

Gurtih XIV



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A Brief History of Christian Exorcism

I exorcise thee

The word 'exorcise' has two possible origins:

1. *Exsarcire* to repair or restore [Latin] (*from* a rootword *sardre*, to mend).

(Note: Exorcism originally meant restoration or healing. If the word came from Exsarcire)

2. *Exorkizein*, to administer an oath or to bind by an oath.

In classical Greece, an *Exorkistes*, i.e. Exorcist, was someone who administered an oath, like a notary public or a justice of the peace before whom you swore an oath about anything. It had nothing whatever to do with banishing, expulsion or exile.

Confusion

By the 4th century Ce, towards the end of the classical era, *Exorkizein* to repair or restore, became confused in common usage with an entirely different word, *Erorizein* which meant 'to banish or expel'. The latter word is built from a, out of or beyond; and *horors* a boundary. It was used to mean the banishing from a country of criminals or

political enemies, that sort of thing. This misunderstanding led to the use of the word *Exorkizein* in the Church with a new meaning. From the 4th century Ce, Exorcism meant banishing an evil spirit or forcing an evil spirit to depart by oaths.

This has been the meaning of the term Exorcism in the Western world generally and Christianity particularly ever since.

There is no need to see in this change of meaning, some kind of plot on the part of Theologians, Languages are lively and continually evolving. Words do change their meaning and blend with other, different words to form new meanings.

Unfortunately, in this case, *Exorkizein* lost its ancient and original meaning of healing and restoration, and became a word meaning only the expulsion and punishment of unclean influences and evil spirits.

Earliest rites psychologically sound

In the earliest days of the Christian Church, rites of Exorcism were automatically carried out for each new convert before they were baptised. Being exorcised was a part of the normal, every day process of becoming a Christian. The new convert was healed and restored' from their spiritual and, in many cases, physical infirmities, ready to start life afresh, re-born 'by Water and the Spirit.'

Psychologically, this was very sound practice. The entry of the convert into a new and hopefully better way of life was marked by two appropriate rituals: the first one [exorcism] marked cleansing of the effects of the old way of life; the second, baptism, marked the formal entry, into the new way.

When Church theologians of later centuries looked back at the records of the early Church, they misread the word Exorcism. They did not know its original meaning of 'a healing and restoration process.' They knew only the later meaning of 'driving out and banishing.' They assumed that the early pre-baptismal rites of exorcism had been used to drive out the devils [i.e. the gods] formerly worshipped by the new converts.

'Their mistake needs to be seen in the light of the enormous changes that took place in the cultural milieu of the Western world, especially for the Christian Church, between the 1st and the 4th centuries Ce.

Christian by choice

In its first century, Christianity was one mystery cult among many. Its message was fresh; and virtually all of its members chose to become Christian as adult converts, either from nothing more than the State religion of the Empire or from one of the other mystery cults.

The State religion or Emperor worship required nothing more than formal obeisance. It tolerated other religions.

People become Christians for the same reasons they joined the Gnostics, the rites of Isis or Cybele, or the Mithras cult. All the mystery cults promised redemption from the burdens of the past; healing of spiritual, mental and physical ills in the present; and eternal life in the world to come.



In 313 *Ce* the Emperor Constantine became the patron of the Christian Church. He himself did not become a Christian until he was baptized into the Church on his death-bed in 337 *Ce*. His patronage resulted in a surge of new converts to Christianity from the ranks of government officials and other people seeking favour with the imperial court. During the later years of Constantine's rule, the Church gathered more and more political power to itself, aided by its civil service converts.

In 361 *Ce*, the Emperor Julian tried to restore Paganism to at least an equal footing with Christianity. He was killed in battle in 362 *Ce*, and the restoration of Paganism collapsed before it had really got under way.

From that time, Christianity was recognized as the official State religion, but, unlike the former State religion of Emperor-worship, the Church would tolerate no rivals. In 395 *Ce* all religions but the Christian Church were banned throughout the Roman Empire by the Emperor Theodosius.

Christian by decree

This made a considerable difference to the rites of entry into the Church. People now became Christians by decree. The children of Christians underwent the Initiation ceremony of baptism automatically when infants. Baptism of adults became a formal ceremony marking their submission to the decrees of their rulers, not their acceptance of the Church teachings.

Christian Baptismal Exorcism

The baptismal exorcism rites became a formal rejection of the devil and all his works and now comprised, at most, a few prayers said just before the baptism. Until the 16th century, and even later, in some branches of the Church, prayers of similar to the following formed a part of every baptismal rite. This one is from a 1549 Prayer Book.

"I command thee, unclean spirit, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, thou come out and depart from these infants whom our Lord Jesus Christ hath vouchsafed to call to his Holy Baptism, to be made members of his body and his holy congregation.

Therefore, thou cursed spirit, remember thy sentence, remember thy judgement, remember the day to be at hand, wherein thou shalt burn in fire everlasting, prepared for thee and thy angels. And presume not hereafter to exercise any tyranny towards these infants whom Christ hath bought with his precious Blood and by this holy Baptism call to be his flock."

There is a basic assumption underlying this and other exorcisms that formed part of other churches' baptismal rites: All humans are by nature born in sin and possessed by the devil. If they belong to another religion, they worship the devil. Baptism cleanses the candidate of original sin and requires the renunciation of the devil.

Exorcism outside of Baptism

Within the initiation rites of Christianity, exorcism had been reduced to a formality. But this did not mean there was no need felt to drive out demons in other circumstances.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, culture was increasingly confined to scattered settlements, separated by vast areas given over to wilderness and roaming bandits. Demons there were aplenty in the consciousness of the peoples of Europe during these truly dark centuries.

Indoctrination

As Christianity spread its influence throughout all Europe, on the one hand it brought civilising influences which it had inherited from the Romans, but, on the other hand, its religious intolerance turned the old gods of the people of Europe into devils and demons to be driven away. Their holy places were either destroyed or replaced.

"The wretched bodies of the damned shall simmer and blaze in these living fires ... the fire is more deadly than any which man can suffer in this life ..."

With teachings like this, the Church bound its members in iron bands of discipline tighter than any exorcist has ever managed to bind a demon. The slightest deviation meant eternal damnation in the most appalling circumstances that the minds of human beings could devise.

Resistance to indoctrination

Only two classes of people resisted this indoctrination: the pagans and the scientists. The scientists, while hardly resembling the scientists of today, did at least stand back a little, query everything and view all this with a little honest doubt. The pagans while paying lip service to the new morality, quietly and with inevitable secrecy, returned to the old religions, the practices of their forebears with all their spontaneity, creativity and futile exuberance. Both scientists and witches were candidates for the stake.

Demons were in early times usually dealt with by priests of the Church, but as the standards of priestly education gradually lowered, exorcism became the preserve of clerics fruit orders that were concerned with suppressing heresy and eliminating dissent, collectively referred to as 'the Inquisition'.

Rituale Romanum

There are two documents from medieval era of major importance in these respects *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of the Evildoers) and *Rituale Romanum*, (The Roman Ritual [of Exorcism]). *Malleus Maleficarum* was a handbook on the interrogation of people suspected of witchcraft or devil worship. The *Rituale Romanum*, the Roman Catholic Ritual of Exorcism, has a long history of development. The Jewish spiritual teacher, Yehoshua, in whose name the Christian Church was founded, is reported to have given his disciples the specific command, among other directives, "Drive out Devils." From the age of the Apostles, through the centuries of the Church Fathers and into medieval times, there is an unbroken tradition of Roman Catholic beliefs and practices in the matter of exorcism.

Most of the wording of the Rite as it exists today is comparatively modern, reaching its final form between the 14th and the 17th centuries.

(Note: An extract from the *Rituale Romanum* accompanies this article to give readers an idea of what it is like. The Ritual itself is quite short, three chapters in all.)

By the 17th century, the Reformation had divided Europe into two warring camps, Catholic and Protestant. Both Protestants and Catholics developed an enduring paranoia about devil-worshippers, whom they largely identified with those people who clung to the ancient pre-Christian beliefs and customs. Not only was there intermittent persecution of witches, there were 'frequent pogroms conducted against the Jews, seen as the murderers of Jesus Christ.

The Birth of Modern Science

The Renaissance era which had dawned in the 15th century and reached its magnificent heights in the 16th century, had brought with it an explosion of knowledge of the customs and writings of classical Greece and Rome. This had led to widespread intellectual interest in the ancient mystery religions and their mystical practices.

At its best, this resulted in the work of such scholars and magicians as Albert Magnus, Agrippa, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno. At its worst, it produced the superstition-laden grimoires that still fascinated some magicians, especially the young and the thrill-seekers. Scholars, magicians and grimoire writers alike were seen as very real threats to the established religions.

Of course, the paranoia about the undermining of the religion which was so prevalent in the late Renaissance era (16th and 17th centuries) was compounded by the beginnings of modern scientific knowledge. This was equally dangerous to the medieval religious viewpoint

Modern rationalist scientific attitudes began probably in the time of the astronomer Copernicus [1473-1543]. They were given shape in 1620 in the *Novum Organum* of the English philosopher and politician Francis Bacon [1561-1626]. The first peak of modern scientific achievement rose in the experiments and writings of Sir Isaac Newton [1642-1727]. Both these scientists were reputed to be also Rosicrucians.

By the end of the 18th century, the so-called Age of Reason was established. Only the primitive, the superstitious and the religious bigots believed in such things as the Devil, demons or possession. By the end of the 19th century, the psychologist, Sigmund Freud had published his seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There was now a rationale available which provided reasonable explanations for virtually all human behaviour manifestations, including such bizarre possession.

Modern Attitudes to Exorcism

However, a belief in the possibility of possession has persisted tight through until the present era. Granted, beliefs in demonic possession persist most strongly now, as in earlier eras, among the primitive, the superstitious and the religious bigots. But, like so many other paranormal phenomena, it cannot be dismissed entirely as the preserve of the ignorant and the writers of fiction.

Beliefs in devil possession and the practice of exorcism by fundamentalist pastors had become prevalent enough in the United Kingdom by 1963, to cause the Anglican Bishop of Exeter to set up a Commission of clergy and psychiatrists to investigate and report on Christian exorcism.

This was published by S.P.C.K. in 1972. It represents a conservative but mainstream Christian viewpoint. It is one of the saner documents on the subject. Another text is *Binding the Devil*, by Robert Baker [Sheldon, London, 1974].

Unfortunately, there is insufficient room to print here even a summary of the Commission's findings. Probably the most important points made are [quoting from the *Report on Christian Exorcism*]:

"In the first place it should be assumed that the patient's illness has a physical or mental cause, and the case should be referred by his G.P. to a competent physician in psychological medicine."

"The exorcism of a person must not be performed until possible mental or physical illness has been excluded in this way, and a thorough investigation has been made of the patient in terms of spiritual values by an exorcist duly licensed by the Church."

"The apparent failure of medical or psychological treatment should not necessity be taken as evidence that the illness is spiritual. Nor should the success of medical or psychological treatment exclude the possibility of the existence of a residual spiritual problem, requiring spiritual treatment and healing." (Paraphrased)

Exorcism and Healing

It is significant that the emphasis of the Report prepared by the Bishop of Exeter's Commission on Exorcism emphasises on the healing nature of the Exorcism rite. In this connection, we can compare three exorcism prayers.

I. The first is taken from a Celtic, but Christian, source. It is quoted in Dion Fortune's *Psychic Self Defence* [1930]:

"I exorcise all influences and seeds of evil; I lay upon them the spell of Christ 'Holy Church, that they may be bound fast as with chains and cast into outer darkness, that they trouble not the servants of God"

2. The second is from the rite recommended by the Bishops Commission:

"I command you, evil spirit; in the Name of God the Father Almighty, in the Name of Jesus Christ his only Son, and In the Name of the Holy Spirit, that, harming no one, you depart from this creature of God [name of the person], and return to the place appointed you, thereto remain for ever."

3. The third is from the Magical Rites of the Guardians, a Western Mystery Order. (Note: This ceremony is now part of the Apostolic Guardian Church corpus).

"I exorcise all influences and seeds of evil flay upon them the spell of the Holy Light and Life and Love of Pentagrammaton [.1] that they might be freed from this place [or person] and taken to another place where they shall be healed."

(Note: Originally "and love of YHVH)

Relevant in this context is a prayer common to both the Celtic and the Magical Exorcism Rites:

"In every place, where this element [or magical instrument] is used, grant that there may be cleansing of every power of adversity, of every illusion of mind, and of every artifice of destruction."

Here, in language that is appropriately solemn, are described those things that oppose the spiritual growth of our species: the illusions concerning reality to which we cling, and the forces that destroy where we would build. From these, we seek cleansing and healing, so that we might find integration within ourselves, and thus community and communion with all other living beings.

A Maturing of Attitudes

The maturing of human attitudes is evident It is part of the growth of human understanding that some are now no longer seeing the ecology of all living beings in

dualistic terms, and battlefield of contending forces, but rather as a family or organic whole, some parts of which have different functions from those of other parts. When two or more beings or forces or functions interfere with each other, what is needed is the healing and integration of the various forces or beings, not the victory of one set of functions over the other.

Appendum

The Roman Ritual of Exorcism

Here, part of the *Rituale Romanum* is presented in both the original Latin and an English translation.

EXORCIZO TE, immundissime spiritus, omnis incursio adversarii, omne phantasma, omnis legio. in nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi; + eradicare et effugare ab hoc plasmate Dei. + Ipse tibi imperat, qui te de supernis coelorum in inferiora terrae demergi praecepit. Ipse tibi imperat, qui man, ventis et tempestatibus imperavit. Audi ergo et time salana. inimice fidei, hostis generis humani, mortis adductor, vitae raptor, iustitiae decimator, malorum radix, fomes vitiorum, seductor hominum, proditor gentium, incitator invidiae, onigo avaritiae, causa discordie, excitator dolorum. Quid stas et resistis cum scias Christum Dominum vires tuas perdere ? IlIum metue, qui in Isaac immolatus est, in Joseph venuindatus, in agno occisus, in homine crucifixus, deinde inferni. Triumphator full. (*Sequentes Cruces finant in fronte obsessis*) Recede ergo in nomine Patris + et Filii + et Spiritus + sancti, da locum Spinitui sancto, per hoc signum + Crucis Jesu Christi Domini nostri. Qui cum Patre et eodem Spinitu sancto vivit et regiat Deus per omnia saccula sacculorum. Amen.

I EXORCISE YOU, Most Unclean Spirit! Invading Enemy! All Spirits! Every-one of you! In the name of Our Lord Jesus + Christ: Be uprooted and expelled from this Creature of God. + He who commands you is he who ordered you to be thrown down from the highest Heaven into the depths of Hell. He who commands you is he who dominated the sea, the wind, and the storms. Hear, therefore, and fear, Satan! Enemy of the Faith! Enemy of the human race! Source of death! Robber of life! Twister of justice! Root of evil! Warp of vices! Seducer of men! Traitor of nations! Inciter of jealousy! Originator of greed! Cause of' Discord! Creator of agony! Why do you stay and resist, when you know that Christ our Lord has destroyed your plan? Fear him who was prefigured in Isaac, in Joseph, and in the Paschal Lamb; who was crucified as a man, and who rose from death. (*Then, making the Sing of the Cross on the Forehead of the possessed*) Retire, therefore, in the name of the + Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy + Spirit. Give way to the Holy Spirit, because of this sign of the Holy +

Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns as God with the Father and the same Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Note: Article by the late Shomer Michael, Senior Guardian of Guardians of Grace, Published *Magic Pentacle* Winter 1995, permissions New Zion Inc to Apostolic Guardian Church.