



## **A PASTORAL APPROACH TO DELIVERANCE IN ZAMBIA**

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Prayers for deliverance are an important facet of Zambian Christianity. Within the Catholic Church, the Charismatic Renewal has become very popular; most parishes in the Lusaka area have a large and active group where healing services and prayers for deliverance are conducted. Many Catholics furthermore seek help outside the Catholic gates, especially in Pentecostal churches, to be prayed over and be delivered from Satanic powers and demons. Wealthy people may go very far, some as far as to Lagos/Nigeria to be delivered by charismatic leaders (e.g., “Pastor Joshua”, whose televised services also have a large Zambian audience). Spectacular healings, deliverances, exorcisms, and public confessions of sins draw big audiences in Zambia: people attend crusades to witness such events, they are drawn to exorcising churches, or they follow the televised exorcisms from their private homes on TV, sometimes calling the telephone prayer-lines.

In Zambia, the ministry of deliverance is very much a grass-roots initiative. People experience problems in which they see or recognize the presence of spiritual agents, and they go to the people whom they think can deal with these issues. The ministers they turn to are mostly those recommended to them by friends and family. In the Catholic Church the Charismatic Renewal took up the challenge to answer to grass-roots needs, yet in many ways they remain at the fringes of the official church. Some priests feel out of tune with the way the issue of deliverance is handled. Yet the drastic growth of Pentecostal churches throughout the country shows that the focus on deliverance has become one of the main features in people’s understanding of Christianity.

The following reflection is based on experiences of members of the FENZA Think Tank on Satanism and of the Fingers of Thomas (Regiment Parish). As members of one or both of these groups, we recognise the power of prayer and the need for prayer for healing and deliverance. Many self-confessed Satanists whom the group interviewed have — in their own words — found inner peace through prayers of deliverance. One young woman put it this way:

After the prayers I felt inner peace within myself. I felt accepted by God and knew he was present. I knew that I was healed.



Charismatic prayers can be very dramatic, but they often finish in relief, in praise and in thanksgiving — and that moment after deliverance has been experienced by many people, and has provided for many the basis for a new start in life. The above woman was interviewed again six months after her deliverance, and she still felt that she kept the peace that she had been given through the prayers.

Prayers for deliverance are Biblically founded and they are part of a long tradition of the Catholic Church. Hence the quest to make them as sound as possible and defend them from abuse. We recognize possible abuse in a number of forms:

- Deliverance can become a public spectacle.
- People being prayed over can be in an unstable state of mind, emotionally charged, and able to be coerced and manipulated into the prayer-group's expectations. Many are also easily manipulated into various states of hypnosis that can develop during intensive prayer, with many people around praying in tongues and laying on hands.
- Some people involved in Satanism or perceived Satanism are teenagers or even children. Attitudes of prayer that are focused on demons and take little consideration of the developmental stage of the child or teenager can have a damaging effect.
- Our research shows that a good number of self-confessed Satanists had a very traumatic childhood.<sup>1</sup> Exorcism divorced from social and domestic forces, and furthermore from the inner psychological forces that all play themselves out in the possessed, merely tries to pray problems away.
- An accepted belief that sufferings and events are due to the Devil can go hand in hand with a rejection of responsibility for leading one's own life. One can become more dependent on outside forces (the positive forces of the pastor to combat the negative forces of the Devil) instead of building up and believing in one's own inner power.
- Exorcism can confirm or lead to a very dualistic worldview, which is far from the monotheistic faith that the Church proclaims.
- The demonic world and the Devil have their place in the Bible and also in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Yet the images and visualizations that constitute the popular imagination of demonic interventions in Zambia are drawn mainly from popular Nigerian movies.

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<sup>1</sup> See the different case studies in the other documents on the FENZA website.



## **A pluralistic understanding of demons in the Zambian context**

We recognise that the approach one takes in regard to the demonic dimension depends on the worldview that one is holding. If I am doubtful about the existence of evil spiritual forces from the outset, I will tend to look for psychological, medical or socio-psychic explanations for testimonies about demon possession or Satanism. I will approach the stories of demonic or Satanic possession with the assumption that they can't be true. I will refer to concepts such as "psychotic state", "dissociative identity disorder", "schizophrenia", or "trance experience" in order to explain such out-of-body experiences, or I may even dismiss them completely as mere "stories" of people seeking attention or importance. But if I am convinced about an attack of Satan on Zambia or if I am expecting direct interventions from evil spiritual forces here and now, then I listen with very different ears to such stories. In the stories of Satanism there are beliefs involved: either in the presence or the absence of demonic forces trying to intervene and even to control the mind of a person. Our different beliefs harden with each experience we make that fits into its categories. Often the worldviews of the pastors who went through a Western type of training clashes head-on with the worldview of the people who come to them for help; the latter experience evil forces on a very concrete and intimate level, and often feel they are not understood by their pastors.

The rapid growth of born-again Pentecostal churches in Zambia is a fact. This does not mean, however, that the born-again approach is the only one that people uphold in Zambia. More and more worldviews are standing side by side. This includes also the beliefs about the spiritual world around us. Some see demons manifesting themselves in every form of sickness (AIDS, diabetes, high blood pressure), bad behaviour (rudeness, sexual immorality), and negative mental states (confusion, forgetfulness, tiredness). Others see demons only where one lacks other forms of explanation: a sickness cannot be diagnosed in the hospital, bad dreams come back in spite of changes in lifestyle, and events take place for which one has no explanation. Still others don't refer at all to demons or the Devil, whatever comes, and are sceptical about the rumours. Others bluntly don't believe in the demonic world.

Such different approaches go through families. In many cases we dealt with, some family members believed that a person was possessed by demonic forces, while other family members were in fact not so sure. For many it is not really a matter of strict belief, but a matter of seeing what works and what does not. In our cases, many of the concerned families had tried different things: hospital, a traditional healer or a Mutumwa church, a Pentecostal pastor, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, one after the other. Many people in Zambia have a pragmatic approach to spiritual realities and are not too fundamentalist



about their beliefs and disbeliefs. They embrace what works and let go of what does not. One reason for the popularity of prayers for deliverance is their success: in many cases they have worked, where alternatives had failed.

## **A Catholic understanding of the demonic world**

The Catholic Church has 2000 years of experience dealing with Satanic forces and alleged Satanic forces. Dogmas and teachings on demons span across a number of very different worldviews that have been held by the hierarchy, or by different Catholic groups, at different times. The church is aware that she has made grave mistakes in dealing with demonic forces or alleged demonic forces. It would be foolish to refuse to learn from this history.

The church's teaching until today holds on to a belief in the demonic world. Yet it tries to go beyond any particular worldview concerning demons and spirits. This is clear especially in the documents of the "Sacred Commission for the Doctrine of Faith", which commissioned a study on Demonology in 1975, and which it recommends.<sup>2</sup> This study warns specifically against some errors: (1) the denial of the existence of the Devil and his influence on us, (2) any form of strict Dualism (a kingdom of God fighting against a kingdom of Satan), (3) the full negation of free will and responsibility for those possessed or influenced by the Devil, and (4) any easy answer towards the mystery of evil. While it is naïve to see the Devil everywhere, the document says that it is equally naïve to subscribe to an Enlightenment worldview that reduces the Devil to a mere explanation or to a mere psychological reality. A critical stance is needed when speaking about any possible diabolical intervention. "In all these matters the Church asks for reserve and prudence."

The document teaches that the Devil is real, but that he works mainly in indirect ways, meaning that he does not completely bypass our human faculties, free will and responsibility. It is not so much in outer manifestations that the Devil tries to mislead us. The Devil goes deep into a person's inner life (be that person a Satanist or not):

In other periods of history, men were certainly somewhat naïve in expecting to meet one or the other demon at the crossroads of their minds. But would it not be just as naïve today to assume that our methods have enabled us to say the last word about those deep places of the mind where the relations between soul and body, between the supernatural, the preternatural and the human, and between revelation and

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<sup>2</sup> In the English translation it is called "Christian Faith and Demonology", and it is recommended as "a sure basis for grasping the teaching of the magisterium" on this issue.



reason all intertwine?”<sup>3</sup>

The church affirms the reality of the Devil, yet warns us not to base our knowledge too quickly on visions and subjective experiences about the precision of that reality. The Devil in Catholic teaching remains a mystery, and as such his reality is different from our imaginations about him. To deal with concrete experiences with Satan requires a holistic approach that takes account of the psychological and social makeup of a person and his/her life-history. The church calls for prudence and warns us not to be too fast in concluding that demonic forces are at work in a certain person, even if the person or their families experience them as such. Nor should we rule demonic forces out entirely.

Finally, the approach of the church is not fixed on the Devil, but on Christ. In fact, the Biblical understanding of the Devil is diverse, and in the Bible several different images of Satan are allowed to stand side by side. Rather than study the Devil himself, the church recommends that we remain focused on Christ and his kingdom. A number of spiritual traditions of the church warn that a preoccupation with demons and angels or visions may reveal but a sense of self-importance in prayer which can distract the heart from the search for God in whom alone it can rest.

### **Real or nor real? Not a practical distinction...**

Many people hold that the process of deliverance must start with a discernment: Are we dealing with a real demon — or are we witnessing some psychological manifestation of great inner pressure or repressed fears or desires? Many may regard this distinction necessary and say: How can you fight something if you don't know what it really is. They may hold that fighting a demon needs different weapons than dealing with depression, schizophrenia, or abnormal anxieties. Yet for a pastoral approach this distinction is not very practical. Who can know the answer for sure, and on whose terms and authority? Note that the signs of “true possession” that are often given in charismatic and evangelical circles (grave aversion to Christian symbols, speaking in foreign languages, rudeness, belching and vomiting, showing extraordinary strength or intelligence) have entered the subconscious of many charismatic members and can be provoked in a trance also in people who are not possessed. Such manifestations therefore may be signs of possession, but they are far from being sure signs.

But also the signs of “psychological problems” are difficult to read and still more difficult to treat. Where is one to find a psychologist or psychiatrist for the many people who come

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<sup>3</sup> cited from “Christian Faith and Demonology” (1975), paragraph VII.



saying they are possessed? And if this is difficult already in Lusaka, what is one to do in the rural areas? And how successful is Western psychology in the treatment of psychological illnesses in the Zambian social context? Even in their own Western context the different psychological models are far from being universally accepted.

We find the “either – or” approach unhelpful also for another reason: Even those who see the presence of demons in a particular person acknowledge that these demons still have to work through the human composition, the social and psychological make-up (as God does too). The Catholic understanding of demons is not focused on the outer manifestations, but locates them in “those deep places of the mind where the relations between soul and body, between the supernatural, the preternatural and the human, and between revelation and reason all intertwine.” The demons (whatever their ontological reality may be) link up with and work through our human faculties, our psychological and social make-up, our weaknesses, blind spots, addictions, fears and desires.

## Starting point

Deliverance can be seen as a therapy. The patient is in the centre of the therapy, not the demon, nor a psychological model. The person-centred approach starts with the experience of the person who knows him/herself to be possessed. The pastoral aim is to help the patient to develop faith and trust in God and also confidence in him/herself in a way that makes sense to him/her and that gives meaning to what he/she goes through.

This approach starts with the question: what are the human conditions that enable the demon (whatever its reality) to find a dwelling place in the person and tear him/her apart, or prevent him/her from “living life to the full” as promised by the Gospel. We may call this social and psychological condition the “entry point” of the demon, a term which delivered Satanists themselves like to use. And to speak again in the language of deliverance: this entry point has to be treated (in the charismatic language of deliverance they call it “sealing”), otherwise one demon may be chased out, but — in the words of Jesus — seven other ones more wicked will come and take its place.

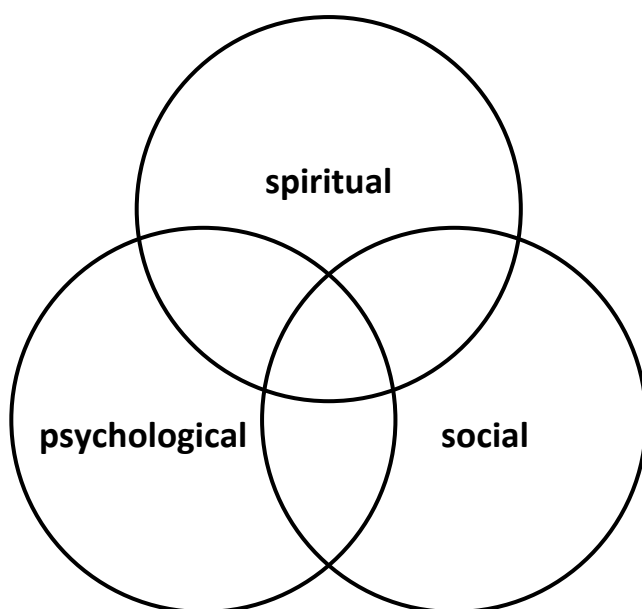
Demons are often described by the possessed as powerful outside forces that have found their way inside a person. A popular analogy<sup>4</sup> compares the human body with a car: the demon is a passenger who paralyses the driver from time to time to take over the steering wheel. As long as the demon remains in the car, this can happen again and again; the

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<sup>4</sup> Mentioned by I.M. Lewis. 2003. *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. London: Routledge.



demon therefore needs to be thrown out of the car. This can be accomplished through exorcism. A Catholic understanding of demons does not follow this analogy completely. Demons are acknowledged as spiritual realities, but their influence is not coming from



outside, but from within “the deep places where body, mind and soul are meeting”. For the demon to possess a person, that person must be joining the game somewhere and somehow, and deliverance can start with an attempt to identify that point. This presupposes a certain openness on the side of the patient and/or the family towards the pastor.

The point of the diagram is that social, psychological and spiritual realities have to meet somewhere; this meeting-point is needs to be addressed. To deal with spiritual demons in themselves brings

the danger of remaining in the clouds, of divorcing them from the human realities through which they work, and thus of failing to bring a lasting solution and healing.

### **Examples of “entry-points”: rejection, unhealthy attachments, expectations, and failed relationships**

The delivered Satanists we dealt with testified that they were initiated into Satanism involuntarily and sometimes even accidentally: through food, clothing, picking up money, or just by giving their names or talking to Satanists, who would then gain power over them. Some called these events the “entry-points” for Satanism. Yet when going through their stories, we could usually relate the entry-points to issues connected to social or domestic life. Identifying these social connections did not demand much imagination. It just required listening. People themselves when speaking would relate their involvement in Satanism or their demonic possession to painful events that had happened in their lives.

In some cases the delivered Satanists made a direct link between their involvement in Satanism and a very difficult childhood, in which they did not develop a feeling of belonging to their families. Here is an example of such a childhood trauma:



My mother became pregnant with me while her husband was abroad. Her family advised my mother to abort me, but she refused. When her husband came back home and found me, he committed suicide. When I grew up with my mother, my step-brothers told me that their father died because of me. My mother could not support me and she gave me to my father, who was married to another woman. I grew up without ever confiding myself to my step-mother or to any other person. I grew up knowing: this is not my family. I knew very well since childhood that I belonged somewhere else. When I was 10 years old, I was living in my own world. I made up my own games, and I liked to watch films. When I watched two films, I combined them in my head to make them into my own story. Presently I do not even know where my mother lives, except that she is somewhere in Lusaka. Once I tried to kill myself: I swallowed different types of medicines and I told God that I was coming to him. But I woke up again. When a Satanist appeared in our secondary school and told me that she had come for me, that I belonged to them, I knew instantly that this was the truth. I think that I belonged from my birth to the Satanic world, though they appeared only when I was in school.

With a childhood marked by traumas one is not surprised that the girl looked towards belonging somewhere else. Such a deep need to belong obviously expresses itself in dreams and in spiritual experiences. The girl did not remember any spiritual experience of God that marked her. "I used to go to overnight prayers, but I never prayed there. It was an excuse to meet my boyfriend, and in fact we rarely entered the church but stayed outside." Her born-again friends flooded her with a born-again language, but she said that "it didn't mean anything to me; they were just words with which we played". In a spiritual vacuum, her spiritual life came to be shaped by Nigerian movies that she was watching daily. She later came to reflect on the experiences with her boyfriend, and she concluded (after splitting up with him) that he was a Satanist and that he had initiated her into Satanism.

A charismatic group at school started to pray for her: at first she did not want it, but then she cooperated. During the prayers she fell down and entered a trance, during which she made confessions as a Satanist and showed signs usually associated with Satanism. Even when one believes in the presence of Satan in these experiences of Satanism, the traumas of real life should be part of the analysis and to address them should be part of the cure. The girl herself was eager to talk over her childhood with somebody, and she was ready for a new start with her mother, to meet her on another level: "I failed to relate with her as a child. But now I am an adult and I would like to meet her again." The moment she was at the point of wanting to take her life into her own hands, her identification with Satanism dropped away.

Another young woman, a former queen in the Satanic world, spoke of grave experiences of rejection during her childhood: an attempted rape by her cousin, an event about which she





could not speak with anyone, and mistreatment by her aunt with whom she stayed. She felt that from the beginning something stood in the way to having a good relationship with her own parents. This made her doubt sometimes whether her father was her real father; she also felt less loved than her siblings.

I knew from my childhood that I belonged to a different world. In my dreams people dressed in black were coming to visit me, and I knew in my heart that I belonged to them.

Also another self-confessed queen of the Satanist world had had a childhood in which she was separated from her mother whom she dearly loved. She was made to grow up with her elder sisters and brothers in Lusaka. Among the elder siblings there was a lot of infighting and various kinds of accusations, including witchcraft. She felt abandoned by her mother. Like the other women, her own history in Satanism started with the visit of people in her dreams who were introducing her into a world to which she belonged.

The three women eventually went through long and dramatic experiences of deliverance, in which one of them vomited “spiritual rings”, crawled for long times on the floor like a snake, and babbled in different languages (which nobody understood). Also the others had trance experiences, and the people present said that they were driven by something else, an overpowering outside force. Prayers of deliverance were held a number of times and by different people and in different ways (Pentecostal pastors, charismatic renewal, Catholic priests, other prayer groups) – in one case the process of deliverance lasted more than a year, in other cases several months, until the trance experiences stopped when being prayed over. All of them eventually were cured, and they see their cure related to strong prayers. At the same time, it was definitely beneficial when the respective families were getting more involved and more accepting, and when the different women had found support groups in which they experienced concern and sympathy for their condition. In the above examples the trigger or entry-point for Satanism (as a form of possession) seemingly was a deep but unfulfilled desire to belong somewhere and be accepted and loved. Whatever the nature of the demons, deliverance was successful probably because that entry-point was taken seriously and the priests and families tried to address it.

## **Unhealthy attachments**

In another case, a 20 year old girl asked a priest for prayers, because she had had experiences of being taken into the underground by Satanic figures. These figures were coming to her on a regular basis, sometimes in dreams, but even during waking time. From her family background, the girl had been in a long crisis before the possession experience



started. She felt that her mother (throughout her childhood) was comparing her unfavourably with her older sisters who were born of a different father; she was made to feel inferior, and was actually planning to leave home.

During the prayers the girl collapsed in the parish office. In a state of trance, she avoided religious objects (the Bible, her own rosary), saying they were too hot. Then she made a deep voice her own and said: "I am Satan. She is my wife. I took her seven years ago, and she has agreed." After prolonged prayers during which many things happened and many words were spoken, the "Satan voice" agreed to go, but it still had something to say: "You make me go! For seven years she belonged to me. That is why she could not get married. Tell B. that I have gone." Back at home, the girl slowly recovered from her trance experience. The priest asked the girl and her family about B. who was mentioned by the Satan-figure. She was shy about him and asked whether he had really been mentioned. Then she said that B. was her former boyfriend. Asked whether the relationship was over, she said: "not completely". Would she like the relationship to come again to life? She said "yes, it should be given a chance." He had been an important person in her life, but she had never spoken with anyone about him. Now the relationship was practically dead. The Satan-figure had given the explanation: he had been jealous and so he destroyed this relationship.

The boyfriend had been a source of comfort and strength for the girl, but the relationship had cooled down and died. In the spiritual world, however, she was married to the powerful Satan. Did the Devil destroy the relationship with her friend (spiritual explanation), or did the girl need a Devil figure to explain to herself the failure and at the same time maintain the hope of a fresh start (powerful inner wish as a psychological explanation)?

Again, an 'either-or' scenario (spiritual versus psychological) would not have been helpful for a pastoral solution. The girl came to the priest for spiritual help, not for psychological counselling. At the same time, the emotional attachment to the ex-boyfriend together with a number of unresolved family issues surely took their effects also on the spiritual plane. In fact the story was much more complex, and the demonic possession could have been related also to a number of other social, psychological but also spiritual issues.

Whatever the reality of the demon, the focus of the pastoral approach is on empowering the girl. The episode of possession had forced the girl to talk about the boyfriend (until then nobody in the family had known). And far beyond the issue of the boyfriend, the trance experiences provoked a healthy crisis which forced the whole family to sit down and address family issues that had been swept under the carpet for years. The subsequent conversations about her family, her ex-boyfriend, and her plans for the future were part of the subsequent cure. So was prayer, through which the girl felt strengthened. In the



following months she called a number of times on some charismatic friends to pray with her; she said she needed help since she felt she was struggling with a force that was bigger than herself. The visions from the underworld became less and less frequent until they stopped.

Incidentally, the social and domestic pressures on the girl, especially the fact that she was often compared negatively against her sisters, linked up well with one of the Biblical images of the Devil, in which he is presented as the accuser<sup>5</sup> who only finds faults, who is out to destroy a person's self-image and self-worth.

### **Unrealistic expectations**

Mrs. M. was a businesswoman with extensive connections to South Africa and to Tanzania. She was in her mid-30s, unmarried and with a daughter. She had a boyfriend, and she believed that the boyfriend tried to initiate her into Satanism:

He bought me gifts, often they were black clothes, but I hate black, and when I was wearing them, I felt I needed to pray. A number of times an urge to pray overcame me when I had met with my boyfriend, or when I was about to meet him. Sometimes when I started praying, I felt that an evil force which is very strong tried to overpower me. It happened several times. I felt that the evil force was stronger than me, and it was by holding on to prayer that it could not take me. It was absolutely terrible and I can't put it in words. Once I bluntly told my boyfriend that he is the Devil; but he just laughed. I went to a Pentecostal church to be prayed over. But before the prayer, I heard voices in myself, very confusing voices, and finally I went to the altar and smashed a glass. People were just looking at me without saying anything. Now this thing inside me it comes and it overpowers me: sometimes I hear voices, but I turn round and there is nothing. It is very frightening.

Mrs. M. was often sick, which made her unable to carry on looking after her business. She was HIV positive and knew her status; she did not want to take ARVs. "I believe in herbal medicine." She was convinced by Christians of some churches that her HIV virus is a demon that hides itself in disguise of a virus. "When they test they see a virus. But what is behind the virus is a demon. You can't treat a demon with ARVs. You only destroy your body. To cast out a demon you need faith. ARVs are a sign of a lack of faith." A number of times she was prayed over, and sometimes she would go into a trance (for a short time) in which the voice of a "demon" would speak through her. People praying for her witnessed that she was overcome by some powers. Were these powers a Satanic demon? Or were these powers a

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<sup>5</sup> Rev 12:10, but also Job 1; Zech 3:1-10; etc.



strong inner wish (unconscious) that her sickness goes back to a demon and not to the HIV virus? (A demon can be cast out, but she knew too well that there is no cure for an HIV virus.)

The “Fingers of Thomas” dealing with this case prayed with the woman a number of times, and encouraged her at the same time to start treatment with ARVs which she did. One member of the Fingers of Thomas visited her often. She said that she had started to take more care of herself. The focus shifted from a miraculous cure towards her own responsibility in managing the disease, even if with little steps. She still prayed for healing, but at the same time practised a regular and healthy life-style, which also presupposed a certain acceptance of the disease. She responded well to the treatment with ARVs, and it was but a matter of months to gain weight. At one point she even started working again on a part-time basis. The Satanic experiences had somehow ceased.

There were many more issues involved in the history of possession that Mrs. M. had experienced, but accepting to live with the disease in a meaningful way was an important key. It forced her also to set realistic goals for her life as a businesswoman and the dreams she had for her daughter. The repeated prayer helped her to gain confidence in God rather than focus on the powers of the Devil in her body and in her relationships.

## **Exorcism and empowerment**

Our approach looks at exorcism from the angle of a patient-centred therapy. People who strongly believe that they are possessed and who are mentally fixed on that possession may need a powerful rite of exorcism in order to be mentally ready for a new step forward in their lives. Since the patients are immersed in their families and communities which often see them to be possessed with demons, they too may need the assurance of a rite that delivers them.

Psychiatrists dealing with multiple personality disorders (MPDs) or dissociative identity disorders (DIDs) and traumas tell us that for a variety of reasons displaced memories or sub-personalities can appear to the patient like external demons, and that group beliefs and subtle group-suggestions reinforce such experiences. If exorcising demons is a good thing, we are aware that to exorcise “inner conflicts”, “sub-personalities”, or “deep desires” means to project them still further away from a meaningful integration. Such an exorcism does the person no lasting good and may even do harm.

This insight from psychology links up in fact with old Bemba or Chewa traditions: The traditional spirits (*ngulu*, *mashawe*) were not always exorcised. More often they were



appeased (through dancing, abstaining from certain foods, white beads, listening to its voice and even provoking it to speak), meaning they were integrated and accepted in the personality of the patient. A person who managed to integrate these spiritual forces in their lives could become a blessing for the community. The spirits in fact were not *evil* spirits or demons, but they were *ambivalent* spirits. People believed that an appeased spirit, in spite of the initial sickness it brings, could bring blessings for the individual and for the community. The focus was on integration rather than exorcism.

Such an integration, however, seems very difficult in a Christian worldview, especially if it is a dualistic one. Appeasing demons becomes worshipping the demons. Demons in a dualistic Christian worldview can only be cast out. Nevertheless, the recurring exorcisms of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, where the possessed are allowed to roll on the floor and scream and shout, and where the possessed go from one church to the next to be exorcised again and again, have something in common with the night-long dancing and drumming of those who appease *ngulu* and *mashawe*. Psychologically speaking, both forms could be regarded as methods to abreact inner powers, but also to provoke a crisis (when issues have been kept 'under the carpet' for too long) and public recognition. In this sense exorcism can be important even from a psychological angle.

Saying this, in a pastoral approach, exorcism cannot be an aim in itself. It can only be one of several steps that together aim to empower the patient to take his/her life into his/her own hands, even if only in small steps.

## Deliverance

The language of deliverance seems to be broader than the language of exorcism. Exorcism has a narrow focus on demons. Deliverance is broader and more holistic. In the Biblical sense, deliverance looks at political and social structures before it goes to demons. While the aim of exorcism is to get rid of a demon, deliverance seems to embody the notion of empowerment, meaning to empower the person to take his/her life into his/her own hands in the face of oppressive demonic or social structures.

Deliverance deals with forms of enslavement. The prime Biblical example of positive deliverance is the Exodus: the Israelites were delivered from the powers of the Pharaoh in order to be led into their own land; on the long journey they became a new people, attained new values and experiences, and became empowered to shape their own destiny in relation to their delivering God. The real obstacles towards deliverance were not only the external factors – the army of Pharaoh was easily destroyed by the almighty God – but internal



collaboration with the oppressive structures and the fears of the unknown; even after deliverance the Israelites wanted to go back to the meat pots they had been given during the time of slavery. Rather than moving forward their journey was one of many circles, with little vision and also little faith in themselves and in their God. Their journey to freedom proceeded in small and clumsy steps.

The forthcoming prophets reminded their people again and again of the meaning of true deliverance that presupposes a sense of justice, peace and inner freedom. Jesus built on this tradition: healings and exorcisms were not ends in themselves but signs of God's Kingdom where people are truly free. Prayers for deliverance are very Biblical (the Our Father closes with a petition for deliverance), and as such they go beyond mere exorcisms.

In Zambia many people experience their tribulations as forms of demonic possession, and there is little point trying to convince them of some vague psychological realities. Experience furthermore shows that many people have become healed and liberated through prayer. A medical expert dealing with mental illnesses at Chainama advised the Fingers of Thomas to help patients through their own concepts and worldview:

Those overcome by evil forces cannot be healed by you; they can only be healed by themselves. Therefore you must start with the categories of the patient, and see from there how to help them build up faith and confidence in themselves. Faith plays a very important role.

Deliverance means foremost to build up faith in the patient: faith in God, in love, and in themselves.

A reflection on Mark 9:14-28 (Jesus healing a boy possessed by a mute spirit) gives guidance on a number of different dimensions that are involved: (1) Jesus asked questions and connected to the answers; (2) he involved the family (in this case the father); (3) he related also to the crowd; (4) he challenged the faith and the worldview of the family and of the crowd — challenging them to move forward; (5) he saw healing completely dependent on God and on God's own time (emphasis on prayer and fasting).

## **Starting from the experience of people**

In the healing rites of a number of famous Pentecostal pastors, it is not the patient but a prophecy which reveals the nature of the sickness. Jesus however listened, and we propose that the first step towards deliverance is to listen: what do the sick say themselves, and what do their families say? What are their dreams and nightmares? How do they themselves interpret these dreams? How have they been dealing so far with their sickness?



To whom have they gone and what has made sense to them? If people are to find God, it has to be on the ground of their own experiences. Listening can be done either at home, or in church, when several sick people and their families have come together. People have gone already through much discernment, and they have found their own answers. They have already gone on a long journey of which the pastor has not been part. The pastor needs to become attuned to the answers they have found by themselves.

### **Involving the family**

Jesus healed by speaking with the father, challenging him, and developing a sense of faith in him. Jesus focused his attention not exclusively on the sick boy, but made the family part of the healing process. He healed through a family therapy. People who feel overcome by Satanic powers feel in the real sense that they are not in control of their lives, but that they are overcome by powers bigger than them. According to the cases we dealt with, it was often the dependencies within the family, unrealistic expectations, or abuses of relationships that allowed the sense of helplessness to arise in the first place. To help people to grow in self-confidence, the involvement of the family is important. We ourselves tried to involve the families both in the preparation and in the actual prayers, and we tried to ask all persons involved how they felt about the situation. Youths felt that they belonged to Satanism, or they felt overcome by an evil power often in response to experiences of rejection within the own family. Sometimes their involvement in Satanism was in fact a means to trigger a crisis within the family because of problems they could not address otherwise.

### **Involving the community**

At times Jesus took people away from the crowd in order to heal them. At other times he healed people within a crowd. In Mark 9:14–29 the whole crowd was involved along with the father, maybe because the crowd was playing a part in the interpretation of the sickness. The possessed often holds the images and worldviews of the surrounding community. The community has already done its discernment. In the Zambian context the signs of possession within the patient can be interpreted in different ways: apart from the explanation of Satanic possession, others refer to witchcraft, or to possession by a *cibanda*, or some *ngulu* or *mashawe* or they may be related to psychological issues, or to a family history, or to a curse, or to the consequences of adultery. Beliefs of the community and experiences of the individual stand in a reciprocal relationship. The communal discernment has consequences on the subjective experiences of the patient. Whether he/she



experiences heat and pain in the chest as a fire, as an unseen virus, a cancer, a spirit, or a snake moving around in the body, depends very much on his/her concepts, and these concepts in turn depend on communication. Through the discernment process of the patient with the community, different possibilities have been weighed against each other and different opinions have been listened to. The condition of the possessed is often talked about openly and people have become familiar with the symptoms.

Any deep experience can hardly be put adequately into words, and yet we have to use the words and language available to us to communicate what is happening. Thereby we reshape our own experiences; we make them fit into the shapes of the communal concepts. Communal concepts are the moulds through which the patient experiences his/her illness. Since memories and dreams are reshaped in the process of narrating them, the expectations of the community to whom they are narrated also are important: Expectations of the community and the symbolic language are working on the experiences of the individual. After deliverance the patient will have to live back in the community, and therefore it makes sense to involve the community in the healing process. Deliverance is not a private event.

## **Addressing the worldview**

Jesus challenged the worldview of the father (who was closed and had resigned himself to believing that nothing can change). Many times when Jesus cured people, he also challenged their understanding of things and challenged them to grow in faith. To avoid wrong expectations, we find it important to address some points with those to be prayed over and also with the families:

- Guide those who see themselves trapped in Satanic forces to come away from a dualistic worldview and accept a faith where God is never absent, not even in Satanic experiences.
- Healing is on God's terms, not on our terms.
- For God, many different ways of healing are open.
- Suffering has meaning in the life of a Christian.
- Illusions of instant solutions are not helpful for entering prayer.
- We have no road map for understanding evil forces, nor do we pretend to know what they really are. The purpose of our prayers is to hand the evil forces over to God, who knows how to deal with them. The focus is not on the priest/pastor/prayer group, nor on the Devil, but on the patient in his/her relationship with God.





As part of the preparation we ask the patients (and sometimes the families) about their trust in God and invite them if possible to pray and show this trust in their own words.

## The prayers

Jesus explained to the disciples “some demons can only be cast out by prayer” (and fasting, as some translations add). In some groups this “prayer and fasting” is understood as a power-game in spiritual warfare: through prayer and fasting some special powers are bestowed by God on the exorcist who then defeats the Devil. But another understanding of this Bible text is possible: the effectiveness of the exorcism is not dependent on the power of the exorcist, nor is exorcism a power-game. The emphasis on prayer acknowledges that healing depends solely on God. Also fasting is not so much a matter of gaining greater spiritual powers, but of making oneself empty before God. God is invited to act on his own terms. Fasting also adds the dimension of time: it is to acknowledge that God will heal the person in his own time, not in the time frame of the exorcist. For the possessed boy, God’s time of healing had come with the arrival of Jesus from the mountain of the transfiguration (Mk 9:2-13), where his death and resurrection had been foretold. Likewise, a Catholic way of deliverance is not an isolated event, but is fully encompassed within the Easter mystery, where the cross (and sickness) have their mysterious place in God’s plan, and where they are overcome in God’s own way.

The power of prayer in the Catholic Church is not dependent on a specific style. Some Pentecostal manuals propose specific styles of prayer for specific demons in spiritual warfare. We, on the other hand, have seen successes with a variety of prayers — some unfolding very quietly until the end, others marked by shouting and crawling. The type of prayer depends both on the prayer-group and on the patients. Those praying should feel at ease and comfortable with the style of prayer, since they are to radiate confidence and trust. Ourselves we prefer a small prayer-group well prepared in a closed setting, to avoid a spectacle and to provide a calm atmosphere. Sometimes a small choir helps (prepared for the event). When a person enters a trance (which they often do during such types of prayers), some pastors may engage the “demons”, others not.

One rationale for engaging the demons (asking for their names, asking what they want) is to obtain a clue about the inner powers. A number of issues often come out when the demon is engaged intelligently, and these issues can help in subsequent counselling. When the demon reveals its name it is usually a sign that it is ready to be engaged and also ready to leave. The patient (in a trance) responds and cooperates with the prayers. They often expect the demon to be addressed, and when the demon is addressed, it gives them the push to let



it go. If patients are ready to let go of the demon, then the leader and members of the prayer-group can guide the patients (even when in a trance) through subtle clues about when it is time to abreact and when it is time to stop.

The rationale for not engaging the demons (which some prefer) is to trust that God does not need the spectacle of a demon; the prayer is focused on God, not on what the demon may have to say or not say. Jesus himself often forbade the demons to speak. In this type of prayer for deliverance the “demons” may be shouting, but they are not engaged actively (asking them questions, ordering them to leave). This type of prayer avoids the danger of suggesting demon possession to the patients, which easily happens when the prayer-group itself is eagerly waiting for signs or manifestations of demons.

As Fingers of Thomas we have also developed our own rite, using the symbols of the baptism rite, to help people trust in the grace and inner power that they have already received. For this we have used various Bible readings, psalms and songs, holy water, a burial rite in which the patients are covered in blankets (symbolising the death to sin and to the old life with the demon, and the rising to new life with Christ), and light (a burning candle) that the patients receive from their families after the rite, while Easter songs are sung. The purpose of such a rite is to give the prayers a structure. This can help to prevent the deliverance from becoming a power-play between the demon and the exorcist.

According to our experience, prayers for deliverance that had been preceded by family visits seemed to work in most cases. But patients who joined at the last minute were more difficult to handle, and the success rate was lower.

## **The follow-up**

Deliverance and empowerment rarely come in one afternoon of prayer. The delivered person still has to cope with lively memories of the underground world and of the creatures that were haunting them. Even when delivered, people don't stop dreaming. Sometimes dreams turn into reality (this does not only happen to Satanists!). Some delivered Satanists, and more often still their families, shared with us their fear that the deliverance is not complete, that there may still be some Satanic powers left, and that what happened to them in the past may happen again.

Faith-healing from possession by demons takes place when trust in God is allowed also to reinterpret past events: that God's love was everywhere, even in the frightening experiences of the underground world. One could call this the reshaping of memory.



The rationale behind this approach is that memory today is no longer understood as a sort of computer hard-disk from which the past can simply be retrieved. Today it is acknowledged that our memories are being reshaped by the events and worldviews of the present. Present events provoke memories of the past that are linked to the same associations, and they condition each other. That is why we narrate our own past in ever changing terms, and rearrange our memories of the past with ever changing chronologies and causalities. Our memories are selective and they are conditioned by the present. Memories of ex-Satanists were often shaped by a dualistic worldview. This means, however, that a new worldview will put the memories into a new framework: a worldview centred on trust in God who encompasses everything.

Deliverance is rarely achieved through one powerful prayer. Such prayer has its place, but its effect depends how the person afterwards can come to lead his/her own life and take responsibility, even if only with small steps. Ongoing encouragement is important. In our group we had some success by helping with simple breathing exercises during quiet prayer that people can easily do at home and that helps them to find and build on their own inner powers.