

Demonization

Strange as it may seem, our versions of the Bible mislead us on this subject. The noun 'demon' is simply a transliteration of the Greek *δαιμονιον* or *δαιμων*. I wish they had done the same thing with the corresponding verb, *δαιμονιζω*. In that event we would have the verb 'demonize'. But no, the translators put 'possessed' of a demon. As a result we have tended to think of demon activity only in terms of possession. Well, so what is the problem? I suggest the following.

By 'possession' the translators presumably intended to connote 'control', but the more common meaning denotes 'ownership', and most people seem to take the second meaning. This has serious consequences. First, the concept is wrong, since demons do not and cannot 'own' human beings (although a demon will often claim that its victim "belongs" to it).¹ Second, it has fostered a misunderstanding about Christians and demon 'possession'—since a believer belongs to God it is presumably impossible that a demon should own him as well. We need to stop using the word 'possessed' in this connection altogether and replace it with the more precise term 'controlled'.

Demon control certainly exists, but it represents only a small part of the enemy's activity against mankind, precisely the most extreme cases. (Although organic insanity does exist it would not surprise me to verify that most cases of insanity involve at least some demonizing.) The vast majority of the demons' attacks should not be characterized as control. There are less severe forms that are sometimes called oppression or obsession. They also cause physical problems. But I believe that the most frequent attacks interfere with our minds in less obvious ways; so much so that most of the time we are not even aware of it. I suggest that we use the term 'demonization' to refer to any and all direct interference, whether in the mind or the body. The following continuum will help us to visualize the concept:

minds | bodies | obsession | oppression | control

Note that I have not included temptation to evil in this continuum. What is included in the concept of demonization, however, encompasses a world of suffering.

Let us now consider some consequences of the translation "possessed". I am not sure how far that rendering is at fault, but 'traditional' churches and schools scarcely touch the subject; perhaps because they think only in terms of ownership and conclude that believers are exempt. Whatever the explanation, you could attend certain churches during 20 years and never hear any teaching on Satan and the demons. On the other hand, 'pentecostal' or 'charismatic' churches and schools do at least deal with the subject, even if only partially. During deliverance sessions they tend to deal mainly with cases of control—is that not so? When does the leader of the service expel a demon? Only when it manifests itself—right? Someone begins to scream, foam at the mouth, roll on the ground or give some other evidence of foreign control, at which the leader confronts the demon and commands it to leave. But if the demon keeps still, what happens? Nothing, usually—nobody bothers it; its presence is not discerned. I know that some order the demons to show themselves, but do all obey? How do we know? Or if the manifestation is not of a type that we recognize as 'possession', who will identify and repel it? It seems clear to me that even in the churches where there is expulsion of demons the greater part of the enemy's activity against us goes unrecognized. They are focusing only on control.

I see another consequence that can be rather serious. When we conceive of demonic activity only in terms of ownership, and when a church teaches that a believer cannot be 'possessed', the

¹ Within Satanism there are 'robots', people who have turned themselves over to the complete control of a demon. For practical purposes a 'robot' is owned by his demon.

following occurs. A believer is demonized. In terms of the continuum I am suggesting it is not a case of control, yet the person knows he is being attacked. But the only terminology he knows for talking about demonic attack is 'possession' and the church teaches that a believer cannot be 'possessed'. So the person is plunged into anguish—he knows he is saved but a believer cannot be 'possessed'; yet he is being attacked and knows it. What is the explanation and how can he escape? He cannot say anything to the church because if he admits that he is being 'possessed' then they will no longer accept him as a believer. He does not dare talk and so he cannot receive help. Even if he did talk, he would not receive adequate help because the leaders think only in terms of ownership. As a result of all that, the poor believer may even reach the point of doubting his salvation! The worst of it all is that such suffering is simply unnecessary. We must learn to speak in terms of demonization, understand that believers certainly are demonized, and explain the use of the spiritual weapons that are at our disposal.