

**Harmful Spirits:
From Fear to Freedom**

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INTRODUCTION

Popular fear of harmful spirits presents an opportunity and challenge to world Christianity. Beginning with biblical foundations, this paper traces historical reasons Western Christians ignored the spiritual world. By contrast, Christianity spread across the Global South through exorcising fear-inducing spirits. Examining Pentecostal ambivalence, the paper argues that life-and-death stakes justify increased attention to delivering Christians from demons. After considering difficulties, the paper explains one exemplary ministry model. The goal is to encourage the church in Singapore to serve the global church by resisting temptations to emulate Western materialism or methodolatry, instead leading the church back to gospel basics.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The driving out of harmful spirits formed a cornerstone of Jesus's ministry. As Jesus was baptised, the Spirit of God descended and led him into the wilderness to overcome Satan's temptations.¹ Jesus then began preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."² Whenever Jesus proclaimed good news of the kingdom, he also healed every disease and drove out (Greek *ekballō*) demons (*daimonia*, lesser spirits) causing harm.³ Jesus taught with such "authority" that "He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him."⁴ When Pharisees accused Jesus of driving out demons by the prince of demons, Jesus responded that "If Satan drives out Satan . . . How then can his kingdom stand? . . . But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."⁵

¹ Matthew 3:16–17, 4:1–11; all biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

² Matthew 4:17.

³ Matthew 4:23–24.

⁴ Mark 1:27.

⁵ Matthew 12:24–28.

Jesus delegated authority to disciples. He appointed twelve “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”⁶ Seventy-two others “returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to . . . overcome all the power of the enemy.’”⁷ After Pentecost, the church grew as crowds brought “their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.”⁸ Peter, Paul, and Philip the Evangelist (although not an apostle) drove out demons.⁹

The early church applied biblical models. Tertullian (ca. 165–220) observed that *any* Christian could exorcise (Greek *exorkizō*, bind by oath) demons.¹⁰ Justin Martyr (ca. 90–165) recounted how demons were subdued by hearing about Jesus, “Son of God—who is the Firstborn of every creature, who became man by the Virgin, who suffered and was crucified under Pontius Pilate . . . who died, who rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven.”¹¹ Origen (ca. 185–254) noted that “for the most part it is unlettered persons who perform this work,” revealing the “despicable weakness of demons, which, in order to be overcome and driven out of the bodies and souls of men, do not require the power and wisdom of those who are mighty in argument, and most learned in matters of faith.”¹² Historian Ramsay MacMullen attributed Christianity’s

⁶ Mark 3:14–15.

⁷ Luke 10:17–19.

⁸ Acts 5:16.

⁹ Acts 5:15; 8:6–7; 16:16–18; 19:11–12.

¹⁰ Andrew Daunt-Fear, “Deliverance and Exorcism in the Early Church,” in *Exorcism & Deliverance: Multi-Disciplinary Studies*, edited by William K. Kay and Robin Parry (London: Paternoster, 2011), 83.

¹¹ Justin, *Dialogue* 85.1–3, quoted in Oskar Skarsaune and Tormod Engelsen, “Possession and Exorcism in the History of the Church,” in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, edited by A. Scott Moreau, Tokunboh Adeyemo, David G. Burnett, Bryant L. Myers, and Hwa Yung (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), 67.

¹² Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.4, quoted in Skarsaune and Engelsen, “Possession and Exorcism,” 68.

spread across the Roman Empire to healings and exorcisms that created faith in Jesus and destroyed belief in the power of Greco-Roman gods.¹³

INSTITUTIONAL RETREAT

By the fourth century, the church developed from a persecuted sect into a state-sponsored institution, and leaders consolidated authority by limiting healing and exorcism to specialists and regulating practices. Elites borrowed Platonic mind-body dualism and asceticism, while an influx of nominal Christians retained magical formulas to counteract misfortune.¹⁴

In the sixteenth century, Protestant Reformers like French theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) asserted the cessation of miracles and attributed Roman Catholic claims to superstition.¹⁵ Catholic authorities responded by tightening criteria.¹⁶ Rank-and-file Christians felt less protected by the church, but still feared spirits.¹⁷ This combination of factors fuelled European witch hunts, causing deaths of thousands of accused witches and producing backlash against belief in magic as dangerous.¹⁸

¹³ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 108.

¹⁴ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 77, 114, 118; Philip Schaff, “Exorcism,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, IV: Draeseke–Goa, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1909), <https://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc04/htm/ii.vii.htm#ii.vii>; Francis MacNutt, *The Healing Reawakening: Reclaiming Our Lost Inheritance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2005), 103.

¹⁵ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 207.

¹⁶ Jacalyn Duffin, *Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

¹⁷ Skarsaune and Engelsviken, “Possession and Exorcism,” 76.

¹⁸ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 288.

During the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Western investigation of natural laws prompted spiritual scepticism. Elites replaced demonic attributions for diseases and mental disturbances with materialistic explanations.¹⁹

PIETIST REMNANT

The Western church did not wholly abandon exorcism. German Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) included exorcisms in his Order of Baptism (1523, 1526).²⁰ Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (1529) illustrates his cosmology: “And though this world, with devils filled / should threaten to undo us / we will not fear, . . . the Spirit and the gifts are ours . . . his kingdom is forever.”²¹ Luther’s German Pietist heirs influenced the British founder of Methodism, John Wesley (1703–1791), who prayed for healing and drove out demons.²²

As folk magic persisted, so did felt needs for freedom. In 1841, Gottlieb Dittus—introduced to sorcery by an aunt—fell, unconscious, when prayers invoked Jesus’s name. As Lutheran pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880) prayed, “everything that had hitherto been reckoned under the most ridiculous popular superstition, stepped over from the world of fairytales into reality.”²³ After an eighteen-month “battle”—waged with prayer, fasting, and the

¹⁹ Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1995), 14.

²⁰ *The Order of Baptism* (1523), 197–206, and *The Order of Baptism Newly Revised* (1526), 207–211, in *Works of Martin Luther: The Philadelphia Edition*, vol. 6, by Martin Luther, edited by Paul Zeller Strodsch (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1932); Jussi Koivisto, “Is Evil Inevitable for Creation and Human Life? Studies on Martin Luther’s Biblical Interpretation” (Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki, 2012), 13, 172.

²¹ Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (1529), translated by Frederic Henry Hedge, Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/a_mighty_fortress_is_our_god_a_bulwark.

²² Jonathan Strom, “Problems and Promises of Pietism Research,” *Church History* 71, no. 3 (2002): 540, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640700130264>; Brian Stanley, “The Evangelical Christian Mind in History and Global Context,” in *Every Leaf, Line, and Letter: Evangelicals and the Bible from the 1730s to the Present*, edited by Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 301; Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury, 1987), 118.

²³ Blumhardt, quoted in and translated by Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 48.

Bible—demons “bellowed” that “Jesus is the Victor!” Villagers hearing “mournful cries” of “Into the abyss!” renounced magic, and revival attracted international visitors. Blumhardt prayed for more spiritual power: “I long for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit, another Pentecost. . . . The gifts and powers of the early Christian time—oh, how I long for their return!”²⁴ Blumhardt inspired many others, including nineteenth-century Pietist missionaries to Ghana and, in the twentieth century, Dutch evangelist Corrie Ten Boom, U.S. Catholic Charismatic Francis MacNutt, and U.S. Vineyard founder John Wimber.²⁵

BIBLE AS GUIDEBOOK

Those Pietist missionaries to Ghana illustrate a pattern. Because Pietists viewed the world as a cosmic battleground, they did not reduce African beliefs to superstition, but neither did they exorcise fear-inducing spirits nor recognise God’s footprints (*vestigia Dei*) in Ghanaian culture.²⁶ Once missionaries started translating the Bible into local languages from the 1850s, Ghanaian converts emulated biblical models for gaining protection from spirits they now categorised as mere demons that could be driven away.²⁷ Locally run churches of every denomination

²⁴ Friedrich Zündel, *The Awakening: One Man’s Battle with Darkness* (Farmington, PA: Plough, 1999), 42, 50, 160; Christian T. Collins Winn, “Seeing What Jesus Can Do: The Blumhardts and the Healing of Creation,” *Christian History* 142 (2022): 26–27.

²⁵ Corrie Ten Boom, *Defeated Enemies* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2008), 10; Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 46; Stanley, “Evangelical Christian Mind,” 301; MacNutt, *Healing Reawakening*, 167–70; Francis MacNutt, “The Struggle to Recover Healing,” *The Healing Line*, no. April/May (2008): 3–4; Michael W. Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 95.

²⁶ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 9, 83, 109, 138; Simon Chan, “Whither Pentecostalism?” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, edited by Allan Heaton Anderson and Edmond Tang, rev. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011), 473.

²⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

incorporated deliverance (Latin *de*, away, and *liberare*, to free) from demons.²⁸ By the twentieth century, deliverance flowed back to Germany through African migrant churches.²⁹

Even missionaries who read the Bible through a Calvinist, cessationist, Enlightenment-tinged lens failed to dissuade non-Western converts from recognising similarities between biblical and local cosmologies. Theologian Lamin Sanneh, a Gambian convert to Catholicism, distinguished the “disinfected,” “stripped-down universe of a post-Enlightenment Christianity” from the “larger world” of Africans “surrounded by an active, dangerous spirit world that requires constant and vigilant intervention to be safe and whole.”³⁰ In Ethiopia, Christians exorcised demons by reading from the Bible, singing praise and victory songs, and confronting spirits in Jesus’s name.³¹

Similar stories unfolded in Asia. In China, Watchman Nee and John Sung, both introduced to Christianity by Methodists, imitated the gospels and Acts.³² U.S. Presbyterian missionary John Nevius (1829–1893) reassessed his worldview after observing Chinese converts perform successful exorcisms. Nevius noted parallels between sources of demonisation in China and the United States, where spiritism was popular. Although Nevius influenced missiology,

²⁸ Cephas Narh Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002), 255; Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Blandford Forum: Deo, 2012), 2.

²⁹ Claudia Wahrlich-Oblau, “Material Salvation: Healing, Deliverance, and ‘Breakthrough’ in African Migrant Churches in Germany,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, edited by Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 61–80.

³⁰ Lamin O. Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter, *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7–8.

³¹ Amsalu Tadesse Geleta, “Demonisation and Exorcism in Ethiopian Churches,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 100.

³² Hwa Yung, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, 40; Robert Menzies, “Pentecostals in China,” in *Global Renewal Christianity*, vol. I, Asia and Oceania, edited by Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016), 69, 81, 89.

Westerners ignored his demonology until “Third Wave” pentecostals like Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft rediscovered Nevius.³³

In Korea, nineteenth-century Presbyterian and Methodist converts reinterpreted local spirits as demons. Missionary women and Korean “Bible women”—some of whom were former folk ritual specialists—expelled spirits through Bible reading, prayer, and singing hymns like “My Soul, Be on Thy Guard” and “I Need Thee Every Hour.”³⁴ Healing and exorcism became so common that in 1923 the Presbyterian Church in Korea renounced cessationism.³⁵

Similar examples abound. In India, illiterate Christians learned gospel stories narrated and sung in church; they acknowledged Jesus’s “lordship over all other gods” as they experienced him as their healer, exorcist, provider, protector, and Saviour.³⁶ In the Philippines, demonstrations of Jesus’s power over once-feared spirits convinced converts to abandon former allegiances and pledge allegiance to a newfound God who is able to protect them.³⁷

PENTECOSTAL AMBIVALENCE

Despite stories from the Bible and mission fields, Pentecostals have exhibited ambivalence toward exorcism and deliverance. As biblical literalists, Pentecostals could not

³³ John Nevius, *Demon Possession and Allied Themes: Being an Inductive Study of Phenomena of Our Own Times* (New York: Revell, 1896); Andrew Monteith, “The Ghosts of the Past: Reflexivity in Missionary-Missionized Relationships and John Livingston Nevius’ Influence on 20th Century Demonology,” unpublished essay, Indiana University, December 14, 2013, 4; John Halsey Wood, “John Livingston Nevius and the New Missions History,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 83, no. 1 (2005): 23–40.

³⁴ Sung-Deuk Oak, “Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounters with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea,” *Asian Ethnology* 69, no. 1 (2010): 95, 100, 104, 116.

³⁵ Sean C. Kim, “Reenchanted: Divine Healing in Korean Protestantism,” in Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, 268, 270, 274.

³⁶ Finny Philip, “Christological Nuances in Bhil Pentecostal Theology,” in Synan and Yong, *Global Renewal Christianity*, 12–13.

³⁷ Julie C. Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits: Pentecostal Ministry among the Kankana-Ey Tribe in the Philippines* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 244–47; Julie Ma, “A Comparison of Two Worldviews: Kankana-Ey and Pentecostal,” in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, edited by Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 290.

dismiss biblical demons as metaphors for mental illness. But they struggled with Jesus's comparison of a person to a house. The story implies that it is risky to drive spirits out of a person unoccupied by the Holy Spirit, lest the spirit return with "seven other spirits more wicked than itself."³⁸ Pentecostals applied spatial reasoning to conclude that infilling with the Holy Spirit protects Christians from demonic intrusion.³⁹ But this seemingly ruled out deliverance of *both* non-Christians and Christians baptised with the Holy Spirit. By this logic, exorcism perfectly suits missions but has little place in Pentecostal church life.

Confusion arose from translations of the Greek *daimonizomai* as "demon-possessed." The term implies its inapplicability to Christians who belong to Jesus. The Latin Vulgate translates *daimonizomai* as *qui daemonia habebant*—those who *have* demons. One may *possess* a demon—who inflicts oppression, torment, or disease—without being *possessed by* a demon.⁴⁰

Supporting the Vulgate, Jesus cast a spirit out of a man sufficiently in control of his faculties to gain admission to the synagogue.⁴¹ When Jesus freed a woman in the synagogue from a "spirit" of infirmity, he called her a "daughter of Abraham."⁴² When Jesus initially refused a Syrophenician woman's plea to free her daughter from a demon, Jesus named deliverance the "children's bread."⁴³

The New Testament indicates that believing in Jesus does not make Christians immune to the devil. Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as like a king who forgave a servant's debts but

³⁸ Matthew 12:43–45.

³⁹ Stephen Hunt, "Deliverance: The Evolution of a Doctrine," *Themelios* 21, no. 1 (1995): 11.

⁴⁰ Doug Lowenberg, "Demonization and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers," *Enrichment* 18, no. 3 (2013): 89; George Paul Wood, "Discerning Best Practices in Spiritual Warfare," *Enrichment* 18, no. 3 (2013): 104; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: The Gospel in the Power of the Spirit," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 1 (2009): 41; Francis MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2009), 74.

⁴¹ Mark 1:23–25.

⁴² Luke 13:10–16.

⁴³ Mark 7:25–27.

when that servant refused to forgive, the king handed the “wicked” servant over to be “tortured.”⁴⁴ Letters written to Christians after Pentecost admonish: “Do not give the devil a foothold,”⁴⁵ “take your stand against the devil’s schemes,”⁴⁶ “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,”⁴⁷ “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”⁴⁸ Tertullian narrated an incident in which a Christian woman “went to the theatre and returned devil possessed.” Upon being chastised, the demon defended: “I was quite right . . . found her on my own ground.”⁴⁹ Addressed to Christians, such warnings do not specify whether Spirit-baptism offers additional protection.

Although apparently a question of philology or hermeneutics, debates over whether Spirit-filled Christians can be demonised arose from a particular social-historical context. Early twentieth-century Pentecostals had little education or money, leading to social insecurity. When Christian critics denounced ecstatic experiences as demonically inspired, leaders defensively insisted both on their authority to expel demons from non-Christians and on protection through Spirit-baptism.⁵⁰ In 1912, Welsh revivalist Evan Roberts co-authored with Jessie Penn-Lewis a book entitled *War on the Saints: A Text Book on the Work of Deceiving Spirits among the Children of God, and the Way of Deliverance*. The book graphically describes demonic infiltration of Christian bodies and suggests that certain manifestations (Latin *manifestare*, to make public) attributed to the Holy Spirit were demonic counterfeits. Pentecostal leaders

⁴⁴ Matthew 18:23–35.

⁴⁵ Ephesians 4:27.

⁴⁶ Ephesians 6:11.

⁴⁷ James 4:7.

⁴⁸ 1 Peter 5:8.

⁴⁹ Tertullian, *Shows* 26.1–2, Loeb, quoted in Dauntton-Fear, “Deliverance and Exorcism in the Early Church,” 78.

⁵⁰ Kimberly Ervin Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing: Models in Theology and Practice*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology. Supplement Series (Blandford Forum: Deo, 2006), 165.

denounced the book as dangerous, doubling down on insistence that Spirit-baptism safeguards Christians from demons.⁵¹

For much of the twentieth century, deliverance occupied an uneasy space in Western Pentecostalism. In the 1940s, independent U.S. Pentecostals like A. A. Allen (1910–1970) employed sensationalist tactics—such as audio-recordings of “screaming demons”—that pushed denominational Pentecostals away. When, in the 1960s, Oral Roberts (1918–2009) sought middle-class audiences, he replaced exorcism with feel-good messages of psychological well-being and financial prosperity.⁵²

It took a Pentecostal with unparalleled academic credentials, Cambridge-educated Greek and Latin scholar Derek Prince (1915–2003), to break down Pentecostal resistance to the idea that Spirit-baptised Christians might need deliverance. Not coincidentally, Prince encountered spirit-saturated worldviews growing up in a British military family in India under care of a Hindu nanny.⁵³ As a missionary in Kenya, Prince heard Kenyans describe exorcisms—but put stories in his “pending file” until seeing U.S. Pentecostals manifest demons in the 1960s. By distinguishing “soul” from “spirit,” Prince reasoned that although Christians’ spirits belong to Jesus, demons can enter through souls—wills, intellects, and emotions—to occupy bodies.⁵⁴ Employing legal metaphors, Prince argued that by God’s laws demons gain rights through sin, such as unforgiveness or occult (Latin *occultare*, secret magic) knowledge or power.⁵⁵

⁵¹ James Collins, “Deliverance and Exorcism in the Twentieth Century,” in Kay and Parry, *Exorcism & Deliverance*, 88.

⁵² David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975), 7, 50, 157.

⁵³ Brian Stanley, “From Plato to Pentecostalism: Sickness and Deliverance in the Theology of Derek Prince,” in *Studies in Church History*, 58: The Church in Sickness and in Health, ed. Charlotte Methuen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 408.

⁵⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12.

⁵⁵ Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons: What You Need to Know about Demons—Your Invisible Enemies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998), 9, 38, 43.

Many Pentecostals remain ambivalent. A 1985 survey of U.S. Assemblies of God pastors reported that 85 percent agreed that Christians can be demonised, but 37 percent had *never* included deliverance in a church service.⁵⁶ A 2006 survey found that 62 percent of U.S. Pentecostals had witnessed divine healings, but only 34 percent had witnessed deliverances.⁵⁷ A 2019 Assemblies of God statement acknowledges that Christians can be “oppressed” though not “possessed.” The statement affirms: “If one repents, forsakes their sin and carnal activities, resists temptation, and calls upon the Spirit to cleanse and deliver, victory and freedom will be obtained”—but is silent about the value of deliverance ministry in obtaining freedom.⁵⁸

LIFE-AND-DEATH STAKES

Regardless of theoretical debates, many Pentecostals in the Global South have concluded with Hwa Yung that: “Pastoral experience shows that it is possible for Christians to be demonised.”⁵⁹ Certain Westerners have reached similar conclusions—often through cross-cultural experiences.

Like Derek Prince, North American Francis MacNutt (1925–2020) attained impeccable academic credentials—graduating with honours from Harvard University and earning a Ph.D. in theology as well as ordination as a Dominican priest. After Spirit-baptism among Protestants, MacNutt spent the 1970s catalysing Catholic Charismatic Renewal globally as he itinerated

⁵⁶ Margaret M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 200.

⁵⁷ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Pew Research Center, October 2006), 5, <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2006/10/pentecostals-08.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Assemblies of God, *Position Paper on Spiritual Warfare and the Believer* (2019), <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Spiritual-Warfare-and-the-Believer>.

⁵⁹ Hwa Yung, “Case Studies in Spiritual Warfare from East Asia,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 144; V. Ezekia Francis, “Spiritual Conflict in the Indian Context,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 158; Geleta, “Demonisation and Exorcism,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 102; Tertullian, *Shows* 26.1–2, Loeb, in Dauntion-Fear, “Deliverance and Exorcism in the Early Church,” 78.

across Latin America, Africa, and Asia.⁶⁰ In 1974, Dominican missionaries invited MacNutt to Nigeria to disabuse local seminarians of “primitive, superstitious” fear of curses by “witch doctors.” MacNutt instead concluded that the Nigerians had a more biblical worldview and accurate perception of reality. MacNutt found that when churches fail to offer spiritual protection, Christians turn to occult sources that offer temporary relief but actually worsen sickness and torment. Discovering that even priests and sisters can become infested by demons, MacNutt called the church to stop limiting exorcism to those fully possessed and to stop expecting Christians to gain freedom on their own just by trying harder to resist temptation and practice spiritual disciplines.⁶¹ Sometimes Christians need loving—authoritative yet gentle—deliverance from demons to help them obtain freedom. (The story of how MacNutt arrived at these insights is so inspiring that I wrote his biography.)⁶²

As Charismatic renewal swept across mainstream denominations in the 1970s, and as a “Third Wave” (a misnomer that ignores globally diffuse Pentecostal waves pre-dating Azusa Street) flowed over evangelical churches in the 1980s, deliverance became increasingly respectable and even trendy. This resurgence produced another wave of backlash, as critics charged charismatics with seeing “demons behind every bush” or evading personal accountability by claiming “the devil made me do it.”⁶³ In actuality, few charismatic leaders presented deliverance as an alternative but rather as an aid to repentance and discipleship.

⁶⁰ R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 67, 72; Edward L. Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 30–39; Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93.

⁶¹ MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 24, 31.

⁶² Candy Gunther Brown, *Father Francis: A Biography of Francis S. MacNutt (1925–2020)*, manuscript under review.

⁶³ MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 16; Bob Larson, *Dealing with Demons: An Introductory Guide to Exorcism & Discerning Evil Spirits* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2016), 21; Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker: Overcoming Negative Thoughts, Irrational Feelings, Habitual Sins* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990), 218.

Although both divine healing and deliverance assume the interpenetration of spirit and matter and a cosmic conflict between kingdoms, deliverance provokes greater misgivings. Most healing is visually unremarkable, the process peaceful and pleasant. Deliverance, by contrast, often involves disagreeable manifestations and disrupts social decorum. People's bodies shake, contort, slither, or claw. Voices hiss, growl, threaten, or spew obscenities. Commands to leave may evoke screams or retching, and do not always resolve physical or mental health problems.⁶⁴ Insecure deliverance ministers sometimes react by shouting, chaining and whipping demonised persons, coercing them to fast from food, or even dousing them with boiling wax.⁶⁵ Public exorcisms can be humiliating for the demonised person and, if unsuccessful, for the exorcist. On rare occasions, tragedy results—death by starvation, dehydration, or suffocation.⁶⁶ Media portrayals—infamously *The Exorcist* (1973)—caricatured possession and exaggerated dangers of exorcism; in the film, both priests died, though in the real-life exorcism behind the film no one died.⁶⁷ For Christians seeking respectability, exorcism and deliverance provide very bad press.

But reluctance to confront demons can be even more costly. The gospels suggest that healing sometimes *requires* exorcism. After Jesus's disciples failed to heal a boy from seizures, "Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed *at that moment*."⁶⁸ This story became intensely personal for me in 2003. My Christian, Spirit-baptised, tongues-talking, neuroscientist husband, Joshua W. Brown, Ph.D., had a seizure; was diagnosed with an

⁶⁴ Frank Hammond, *Pigs in the Parlor: The Practical Guide to Deliverance* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 2008), 57–62; MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 24.

⁶⁵ Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 191; Opoku Onyinah, *Spiritual Warfare: A Centre for Pentecostal Theology Short Introduction* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 162; MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 295–96; Geleta, "Demonisation and Exorcism," in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 102.

⁶⁶ Felicitas D. Goodman, *The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel* (New York: Doubleday, 1981); Cuneo, *American Exorcism*, 279.

⁶⁷ *The Exorcist*, produced by William Peter Blatty, directed by William Friedkin (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1973); MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 133; Cuneo, *American Exorcism*, 7.

⁶⁸ Matthew 17:18.

untreatable, terminal brain tumour; manifested demons; experienced deliverance with help of Christian brothers and sisters from Argentina, India, and Kenya; and was miraculously healed—a story he tells in *Proving a Miracle: Unlocking the Power of Prayer to Heal* (2026).⁶⁹

If certain healings require exorcism, it follows that certain failures of healing prayer may be attributable to neglect of deliverance ministry. When Christians experience prayer for healing as ineffective, they are less likely to pray expectantly and persistently, and more likely to seek help from occult sources that invite demons, perpetuating a vicious cycle.⁷⁰ Labelling demonic torment as “possession” implies that exorcism is rarely needed—never by a Spirit-filled Christian. Acknowledgments that Christians may need deliverance can imply that Christians should be able to obtain it on their own if they simply walk in holiness. Christians struggling to experience freedom may feel too ashamed to reach out for help.⁷¹ When pastors and leaders struggle, shame and fear tempt cover-ups that not only keep individuals in bondage but harm others and damage the reputation of the church.⁷² Christians who cannot find, or are too embarrassed to seek, help through local churches, often turn to maverick exorcists advertised on YouTube or TikTok who may lack accountability, use questionable tactics, or charge exorbitant fees, and who cannot offer post-deliverance care.⁷³

⁶⁹ Joshua W. Brown, *Proving a Miracle: Unlocking the Power of Prayer to Heal* (New York: Harper, 2026).

⁷⁰ Candy Gunther Brown, *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Healing Gods: Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Christian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Candy Gunther Brown, *Debating Yoga and Mindfulness in Public Schools: Reforming Secular Education or Reestablishing Religion?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁷¹ Jörg Hausteil, “Embodying the Spirit(s): Pentecostal Demonology and Deliverance Discourse in Ethiopia,” *Ethnos* 76, no. 4 (2011): 539.

⁷² Jaharianson Saragih and Parulihan Sipayung, “Deliverance, Mental Health, and Prosperity: A Holistic Diaconial Perspective from Indonesian Context,” in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia: Contextual Theologies and Practices of Diakonia and Christian Social Services*, edited by Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, and Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2021), 492–494.

⁷³ Rodney Hogue, *Liberated: Set Free & Staying Free from Demonic Strongholds* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2019), 22.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Widespread popular belief in and fear of spirits presents opportunities and challenges for the church. A 2023–2024 Pew Research Center survey in 36 countries on six continents found that most people—regardless of religious identity—believe that unseen spirits exist and can occupy animals, parts of nature (e.g. mountains), or objects (e.g. crystals).⁷⁴ In Asia, people who are younger and better educated are *more* likely to believe in spirits.⁷⁵ In Singapore, 55 percent of all adults say that spells, curses, or magic influence people’s lives.⁷⁶ As Hwa Yung expresses the opportunity, “People give their allegiance to Christ when they see that his power is superior to magic and voodoo, the curses and blessings of witch doctors, and malevolence of evil spirits, and that his salvation is a real liberation from the power of evil and death.”⁷⁷ The corresponding challenge, articulated by Wonsuk and Julie Ma and by Simon Chan, is for Asian theologians to discern how to relate the Holy Spirit to traditional ideas of universal spirits or energies such as *qi*, as for instance in qigong or acupuncture.⁷⁸ In my own cultural context, efforts to develop alternatives such as “Christian yoga,” “Christian martial arts,” or “Christian mindfulness” (by substituting terms or adding Bible verses) have raised difficult questions.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Jonathan Evans, Kirsten Lesage, William Miner, Kelsey Jo Starr, and Manolo Corichi, *Believing in Spirits and Life After Death Is Common Around the World* (Pew Research Center, May 6, 2025), https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2025/05/PR_2025.05.06_spirituality-around-the-world_report.pdf.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Evans, Alan Cooperman, Kelsey Jo Starr, Manolo Corichi, William Miner, and Kirsten Lesage, *Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies* (Pew Research Center, June 17, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/06/17/religion-and-spirituality-in-east-asian-societies/>.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Evans, Kelsey Jo Starr, Manolo Corichi, and William Miner, *Buddhism, Islam and Religious Pluralism in South and Southeast Asia* (Pew Research Center, September 12, 2023), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2023/09/pr_2023.09.12_se-asia_report.pdf.

⁷⁷ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., American Society of Missiology Series 52 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 35.

⁷⁸ Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 64; Wonsuk Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, 58, 71; Simon Chan, “Pentecostalism at the Crossroads,” in Synan and Yong, *Global Renewal Christianity*, 388.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Healing Gods*; Brown, *Debating Yoga*; Candy Gunther Brown, “Spiritual Property Rights to Bodily Practices: Pentecostal Views of Yoga and Meditation as Inviting Demonization,” in *Annual Review of the*

Christians who live in religiously diverse societies such as Singapore must discern how to offer freedom from fear of spirits while also promoting religious harmony. Jesus offers guidance by teaching that the greatest two commandments are to love God and love one's neighbours.⁸⁰ The apostle Paul reminds that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."⁸¹ There are indications that churches in Singapore already do this well, loving their neighbours rather than demonising people.⁸² As long as Christians continue to approach neighbours with compassion and respect, shared belief in spirits can provide common ground for empathetic conversation about felt needs for freedom.⁸³

Despite the recent popularity of "strategic-level spiritual warfare," martial frameworks may be counterproductive.⁸⁴ The method's most influential advocate, Peter Wagner (1930–2016)—former missionary to Bolivia and professor at the U.S. Fuller Theological Seminary—borrowed selectively from Argentinian revivalists such as Carlos Annacondia (1944–). Critics note that spiritual mapping, tearing down strongholds, and confronting territorial spirits have weak biblical foundations, confuse spiritual and political kingdoms, offend human neighbours, and invite spiritual counterattack by exceeding Christians' God-given sphere of authority.⁸⁵ A

Sociology of Religion, 8: Pentecostals and the Body, edited by Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁸⁰ Matthew 22:36–40.

⁸¹ Ephesians 6:12.

⁸² Jean DeBernardi, "Global Christian Culture and the Antioch of Asia," in *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, edited by Lai Ah Eng (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 137; Robert M. Solomon, *Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 1994).

⁸³ Amos Yong, "The Demonic in Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and in the Religious Consciousness of Asia," in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, 92.

⁸⁴ Chan, "Whither Pentecostalism?" 474.

⁸⁵ Assemblies of God, *Position Paper*; Hwa Yung, "Endued with Power: The Pentecostal-Charismatic Renewal and the Asian Church in the Twenty-First Century," *AJPS* 6, no. 1 (2003): 77; Onyinah, *Spiritual Warfare*, 16; Hwa Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognises the Demonic," in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 14; A. Scott Moreau, "A Survey of North American Spiritual Warfare Thinking," in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 123; Juliet Thomas, "Issues from the Indian Perspective," in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 147; Working Group Report, "Statement on Spiritual Warfare," in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 312; A. Scott Moreau,

U.S. preoccupation with methods has been described as “methodolatry.”⁸⁶ Wonsuk and Julie Ma caution that “it is one thing to preach [that demons, like germs, are everywhere] within the West where spiritual beings were totally ignored; but, it is an entirely different case when they are introduced to a cultural context which is already crowded with myriads of good and evil spirits.”⁸⁷ The effort may inspire fear rather than faith in the Holy Spirit’s unparalleled power.

Certain psychological methods also have questionable foundations. Pioneering Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875–1961) participated in seances and engaged a spirit-guide named Philemon in lengthy conversations, through which Jung concluded that psychological wholeness requires incorporating evil within, rather than expelling it from, human personalities.⁸⁸

Jungian theories undergird certain “inner healing” methods, particularly diagnoses and treatments for “dissociative identity disorder” or DID (and the related, imprecisely defined label “Satanic ritual abuse”).⁸⁹ Dr. Jerry Mungadze (ca. 1950s–) is a psychological counsellor born in Zimbabwe and educated in the United States. Mungadze diagnoses many people who think themselves demon-possessed with DID. Voices claiming to be demons are “really” parts of the person’s mind, or “alters,” that “need to be embraced rather than cast out.” Mungadze does not attempt exorcism without “acceptance by the person’s created parts,” lest exorcism

“Religious Borrowing as a Two-Way Street: An Introduction to Animistic Tendencies in the Euro-North American Context,” in *Christianity and the Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, Number 2, edited by Edward Rommen and Harold Netland, Evangelical Missiological Society Series (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 174; John Paul Jackson, *Needless Casualties of War* (Fort Worth, TX: Streams Publishing, 1999), 34, 53, 70; Wonsuk Ma, “‘In Jesus’ Name...’: Power Encounter from an Asian Pentecostal Perspective,” in *Principalities and Powers: Biblical Reflections in the Asian Context*, edited by Forum on Theology (Mandaluyong City: OMF Literature, 2007), 35.

⁸⁶ V. J. Janesick, “Chapter 12: The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994).

⁸⁷ Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 192; Wonsuk Ma, “A ‘First Waver’ Looks at the ‘Third Wave’: A Pentecostal Reflection on Charles Kraft’s Power Encounter Terminology,” *Pneuma* 19, no. 2 (1997): 194.

⁸⁸ William K. Kay, “Deliverance and Exorcism in Psychological Perspective,” in Kay and Parry, *Exorcism & Deliverance*, 145–147.

⁸⁹ Cuneo, *American Exorcism*, 200.

“antagonises,” making alters “angry and destructive.”⁹⁰ If one supposes that Western educational biases may in certain cases result in misdiagnosing demonised people with DID, it follows that demons might avoid exorcism by deceiving counsellors into defining them out of existence.⁹¹

Biblical teachings on demons suggest that any interaction beyond commanding demons to depart in Jesus’s name risks deception or amounts to divination.⁹² Charles Kraft (1932–), former missionary to Nigeria and colleague of Wagner’s at Fuller, admits gaining most of his knowledge about demons through personal interviews with them during deliverance sessions.⁹³ Kraft’s idiosyncratic methods include asking angels to cut the arms and legs of demons with a spiritual sword, imposing increasing levels of pain on demons, commanding demons to jump into a box then asking Jesus to dispose of the box, and bringing four-year-old and eight-year-old versions of the same person’s inner child into conversation with Jesus.⁹⁴ As Ma and Ma note, “biblical ‘holes’ are now sometimes filled by less than biblical concepts.”⁹⁵

The allure of sophisticated-sounding psychological methods derives from associations with modern medicine. Pentecostals do not want to repeat anti-medical miscalculations of their predecessors—including zealous missionaries who needlessly died of malaria rather than take quinine to prove faith in divine healing.⁹⁶ Exorcistic excesses heightened caution not to misdiagnose illness as demonisation. Thus, the Assemblies of God affirms that “Great care must

⁹⁰ Jerry Mungadze, “Spiritual Conflict in Light of Psychology and Medicine,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 206.

⁹¹ Larson, *Dealing with Demons*, 96; Hwa, “Endued with Power,” 70.

⁹² Deuteronomy 18:10–14; 1 Samuel 28:3–25; 1 Timothy 4:1; Robert J. Priest, “Missiologial Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm,” in *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues*, edited by Edward Rommen (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 30–31.

⁹³ Charles H. Kraft, “Contemporary Trends in the Treatment of Spiritual Conflict,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 197.

⁹⁴ Anthony Casey, “A New Reality: Charles Kraft’s View of Spiritual Warfare,” unpublished paper, 2011, <https://culturcity.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/kraft-on-spiritual-warfare.pdf>, 19, 21; Ma, “A ‘First Waver,’” 191–92.

⁹⁵ Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 188.

⁹⁶ Gary B. McGee, “‘Power from on High’: A Historical Perspective on the Radical Strategy in Missions,” in Ma and Menzies, *Pentecostalism in Context*, 325.

be taken not to confuse emotional and mental illnesses with demonic activity.”⁹⁷ Mungadze urges that the “safest approach is *first* to rule out mental illness or psychological problems before assuming that it is a spiritual conflict.”⁹⁸ Yet, treating deliverance as a *last* resort privileges Western, “two-tiered,” materialist over global, “three-tiered,” holistic worldviews.⁹⁹ From the latter perspective, it can be just as dangerous to postpone spiritual as psychological care. Problems may be psychological *and* spiritual, and some individuals may benefit from using multiple approaches simultaneously.

FREE IN CHRIST

Despite challenges inherent to deliverance and risks of replacing one methodolatry with another, some proven models may be adaptable to Asian contexts.¹⁰⁰ Pablo Bottari, Director of Deliverance for Argentinian revivalist Carlos Annacondia, has ministered to some 80,000 individuals (my husband included) and overseen deliverance of one million persons—ninety percent of them Christians.¹⁰¹ Bottari’s book, *Libres en Cristo* (1999), translated as *Free in Christ* (2000), teaches a ten-step model that minimises manifestations, expels demons quickly, and prepares people to walk out freedom. Bottari’s overriding principle is: “Deliverance ministry should be guided by God’s love and by a dependence on the Holy Spirit every step of the way.

⁹⁷ Assemblies of God, *Position Paper*.

⁹⁸ Mungadze, “Spiritual Conflict,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, 205.

⁹⁹ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (1982): 43; Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, 60–61; Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “Deliver Us from Evil Consultation Statement,” in Moreau et al., *Deliver Us from Evil*, xx.

¹⁰¹ Pablo Bottari, *Free in Christ: Your Complete Handbook on the Ministry of Deliverance* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000), 60.

Remember, your main job is not to cast out a demon; it is to help a soul whom the Lord loves and does not want to hurt . . . Don't ever treat the person being ministered to like a demon!"¹⁰²

Bottari's model is simple. Step 1: Be loving, not militant. Step 2: If a spirit manifests, command it to stop in Jesus's name. Avoid divided authority by asking others not to speak to or touch the person. Bind demons verbally, not physically. Do not mention the blood of Jesus, lest bound demons become violent. Step 3: Establish communication with the person. Keep your eyes open. Step 4: Make sure the person wants to be free—and is willing to repent, forgive, renounce benefits from wrong conduct and attitudes, and change lifestyles. Step 5: Make sure the person has accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Step 6: Interview the person to find "open doors" (following Jesus's "house" metaphor). Look for unforgiveness, drugs, occult, sex outside marriage, trauma, sins, or curses. Step 7: Close doors. Lead the person to pray after you: forgive, repent, reject spirits, renounce benefits. Establish eye contact. Break power of renounced spirits and yokes of bondage. Step 8: After closing all doors, cast out spirits in Jesus's name. Do not worry about where to send them, their names, or how many there are. If the person does not feel free after one or two commands, repeat Step 6. Step 9: Lead thanksgiving. Step 10: Lead in asking for Holy Spirit infilling. Pray for healing. Offer suggestions for staying free.

CONCLUSION

As the Antioch of Asia, the church in Singapore is uniquely positioned to offer global leadership in ministering deliverance.¹⁰³ Popular fears offer opportunities to demonstrate that the

¹⁰² Bottari, *Free in Christ*; Pablo Deiros and Pablo Bottari, "Deliverance from Dark Strongholds," in *Power, Holiness, and Evangelism: Rediscovering God's Purity, Power, and Passion for the Lost*, edited by Randy Clark (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1999), 112.

¹⁰³ Kong Hee, "Singapore: The Antioch of Asia?" in *Voices Loud and Clear*, edited by Kong Hee, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2024), 181–203; DeBernardi, "Global Christian Culture and the Antioch of Asia."

Holy Spirit is more powerful than other spirits, and deliverance is the children's bread. My encouragement is to avoid emulating Western materialism or methodolatry. The choice is not between credulity and modernisation, but between fear and freedom in Christ. Return to gospel basics. Love God. Love people. Proclaim good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick. Drive out demons.

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