of faith and discernment.

### **The gift of faith**

The spiritual gift of faith is found in the list of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. Verse 9 says that some people are given the gift of faith, but the gift is not specifically explained. All believers have been given saving faith by God as the only means of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9), but not all believers are given the spiritual gift of faith. Like all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gift of faith was given for the “common good,” which means the edifying of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7).

The gift of faith may be defined as the special gift whereby the Spirit provides Christians with extraordinary confidence in God’s promises, power, and presence so they can take heroic stands for the future of God’s work in the church. The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, and His promises. Examples of people with the gift of faith are those listed in Hebrews chapter 11: Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Enoch, Abel among others. This chapter, often called “the hall of faith,” describes those whose faith was extraordinary, enabling them to do extraordinary, superhuman things. Here we see Noah spending 120 years building a huge boat when, up to that time, rain was non-existent. Abraham

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<sup>68</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 287: AAS 105 (2013), 1136.

believed he would father a child when his wife's natural ability to do so had ended. Without the special gift of faith from God, such things would have been impossible.

As with all spiritual gifts, the gift of faith is given to some Christians who then use it to edify others in the Body of Christ. Those with the gift of faith are an inspiration to their fellow believers, exhibiting a simple confidence in God that shows in all they say and do. Extraordinarily faithful people show a humble godliness and reliance on God's promises, often so much so that they are known to be quietly fearless and zealous. They are so convinced that all obstacles to the gospel and to God's purposes will be overcome and so confident that God will secure the advancement of His cause, that they will often do far more in the promotion of His kingdom than the most talented and erudite preachers and teachers.

### **Gift of discernment**

From the onset, this gift is a supernatural gift of perception given by God to enable individual believers to distinguish the motivating spirit behind words or deeds. However, it encompasses much more than this simple definition.

The Greek word *Pneuma* is translated as spirit. It can also be translated as

1. The third person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit,
2. The spirit, i.e. the vital principal by which the body is animated
3. A spirit higher than man but lower than God, i.e. an angel, also used of demons, or evil spirits, who were conceived as inhabiting the bodies of men
4. A movement of air (a gentle blast) or breath

The Bible encourages believers to test the spirits. Test all things; hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Apostle Paul provides an example of the proper exercise of the gift. Then Saul, who is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease, perverting the straight ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:9,10). The churches were directed to exercise the gift of discernment. The church at Ephesus is applauded for practicing the gifts of knowing ones works, labor, patience, and avoiding that which is evil.

## CONCLUSION

God is the Creator of all that is. He created man in his image and likeness. Man therefore is called upon to share in the creative work of God. Man hence has a role of great importance to play in sustaining creation. However, since the beginning, we see that man is faced with challenges. There are forces in existence that try to thwart man’s focus and first mission: obedience to God and care for creation. Hence, with the devil, disorder is introduced between God and man, between man and man and between man and nature. This is an indication that man on his own is incapable of confronting these evil forces. Evidently, he has to assume responsibilities, but ultimately, it is only God that can totally deliver man from the hands of the evil one.

God’s guidance will be expressed in his intervention in the history of the chosen people. He led the Patriarchs, he guided the people in the desert, he instructed them through the prophets, he protected them through the Judges and Kings. The culmination of God’s guidance and protection will be achieved in the person of his only Begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus will overpower all evil forces and he will mandate his disciples to do the same. It is this mandate of deliverance that the Church

exercises in the ministry of exorcism. In our world today, the devil continues to manipulate lives of many individuals and events. The Church plays her role of sanctifying the world, specifically by the ministry of exorcism to deliver and set free all those possessed by Satan. Therefore, God continuous to deliver man through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

This work set out to explicate the reality of exorcism in our world today. Exorcism is indeed a very delicate issue to treat. Hence we do not claim to have exhaustively discussed all the intricacies regarding exorcism. However, we have tried to outline the essential aspects that are attainable to most persons who hear speak of exorcism. We discussed the historical background of exorcism, its aberrations but also its true meaning and practice. We depicted how, since the beginning, the devil tries to control man and make him live in disharmony with God and creation. We showed how this is confronted by God's constant intervention to deliver his people from evil spirit.

This piece portrayed how the yearnings of the human person to live wholly and holy; his struggles against demonic forces and his hope on a superior power to help achieve this. Through Scriptural proofs, the practice of exorcism in the Church's Tradition and its teaching and practice in the Church, we opined that Jesus Christ through his Church is the only power that overcomes ultimately all the pranks of Satan.

Exorcism therefore, is the deliverance of a possessed person from the hands of the devil in the name of Jesus Christ. Exorcism restores life with God and creation. It is a ministry of the Church and thus has to be practiced in accordance with the Church's prescriptions. There is need for faith, hope, love, charity and holiness from the part of the possessed and the Exorcist for an effective exorcism. Despite all aberrations, Jesus Christ continues to soothe the pains of all persons possessed through the ministry of exorcism in the Church.

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