

**“Spiritual Warfare” and
“Deliverance Ministry”
and Seventh-day Adventists**

**A Report of the Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

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Foreword

During the past decade there has developed, particularly among charismatic Christian bodies in various places, a movement that has come to be known as “deliverance ministry” in which evil spirits—believed to control human beings who exhibit bizarre forms of human behavior—are “exorcised” or “cast out.” Believing that Satan often harasses those whom he does not directly control, some “deliverance ministry” advocates have also developed a companion program of “spiritual warfare” by which a child of God may combat supernatural forces of evil in his or her own life experience.

Because the New Testament speaks about Christ casting out demons, and conferring upon His disciples the authority and power to do the same, interest in casting out demons has mushroomed among many Christians, particularly in evangelical circles, and a movement has developed.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some Seventh-day Adventists have been influenced by such a movement, which, at least superficially, appears to be based upon Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen G. White.

On the other hand, others in the church, equally sincere, have raised serious questions about the sensational claims of those engaged in this “spiritual warfare” (which has developed its own vocabulary with a flavor strongly militaristic and highly aggressive) and especially “deliverance ministry.”

Unfortunately differences of opinion between the two groups has often led to a polarizing effect, with some stoutly contending that the Christian believer’s power over evil spirits is a God-given right that should be exercised vigorously on behalf of those believed to be victims of Satan’s control, while others feel that “exorcism” is a practice to be completely avoided.

Thus the lines have been drawn in widely-separated groups of Adventists in North America particularly in recent years. In one of our colleges a teacher lost employment because of unwillingness to abandon what was believed to be a divine commission to deliver the captive victims of Satan. In one field the local conference administration sponsored seminars in how to conduct “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry.” And in another, a minister was relieved of denominational employment as a retiree because his emphasis on this specialized form of “ministry” left substantial divisive controversy in its wake across the nation.

Still elsewhere, a group of indignant laymen accused their conference president (who had asked his local pastors not to allow in their pulpits ministers bringing this kind of emphasis) of violating the principle of Mark 9:38-40 and Luke 9:49-50, where Christ had commanded, "Forbid him not." The president countered by responding that for him the principle involved, rather, was that of Matthew 7:16-20 ("by their fruits ye shall know them") and Romans 16:17 ("mark them which cause divisions and offenses . . . and avoid them").

What is the average Seventh-day Adventist to make of all of this? And what should be the position of our church?

Seeking to find answers that are biblical, rational, and adequate, and sensing the increasingly urgent need to provide some counsel by which to enable our members to avoid the extremes of fanaticism and pitfalls prepared for the unwary by the ever-vigilant enemy of all souls, the General Conference Committee on July 10, 1980, created an ad hoc "Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Study Committee" to investigate this subject in depth. Its members were charged with the responsibility of suggesting, if possible, appropriate guidelines for the world church. And it was instructed to report its findings to the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

The personnel selected to serve on the study committee came from a broad background and depth of experience, representing a spectrum of academic disciplines. W. Richard Leshner (religious education), director of the Biblical Research Institute and more recently elected a General Conference general vice president, was named committee chairman. Roger W. Coon (communication), then pastor of the Takoma Park (MD) church and now an associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate of the General Conference, was asked to serve as secretary.

The committee met on the campus of Andrews University for two three-day sessions, on October 27-29, 1980, and January 18-20, 1981. A preliminary draft report was subsequently reviewed by the members on a two-hour conference telephone hookup on March 16, 1981. The committee then convened again at Andrews University for what was believed to be a final session on May 11, 1982. And lastly, the available members of the committee met at General Conference headquarters in Washington for three and one-half hours on June 15, 1982, with an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister who has become prominent in "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" at his personal and urgent request.

In its various sessions the committee interviewed a wide variety of persons—ministers, missionaries, educators, businessmen, students, housewives, and a physician—who at first had been personally and intimately involved with "deliverance ministry" and "spiritual warfare" in various situations in North America and abroad. In addition, seven committee members prepared a series of research papers, which are appended to the chairman's copy of this report.

The committee noted two extreme views prevalent within Christendom today: (1) the tendency to see the *immediate* presence and activity of evil spirits as the predisposing cause of *every* individual tragedy of human experience, and (2) the tendency to find *purely naturalistic* explanations and solutions for *all* instances of mental and emotional illness and abnormal behavior.

While the committee felt that the Scriptures and the writings of Mrs. White clearly point to the reality of the demonic and to the legitimacy of counseling and importunate prayer to bring freedom and relief to victims of Satan's influence, it also recognized that these same inspired sources sound a warning against the dangers inherent in misapplication, misuse, and mishandling of this kind of ministry.

Indeed, the committee felt that in certain instances brought to its attention misuse (if not malpractice) has occurred, a misuse which has proven dangerous to the spiritual, physical, and/or emotional well-being of the individual whose healing was sought.

This cautious stance recognizes that the threefold message of Revelation 14—not the casting out of demons—is yet today the *raison d'être* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The committee's report, which is intended to be educative rather than legislative, is presented here for the reader's serious study in this day when the counsel of the apostle Paul to the Christians at Ephesus was never more timely:

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm (Eph 6:10-13, *New American Standard Bible*).

Biblical Research Institute

Introduction

Seventh-day Adventists believe that behind the scenes of earthly affairs, invisible, supernatural forces of good and evil are engaged in cosmic warfare for the control of every human being (Eph 6:12). We believe in the existence of a literal, personal devil, now named Satan, who once was a perfect (and heaven's highest) angel (Ezek 28:15). Scripture further declares that Satan experienced a moral fall, took one-third of all the holy angels with him (Rev 12:4), and at the conclusion of that first war in heaven he was literally, physically, ejected, eventually coming down to planet earth (vss. 7-9). Here he continues yet today, diligently waging warfare against the kingdom of God and all that is good and worthwhile in the universe. We believe that today under Satan's immediate, direct control there are multitudes of evil spirits, fallen angels, demons, allied with him in this "great controversy between Christ and Satan."

We believe, further, that we are today living in the closing days of this earth's history, and that this warfare will intensify to an unprecedented degree as this ages-long conflict draws to its close (vs. 12). Because these supernatural

forces of good and evil operate largely outside the range of human knowledge and control, their nature and modes of operation are not always clear and understandable; yet we believe that these forces are real and personal.

We also believe that it is the inalienable right of every child of God to be free from the *control* of Satan (though not, of course, from his temptations) through the superior power of Jesus Christ who won a supreme victory over Satan at Calvary. There, by His personal and once-for-all sacrifice, He earned the right to confer upon His followers not only eternal life in the hereafter, but also freedom from the control of Satan in this present temporal existence.

A number of other Christians also believe all of the above doctrinal tenets surrounding the problem of evil in the universe, and they invitingly beckon Seventh-day Adventists to join with them actively in doing something constructive to combat the reign of Satan in this world. They claim that they have the power to cast out evil spirits, to drive back the supernatural forces of Satan's kingdom of darkness, and to dispossess him of his human prey. They say that we Adventists, too, may have this power—indeed, if we are truly genuine Christians, we *will* have this power, and that we may wield it as they do. Anything less, they affirm, is a virtual denial of the Christian faith once delivered to the saints.

The “deliverance” sessions they conduct are impressive, dramatic, and sensational. They appear to confront Satan and his evil angels in direct combat. They seem to have power to force demons audibly to identify themselves by name, and then they boldly order them to depart the body of their victim by the superior power in the name of Jesus Christ. And the demons seem to obey!

Now these exponents of “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” invite us to join them in this challenging work which, say they, carries not only the authority but also the command of Scripture.

Should we go along?

There are some in the church who think we should.

There are others who are raising questions.

To raise questions at this point is not to prove oneself a skeptic, or to impugn either the sincerity or dedication of the practitioners of “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry.” Nor is it a “cop-out” to escape the high risks that necessarily devolve upon anyone who dares to challenge Satan on his home ground.

In the same sermon in which Jesus commanded, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” He also declared that “by their fruits ye shall know them” (see Matt 7:1, 16, 20). While no Christian may ever judge the character or motivation of a fellow human being, yet Christ clearly intended to convey the idea that His followers should carefully reason from cause to effect, and from effect to cause, and order their lives accordingly in a prudent fashion.

Christianity is not predicated upon the abdication of a human being's reasoning powers. On the contrary, it places a premium upon their correct functioning—but always within the framework of faith and based upon inspired writings. Christianity, indeed, sanctifies reason and intellect, placing them upon vantage ground, all the while subordinating them to the objective control of the Word of God.

In “deliverance ministry,” as it is variously practiced at the present time by many of its enthusiastic advocates, there are a number of features which give cause for serious concern, that raise a danger signal, that sound a warning for caution. In (1) the philosophy which undergirds the movement, and in (2) the manner in which it is often practiced (interestingly, the methodology is often in a state of flux), the committee finds that which causes it to take a second look—especially in view of certain pertinent scriptures and rather straightforward, clear-cut statements from the writings of Ellen G. White which our church holds, respectfully, to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. (For example, our church has been warned that in the very last days just such challenges to the miraculous “will bring Seventh-day Adventists to the test.”)¹

It is, therefore, neither unkind nor unfair to draw back a moment to raise some probing, penetrating questions and to seek frank answers for such, to “test the spirits” by yardsticks provided by inspired writings. It is an area too important to trifle with, for mistakes here may affect the destiny not only of the afflicted but also the one who seeks to bring him relief.

I. Historical Backgrounds: Past, Present, Future

It is impossible today to understand adequately phenomena in “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” without first taking into account the data available to us from the times of the Bible and the subsequent development of the post-New Testament Christian church. Since prophecy has been defined by one writer as “history written in advance,” it will not be inappropriate to include here a survey of instruction and counsel from Scripture and the pen of Ellen White concerning what the present and future may hold for God’s people just before Jesus returns.

A. The Old and Intertestamentary Periods

The Mesopotamian-Canaanite world out of which the Old Testament emerged was extremely conscious of the existence of malignant spirits, and the Hebrew prophets attested in their writings to this fundamental reality even in their own culture.

On the contrary, however, demonology, while certainly present among the Hebrews, still existed in inchoate form in Old Testament times, at least as far as the inspired record attests. While there are in its pages undeniable evidences of what today we might speak of as demonic possession, there is not one single clear-cut instance of “exorcism” (the expulsion of evil spirits from persons and/or places—an especially well-known phenomenon in Sumero-Akkadian civilizations) being practiced among the Jews of Old Testament times.

Why is this so? If demons were present, why were no steps taken for their

¹*Selected Messages*, book. 2, 53; see also 48-55.

expulsion? One answer suggested by scholars is that (Jehovah) is, from beginning to end, seen as so fully in control of all situations and circumstances that the evil spirits are always seen as completely under the regulation and control of Jehovah, thus their preemptive activity is totally precluded. The problem of demonology, as far as the world of the Hebrews of antiquity is concerned, is therefore merely a peripheral one, completely overshadowed by the commanding presence and total authority of Jehovah.

A crucial distinction needs to be recognized at this point between the attitude toward the existence of demons by the Jews and that of their non-Hebrew neighbors. The Babylonians, for example, saw *every illness as traceable to the work of demons (some Christians today would concur in this view)*. The Israelites, however, recognized that *although demons indeed might cause illness, not every such manifestation is properly linked to their direct activity*.

The typical non-Hebrew dweller in Mesopotamia lived his life constantly in fear and danger of evil spirits. Amulets were widely favored to ward off such encounters, but the chief recourse for protection was found in the form of ceremonies of incantation, administered by a professional priest/exorcist. In the ceremony (not unlike the practice of some in “deliverance ministry” today) the officiating priest sought to discover which demons were troubling the afflicted, the better to conduct successfully the appropriate required ceremony. The ritual not only utilized certain incantation rites but also employed specific verbal formulae blurred magic, religion, and disease.

There is a remarkable—and distressing—similarity between these pagan Sumero-Akkadian rituals and those sometimes employed by modern “Christian” practitioners of “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry”—a concern to which we will return again and again.

Although the incantation rituals achieved great popularity in ancient Mesopotamia, there is, by way of stark contrast, a total absence of such rites in the official practices recorded among the Hebrews. Indeed, their Old Testament Scriptures inveighed heavily against the practice of magic, incantation, and exorcistic liturgies.

As the demonology of the intertestamental period developed, these evil spirits were frequently identified or associated with dispositions such as fornication or greed, an identification now revived and increasingly witnessed among believers in “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry”—a cause of growing concern among many.

In this milieu it generally came to be accepted that *every* kind of illness, from insanity down to lesser afflictions, was due to the immediate presence and activity of malevolent spirits. Demons came to be seen as also being capable of possessing places and events as well as people. And thus it was that ritual exorcism, once the exclusive preserve of the pagan dwellers of Mesopotamia and totally unknown in the Judaism of biblical times, now becomes commonplace among the Hebrews.

Partly perhaps because of their contact with Persian influences, the Jews in intertestament times signaled a shift in their perception of reality. Until now, demons had largely been associated with physical evil; now they become attached

to ethical evil as well. This ethical opposition to God and His kingdom transforms demons into devils, and places them under the severest censure.

Thus, by the time we reach the Christian era of the first century A.D. we find the marked presence of demonology in the New Testament where Jesus and His disciples are frequently portrayed as in conflict with demonic forces. And there is a growing interest with things demonic.

To recapitulate, the similarity between the ancient Near Eastern exorcistic rituals and that practiced today by many practitioners of “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” tends to give pause to the objective Christian observer of the contemporary scene, especially in view of the absence of such rituals from the Old Testament (and, as we will note subsequently, below, basically from the New Testament as well).

The absence of exorcistic ritual from the Old Testament points to the power of Yahweh over all evil. This focus on the salvation of God points us away from excessive preoccupation with the demonic.

And the relationship between the use of demonic terminology to characterize disease, increasingly popular in certain “deliverance” circles today, may merely reflect an oversensitiveness and superstitious conscience. It, unfortunately, goes beyond the biblical data to label uncritically all or most disease as directly caused by Satan.

B. The New Testament Period

The New Testament writings present the perplexing and distressing picture of demonic forces not only impinging upon but ruling over creaturely existence. The influence of these forces is portrayed throughout the New Testament, but specific case examples of demon possession and deliverance of Satan’s captives are confined to the Gospels and Acts. (Concern with demonic possession and deliverance is, of course, present elsewhere in the New Testament—see Colossians and 1 Peter, for example.) We will now attempt to summarize the data from these five books.

Although the distinction probably is not significant (since both Satan and his subordinate fallen angels have the same objectives and utilize much the same *modus operandi*), it may yet be interesting to note that although Satan is viewed as behind and superior to all demonic forces, except in the case of Judas, in the New Testament Satan himself is never spoken of as “possessing” an individual. Rather, he is pictured as the instigator of moral evil, the one who tempts weakened mortals to sin. Contrarily, demons or spirits are described as the agencies that possess the bodies (physical illness) or minds (mental illness) of people, but not as the powers that tempt persons to sin.

There seems to be some evidence that people became possessed because they were especially sinful (Judas is one example to the contrary that quickly comes to mind). While possession and special sinfulness may go hand in hand (Mary Magdalene may be a good case in point), in terms of the data of the New Testament itself, possession appears to be related specifically to physical and mental illness, rather than to be linked with doing sinful deeds.

With regard to possession and illness, there appears to be no precise demarcation made in the New Testament between demon possession and illness caused by other factors. Sometimes people are pictured as ill with various diseases without any mention being made of possession; at other times the same diseases are ascribed to possession. In any case, from the New Testament point of view, while not all illness is due (or even is pictured as being due) to possession, the supernatural power of evil is seen as behind all illness.

The most notable feature of possession is the substitution of the human self, ego, or personality by an alien spiritual power. This is seen especially in cases where the demons speak through the vocal chords of the demonized.

Concerning the characteristics of the demons, the following are especially notable:

1. The Gospels imply degrees of badness among the evil spirits.
2. They also correspondingly portray degrees of demon possession.
3. The demons exhibit supernatural knowledge of the identity of Jesus and the fact of their own judgment destruction.
4. The methodology by which the demons are dispossessed of their human prey is spelled out clearly in Scripture: They are expelled by a simple, short, authoritative word of command. Interestingly, Jesus is nowhere in the Gospels called an “exorcist.” And *when He casts out demons there are never any long, drawn-out, time-consuming exercises*. Prayer is mentioned in connection with deliverance from demons only in one instance where the nature of the possession appears to be exceptionally severe.

Though the power to cast out demons was indeed conferred on Christ’s disciples by the Lord, the New Testament—in terms of the data it supplies—is very reserved about this power being given, as far as including all people at all times.

The act and task of demon-deliverance must be understood in the Scriptures in the overall understanding of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, and the infilling of Christ’s Spirit. Here it finds its ultimate significance.

There are two elements common to deliverance from demons in the Gospel and Acts accounts: (1) the mention of Jesus’ name, and (2) the exercise of faith. Prayer and fasting (mentioned in only one account) are perhaps to be viewed under the broad heading of the exercise of faith. Also, certain strange (to us) acts (touching the hem of a garment, praying over handkerchiefs or aprons, standing in Peter’s shadow, et cetera) probably have more to do ultimately with the exercise of faith in Jesus than with any other factor.

The casting out of demons was not an end in itself; the vacuum left by the departing devils must be filled by positive good—God’s presence—lest the demons return to an empty place and make it worse than it was before. And the casting out of demons can only be properly understood in the overall context of the motif of the kingdom of God—and His kingdom in men’s hearts.

It appears that the Scriptures are concerned lest potentially sensationalistic phenomena be overly magnified. In the case of “speaking in tongues” it is implicitly permitted, but tightly regulated, and placed last in all of the catalogues of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

C. The Post-New Testament Period

The earliest evidence of what might be called a Christian rite of exorcism is found in the middle of the third century (about the year A.D. 250). Here we discover the practice of a ritual conducted in conjunction with baptism. It appeared to signify the change that the baptismal candidate was making, withdrawing his prior allegiance to the realm of Satan and the demons and placing it now with the realm of Christ.

It is important that we do not confuse this kind of “exorcism” with the kind exhibited in cases where demons are believed to have taken possession of individuals and are summarily expelled. During medieval times farfetched tales of wonders of various sorts were widespread and prevalent, but it is not until the latter Middle Ages that there is much reliable evidence demonstrating that much attention was given by Christians to what we today speak of as “exorcism.” As a matter of fact, it appears that what little efforts at exorcism were made at this time seem more to be devoted to the matter of how to identify witches than anything else.

The formal ritual in conjunction with baptism, mentioned above, was evidently practiced generally throughout the Middle Ages in connection with a somewhat elaborate rite (which rite was condensed in the *Rituale Romanum* of A.D. 1614).

Interestingly, an abbreviated form of this rite was also published in the earliest Lutheran service books. But Calvinists shunned this sort of practice, and the Lutherans themselves generally came to abandon it as well.

Perhaps most striking (and significant) for us today is the evidence from history in the early modern period (about A.D. 1600). Exorcists in England, southwest Germany, and Italy were then gaining some degree of notoriety. The ecclesiastical authorities were usually found to be questioning the procedures and/or validity of the exorcisms that were purportedly being conducted, and ecclesiastical trials of the would-be exorcists were the usual consequence for such sensationalists.

One especially striking case of the period involved an Italian monk who produced a flurry of excitement by his activity ostensibly in casting out demons. His colleagues and ecclesiastical superiors were amazed and puzzled by his success in view of the very scandalous life he was then living!

A relatively successful exorcism, therefore, is not necessarily evidence that the power of God has truly been at work.

A fact noted at this point in history has also been observed by many in more recent times: *Whereas in places where devils had not previously been known to be prevalent prior to the arrival of this monk-exorcist, all manner of them seemed to crop up when he came to town.*

Until the fairly recent upsurge of interest in exorcism developed, neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant Christian bodies have given much attention to the phenomenon of exorcism, at least in Western Europe and in North America. As recently as 1961 one Catholic authority could declare that exorcism was “rarely

necessary in civilized lands; but foreign missionaries are sometimes called on to use it.” (Protestants, generally, have tended for the most part to hold the same view.)

D. Today and Tomorrow

Inspiration has told us that the period of Christ’s personal ministry among men was the time of greatest activity for the forces of the kingdom of darkness. For ages Satan with his evil angels had been seeking to control the bodies and the souls of men, to bring upon them sin and suffering; then he had charged all this misery upon God. Jesus was revealing to men the character of God. He was breaking Satan’s power, and setting his captives free. New life and love and power from heaven were moving upon the hearts of men, and the prince of evil was aroused to contend for the supremacy of his kingdom. Satan summoned all his forces, and at every step contested the work of Christ.²

Then, without a break, the Lord looks down to the closing scenes of this earth’s history, and prompts His special messenger to add these words full of significance to us who live today:

So it will be in the great final conflict of the controversy between righteousness and sin. While new life and light and power are descending from on high upon the disciples of Christ [possibly a reference to the outpouring of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit prior to the close of human probation], a new life is springing up from beneath, and energizing the agencies of Satan. Intensity is taking possession of every earthly element. With a subtlety gained through centuries of conflict, the prince of evil works under a disguise.³

We are told, further, by this same writer, that it is indeed “important” for us to understand Satan’s snares, that we may escape them today. In his “last campaign” Satan will move upon “some deceived souls” to advocate the idea that he does not really exist as a personal entity.⁴

Indeed, one of his snares is the “subtle,” “mischievous,” and “fast-spreading” “error” that “Satan has no existence as a personal being; that the name is used in Scripture merely to represent men’s evil thoughts and desires”⁵—merely a rhetorical device to personify evil. And this prediction, made more than a century ago, is more than amply fulfilled today by modern humanism.

Whatever the popular concept may be today, the testimony of the Bible is that *Jesus* believed in a *personal* devil. Immediately upon entering into His earthly ministry, Christ was confronted by such a personage who brought nearly overwhelming temptations to Him. They conversed together (not, however, over

²*The Desire of Ages*, 257.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Testimonies for the Church*, 1:341.

⁵*The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, 524.

the person of a possessed human being!), and this confrontation was real (see Matt 4:1-11).

Then, as now, Satan worked “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness” in those who “received not the love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10). God permits the wicked, who deliberately choose evil, to “believe a lie” through the “strong delusions” which Satan increasingly will bring as the end of time approaches (vs. 11).

And in the very last days, we are told, Satan will work with “all power and signs and lying wonders” (vs. 9); even the “very elect” will be in grave danger of this deception. No less than four times in the end-time prophecy of Matthew 24 does Jesus warn of deception and urge alertness (vss. 4, 5, 11, 24). And at the last Satan will work dramatically, especially in performing genuine miraculous manifestations to carry the day (Rev 13:13, 14; 16:13, 14), ultimately producing that “crowning” deception—the impersonation of the second coming of Jesus Christ (see 2 Cor 11:14).⁶

One of the chief deceptions Satan instituted during medieval times was the palming off upon a gullible, unsuspecting public the notion that instead of his being a fallen angel of light, Satan was, instead, a horrible red-skinned creature with animallike horns; cloven hoofs; wolflike ears; scaly, fishlike skin; possessed of an animallike tail with a spike at its tip; who carried a spearlike trident.

Today most people (at least in western culture) merely laugh at such a characterization. And that suits Satan’s purposes well—for men seldom fear that at which they can laugh. Furthermore, they will tend to ignore something that they don’t really believe exists.⁷

They didn’t laugh at Satan in medieval times; they feared him. And in many primitive societies today men still greatly fear a literal, personal devil. And this, too, suits Satan’s purposes well; for where he can paralyze with fear, there he can will, too.

The story of Jesus’ casting out a host of demons from the two men of Gadara (Mark 5:1-20) provides five facts about the existence and activity of Satan and his evil angels, evidence that we need today to counterattack his deception that he and his cohorts do not have a personal existence:

1. Their reality. They are real personalities. On this one singular occasion, Jesus entered into a conversation with them (which, incidentally, *they* initiated).

2. Their number. They declared, in answer to Christ’s demand that they identify themselves, “My name is Legion: for we are many” (vs. 9). In Christ’s day a Roman legion might number somewhere between three and five thousand soldiers.

3. Their organization. Like the Roman legions, “Satan’s hosts . . . are marshalled in companies, and the single company to which these demons belonged numbered no less than a legion.”⁸

4. Their supernatural power. The madmen broke the chains restraining

⁶See also *Ibid.*, 624-25.

⁷See *Testimonies*, 1:295; also *The Great Controversy*, 516.

⁸*The Great Controversy*, 514.

them; and the swine (into which the demons were subsequently cast) were swept down a cliff to their destruction in the sea below.

5. Their malignity. The bleeding, disfigured bodies and distracted minds of the two Gadarenes well illustrate what Satan will do when given an opportunity to “possess” the bodies and minds of men.

Satan, then, is a real, personal being.

Does that mean that everything that is strange and bizarre in our world today is evidence of the direct operation of Satan and his demons? Should we not battle against these personal attacks by the enemy of all souls?

Before we can address that question directly, it may prove helpful to make three crucial distinctions, the better to examine their program intelligently and to decide whether it meets the criteria of inspiration, or is weighed in the balances and found wanting.

II. Three Crucial Distinctions

Before any useful assessment of the validity and helpfulness of the program of “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry,” as it is generally beginning to be practiced among us, can be made, some basic rules must be formulated. And the drawing of three basic distinctions will help us toward that goal.

A. Avoiding An “Either/Or” Mentality

One feature in “deliverance ministry,” as it is popularly being practiced today, which disturbs an increasingly large number of observers, is the tendency to view this present life in the starkest of simplistic terms—to see either a demon or a good angel involved, *immediately*, in *every* human decision and activity.

The informed Christian, we believe, will avoid two equally serious but opposite extremes as he/ she relates to baffling phenomena which appear to be of supernatural origin:

1. A “Satan-made-me-do-it” mentality, in which Satan is identified as the *immediate* cause of *every* misfortune and *every* sinful deed; or

2. A virtual denial of the existence of Satan’s “supernatural” operation in our otherwise “natural” world.

Either position is unrealistic, and is fraught with peril. Let us note why.

While we believe that *ultimately* all evil is traceable to Satan, the originator of sin, we do *not* believe that Satan or his evil angels are always *directly* responsible for every deviation from what we have come to understand as “normal” in human experience. Many illnesses, for instance, whether physical or mental, are simply the result of genetic inheritance, or living in a world of sin, or simply the natural consequences of our disobedience to God-given laws of health and well-being.

Having said that, we do not believe that this fact rules out the possibility of *direct* involvement of evil spirits in influencing human affairs and behavior. Indeed, in some circumstances supernatural entities very clearly are involved.

There *is* a devil—as we have already declared—and he “must not be allowed to get the better of us; we know his wiles *all too well*” (2 Cor 2:11, *New English Bible*).

It also appears that the father of lies in some cases operates supernaturally by simulating “natural” diseases so closely as to render them almost indistinguishable from ordinary diseases. Because of these considerations it behooves each of us to exercise extreme caution and prudence in dealing with cases of alleged demon possession.

And there are, certainly, genuine cases of demonic control or harassment. Evil angels, because of their superior intelligence, powers, and invisibility, obviously have a tremendous advantage over human beings. The only way they can be defeated is by the application of the Word of God and the supernatural forces of the Holy Spirit and holy angels.

It is still necessary, though, to recognize a cogent point made by a recent contemporary writer⁹ who (borrowing an expression from the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Protestant Episcopal Church)¹⁰ provides us with a most helpful insight into the fact that the Christian is the target of three separate (but often coordinated) forces waging war against him: (1) the “flesh,” (2) the “world,” and (3) the “devil.”

Now only in the last of these three categories is Satan seen as *directly* operative (although it is readily conceded that every bad thing ultimately comes from Satan, even as “every good gift and every perfect gift” ultimately comes “from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

The apostle (in this same passage, three verses earlier) is here indicating that at least *some* of the temptations that mankind faces arise merely when a man is “drawn away of his *own* lust [desire], and [is] enticed” (vs. 14).

What we are saying here is simply this: Every son or daughter of Adam has a fallen nature because of the moral “fall” of our first parents in Eden (1 Cor 15:22). And that fallen nature makes it hard for us to do good, and easy for us to do evil (Jer 13:12). This inherited sinful nature is opposed to God’s program for mankind, and each human being has inherited a basic predisposition (or bias, or “bent”) to sin (Rom 8:7). And one of the most common New Testament words to identify this fallen nature of man is the word “flesh” (Rom 7:5, 18; 8:3, 8, et cetera).

Used in this particular way (and it should be noted in passing that “flesh” is used perhaps a dozen ways in Scripture), “flesh” here signifies, in the words of Alexander Cruden, “the whole corruption and depravity of our nature.”¹¹

This, then, is the struggle confronting the Christian quite apart from the *direct, immediate* temptation from Satan or his evil angels that is a continuing fact of life with which we must deal. Furthermore, Galatians 5:16-21 identifies at least 17 specific manifestations of the “flesh” in which we humans sin *quite apart from any immediate external temptation* from satanic agencies, quite simply and only

⁹Mark I. Bubek, *The Adversary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975).

¹⁰*The Litany*, 24.

¹¹*Cruden’s Dictionary of Bible Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 110.

because we have a fallen, sinful nature that always predisposes us to commit these sins.

Next, one use of the term “world” refers to society and an environment totally pagan and unremittingly antagonistic and hostile to the living of the committed Christian life. It is geared to reinforce our internal tendencies toward evil through external stimuli.

In the New Testament the Greek word *cosmos* is often translated as “world,” and in this sense it “often stands for the ungodly . . . or for worldly interests that lead one away from God.”¹² Thus the apostle John urges us to

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (1 John 2:15-17)

In this restrictive sense, “world” then, represents a society at large, and individuals in particular, who are spiritually unrenewed and unregenerated. In John 15:18 the wicked are called the “world” because they “relish and savour nothing but worldly things, and pursue nothing but worldly designs.”¹³

Ultimately this enemy—“world” is a system of social, economic, and religious philosophies and practices expressed through organizations and human personalities. But while Satan is ultimately the father-creator of this “world” complex, it may yet nevertheless operate against a Christian quite apart from the *direct* intervention of Satan and/or his evil angels at the personal, individual level.

Finally, evil spirits—*devils*—most certainly do come in person to tempt (Eph 6:12; 1 Tim 4:1) and to make attractive to each of us both sins of commission (1 John 3:4) and sins of omission (James 4:17). They also taunt and torment (Luke 8:29; Matt 17:15; Mark 1:26). And they most certainly must be reckoned with. But the whole point being made here is this: Evil spirits are *not* always the *immediate* cause of *every* human sin.

Contrarily, while it is dangerous (because it is misleading) to blame Satan as the immediately predisposing cause of *every* sin that we commit, it is equally dangerous to deny (as to secular humanists and some Christians) that an actual being named Satan causes *any* sin. And today there are many who deny *any* supernatural causation of undesirable behavior or attitudes. Yet Seventh-day Adventists are assured, by an inspired writer, “It is Satan’s *special* device to lead man into sin.”¹⁴

B. Harassment Versus Possession

¹²Article “World,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., 1183 (1st ed., pp, 1152-53).

¹³Cruden, 380.

¹⁴*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 156 (emphasis supplied).

A second crucial distinction that the Christian will wish to make is in the area of situations where Satan and his evil angels are admittedly active. He will wish to differentiate between the *external harassment* of demons (which is the universal experience of us all) and *Satanic possession or control* (which is the experience of a comparatively much smaller group of human beings). (By the term “possession” we here wish to designate *control* of human neurology and physiology—the control of an individual’s higher centers, central nervous system, individual organs of the body, et cetera).

Ellen White has written extensively upon the “agency of evil spirits”¹⁵ and “the power of Satan.”¹⁶ In the latter presentation she makes a very useful and significant distinction between (1) Satan going “to the extent of his power to harass, tempt, and mislead God’s people,” on the one hand, and (2) situations in which individuals had “lost *control* of themselves, and Satan *made* them do that which they detested.”¹⁷

Referring to this latter species of spiritualistic phenomena, Mrs. White goes on to add, “It comes so direct from his satanic majesty, that he claims the right to *control* all who have to do with it, for they have ventured upon forbidden ground, and have forfeited the protection of their Maker.”¹⁸

Thus, “Satan holds them by his power, and is not willing to let them go free. He knows that they are surely his while he has them under his special control.”¹⁹ Mrs. White concludes by describing in detail the only way out for such “possessed” souls.

Every one of us has, at one time or another, been “harassed, tempted, misled” by Satan. But certainly not every one of us has been “possessed”—that is, under the *total control* of Satan or his angels. For this reason, it is important that those who confront Satan and his angels in any kind of ministry of deliverance determine first (by earnest prayer and heart searching, subjectively, and a careful examination of the victim, objectively) whether the individual seemingly possessed is simply manifesting the symptoms of a natural illness (epilepsy, for example) which might be a form of mere harassment, or whether the individual is in fact subject to direct demonic control.

It would be unspeakably cruel (for at least three reasons) to suggest to an emotionally disturbed or sin-laden person, in the absence of clearly coercive evidence, that he/she were “possessed” when, in fact, such a person was not demon-controlled:

(1) It would only serve to make the suffering of a sensitive person more keen—and unnecessarily so. (2) It could, unintentionally, provide for an unstable person an excuse in evading personal responsibility and accountability for his/her actions and problems (not only thereby reinforcing deviant behavior but also

¹⁵*The Great Controversy*, 511-17.

¹⁶*Testimonies*, vol. 1, 341-47.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 341, 343 (emphasis supplied).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 343 (emphasis supplied).

¹⁹*Ibid.*

retarding the chance for recovery). (3) It might serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy, actually operating in the form of hypnotic suggestion, weakening the resistance of the individual and making him/her subsequently *more* susceptible to *actual possession!*

We recognize that often it may be difficult (if not impossible) to determine whether an individual is possessed, or merely the victim of demonic harassment. But the important thing to remember under all circumstances is that importunate prayer is *always* appropriate in all situations and at all times. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Indeed, only two verses earlier James asks,

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. (vss. 14, 15)

There is a distinct danger that Christians may make an invalid dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural. God and Satan are interacting in all that goes on in the world, and with all of the processes that are operating therein. We must be sensitive to the operation of these powers and recognize that supernatural forces—both good and evil—frequently operate in many subtle, unnoticed ways, not merely in the spectacular.

More important, we do well to remember that any given experience or phenomenon is not necessarily supernatural or satanic. God often produces supernatural phenomena (miracles, for instance). Further, evil often expresses itself in very naturalistic ways. Much can be done for disturbed persons through professional therapy (as will be noted further, below). True religion, true psychiatry, and true psychology are not in opposition to each other.

C. Natural Illness or Supernatural Possession?

It follows, then, that a third and very necessary distinction needs to be made between “natural” mental illness on the one hand, and supernatural demon possession on the other (although we do recognize that sometimes natural mental illness may provide both the climate and occasion for Satan to work more directly).

Many sincere Christians, unfamiliar with human physiology, are greatly surprised to discover that certain of the more gross, abnormal, bizarre forms of behavior often superficially associated with “possession” are often also present in certain kinds of mental illness *in which demon possession does not appear to be a factor*. We speak of such things as: foaming at the mouth; noisy, obscene, blasphemous utterances in unnatural, altered (and often guttural) vocal registers, or shrill, spine-chilling screams; falling into translike states; and violent bodily seizures in which the unfortunate victim may suddenly be thrown to the floor, or

violently against wall or furniture. All these symptoms, sometimes seen in genuine cases of demon possession, *are also common responses of victims of various “natural” mental disorders*. Thus the ignorance of an individual concerning the nature and operation of nature’s laws could (and often does) result in that person’s seeking to explain these phenomena by means of the spirit world, and thus finding demons where none exist.

(Perhaps at this point it is also worth noting the contrary truth: Some individuals who are genuinely “possessed” may exhibit perfectly normal, natural behavior—and thus are enabled to do Satan’s bidding all the more effectively.)

We quickly grant that all mental (as well as physical) illness is a by-product of sin, and may be said, in the ultimate sense, to be caused by Satan. But a knowledge of certain forms of mental illness is extremely helpful, because apparently *some* mental illnesses are primarily caused by biochemical, environmental, genetic factors; abuses of alcohol and/or other drugs; and simply physical illness. (Again, in some instances, Satan may also become involved more directly.)

Unquestionably *some* mental illness is a genuine manifestation of direct demonic control of human neurology and physiology. But because there is *no* evidence that *all* mental illness involves demonic possession, it is crucially important that those who venture to grapple with the phenomenon of demon possession should, if possible, first have an intelligent awareness of the many and varied determinants of normal and abnormal perceptions, auditory and visual hallucinations, normal and anomalous physical sensations, speech mechanisms, emotional experiences, and thought processes before attempting to deliver a victim believed to be demon-possessed.

In actual practice, interestingly, there are *comparatively few* conclusive, telltale evidences of supernatural activity in cases where demon possession is suspected. Even the following four evidences may at times be suspect:

1. Clairvoyance. The revealing of hidden secrets of private individuals, whether present or not (and often revelations of the secret sins of the one attempting deliverance ministry)—information probably not known by any other human being.

2. Levitation. The suspension of persons or objects in midair without any natural, physical support.

3. Apparition. The materializing of ephemeral, spiritualistic, ghostlike beings.²⁰

4. “Tongues-speaking.” The utterance of foreign languages without the individual’s prior study of such languages. In the book of Acts the three instances of “speaking in tongues” are all manifestations of their speaking established contemporaneous languages foreign to the apostles and never studied by them beforehand. However, Satan can counterfeit this legitimate gift of the Holy Spirit, and probably the context of any given manifestation must aid in determining

²⁰If only *one person* sees the ghostlike form, it may well be merely a hallucination. However, if several individuals see it, there exists the stronger probability of its being a spiritualistic manifestation.

whether it is from God or from Satan. If, for example, the speaking of recognizable foreign languages never previously studied is found in a situation involving gross bodily contortions and other highly repulsive behavioral characteristics, the phenomenon probably is not of God, but of Satan.

If any of these four factors is present in any given phenomena, there may be a strong presumption in favor of the presence of demon possession.

There is a place, we feel, for ministry to the mentally ill by the trained Christian psychiatrist or psychologist. Ellen White once wrote despairingly of parents who took their children to fraudulent faith healers “instead of trusting in the power of the living God and the skill of well-qualified physicians.”²¹ (One wonders if Ellen White were alive today if she would not broaden the category of “well-qualified physicians” to include psychiatrists and psychologists.)

Mrs. White also wrote, in 1908, to a husband and wife who were actively involved allegedly in casting out demons, and her inspired counsel is germane to this consideration.

In vision Mrs. White observed Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Mackin “making some sad mistakes” in their labor for Christ. In their personal study of the Scriptures and of Mrs. White’s writings these Seventh-day Adventists had come to “wrong conclusions.” She therefore sounded a warning concerning their present activities, for “the Lord’s work would be greatly misunderstood if you should continue to labor as you have begun.” As a consequence of their “false interpretation” of inspired writings, the Mackins apparently had sought to carry on what Ellen White described as a “strange work” which included efforts at exorcism of alleged demons. And she wrote them earnestly:

You have even supposed that power is given you to cast out devils. Through your influence over the human mind men and women are led to believe that they are possessed of devils, and that the Lord has appointed you as His agents for casting out these evil spirits.²²

This activity, she went on to warn them, will “endanger not only your own souls but the souls of many others,” because the Mackins were using Scripture coupled with Mrs. White’s writings “to vouch for the genuineness” of their messages and activities. In claiming their authority from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy writings, Mrs. White unequivocally declared to them, “you are deceived.” She characterized their work as “incorrect, . . . inconsistent and fanatical,” which as a consequence made “twentyfold harder” the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church “in acquainting the people with the truths of the third angel’s message.”

And in a message to the churches in California, warning them of the “strange work” of the Mackins, Mrs. White declared unequivocally:

I was shown that it was not the Spirit of the Lord that was inspiring

²¹*Prophets and Kings*, 211.

²²*Selected Messages, book 2*, 45.

Brother and Sister L [the Mackins], but the same spirit of fanaticism that is ever seeking entrance into the remnant church. Their application of Scripture to their peculiar exercises is Scripture misapplied. The work of declaring persons possessed of the devil, and then praying with them and pretending to cast out the evil spirits, is fanaticism which will bring into disrepute any church which sanctions such work.²³

Even more to the point are these next solemn and impressive words of Mrs. White which perhaps have a special application to misguided souls attempting “deliverance ministry” as it is commonly perceived and practiced today: “We are none of us to seek to cast out devils, lest we ourselves be cast out.”²⁴

What conclusions may reasonably be inferred from these two directives from one given heaven-inspired messages for the remnant church today?

1. Obviously *not every person* who *appears* to be demon possessed is in fact demon possessed.

2. Not every Christian who names the name of Christ is called upon by God to engage in the work of casting out evil spirits. (This point is interesting, if for no other reason than the fact that many who are engaged in contemporary “deliverance ministry” claim that this power to cast out demons is the God-given birthright of *every* Christian, whether minister or layman; and the failure to exercise it is a virtual denial of the Christian faith.)

3. While there are situations which may come to our attention in which it is appropriate, through importunate prayer, to call upon divine aid to expel evil spirits, none should presumptuously go out of his/her way in seeking to confront these evil agencies, lest unwittingly they go in their own armor and be defeated by the devil. For even if one *appears* to succeed in casting out demons, it is entirely possible that the prince of evil will triumph at the last.

4. To attempt to cast out a demon *when none, in fact, is present*, is potentially harmful physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to *both the “victim” and to the Christian leader*, and renders a disservice to the cause of God which actually could retard its progress.

III. Problems in “Deliverance Ministry”

While recognizing the existence of genuine cases of demon possession and the need of relief for the oppressed victims of Satan’s control, the committee nevertheless felt unable to endorse “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” as it is presently being practiced in various circles (including some among Adventists).

²³Ibid., p. 46 (emphasis supplied). For background on this singular case, see “The Ralph Mackin Story,” in *Review and Herald*, August 10, 17, and 24, 1972; republished in a White Estate shelf document, “Charismatic Experiences in Early Seventh-day Adventist History.”

²⁴Ellen G. White Letter 96, 1900 (emphasis supplied).

There are problems with some of the philosophical underpinnings of the contemporary “deliverance ministry,” and these have been examined to some extent in the previous section of this report. The committee also viewed with deep concern some of the practices characteristic of this specialized ministry which it deemed potentially harmful and even dangerous. To these we will now address ourselves.

A. Misuse of the Concept of “Priesthood of All Believers” and Importunate Prayer

Central to the philosophy undergirding “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” as it is presently practiced in many places is the concept of the “priesthood of all believers” and the corollary of importunate prayer.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* defines the “priesthood of all believers” as “the concept that every person can approach God directly, without the services of an intermediary human priesthood” and identifies it, rightly, as “one of the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation.” As such, “it is a logical corollary of belief in salvation by faith alone.”

The concluding paragraph in this brief sketch significantly points out how Seventh-day Adventists, in contradistinction to other Protestants (particularly certain evangelicals) see the implications of the doctrine: SDAs share with Protestants generally the concept of the priesthood of all believers. But whereas Luther, for instance, stressed the idea of the universal priesthood of man, SDAs emphasize the priesthood of Christ, to whom man may come directly.²⁵

Some Christians tend to amplify the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers somewhat as follows: The father is priest of his household. As such, the believer may serve as a latter-day Levitical priest and take a man’s “offering” (or the man himself) and present it to the Lord. Thus the “priest” thereby assumes the weight of responsibility for someone else’s behavior and his/her relationship to the Lord.

Adventists have perhaps seen the doctrine in slightly different terms. While some hold (perhaps borrowing an idea from Roman Catholicism) that a Christian may come to God only through the intermediation of a human priest, who brings the supplicant grace and salvation through the sacraments of the church, Adventists believe that the practicing Christian does not need a human priest (or Mary) in order to come directly before the throne of grace to present his/her needs directly to God through Jesus, our heavenly High Priest. We believe we certainly may pray for others with problems, but by so doing we do not become *their* priest; and in so doing we do not assume responsibility on their behalf.

Tied closely to one’s view of the priesthood of all believers is one’s view of the nature and purpose of “intercessory prayer.” The “deliverance ministry”

²⁵“Priesthood of All Believers,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, The SDA Bible Commentary Series, vol. 10, rev. ed., 1151.

adherents see one of the main purposes of intercessory prayer as being a vehicle by means of which the individual Christian may “stand in the place of” the person afflicted (and even possessed) by Satan. Thus, as “priest,” he stands as an intermediary between the victim and Christ.

As such, this viewpoint continues, this “priest” may confess (and/or reveal) the sins of another individual in the small prayer group gathered for “deliverance,” he/she may claim promises or victories on behalf of the victim. And this “priest” may even take another’s sin—or even demons—upon himself/herself, the better to free the victim and enable him/her to deal with them.

It is possibly because of this popular connotation of “intercessory prayer” that Ellen White herself appears seldom to employ the term (she *does* speak a great deal about the need and place for importunate prayer); and because of Ellen White’s apparent reticence to employ the term, we will seldom use it here.

A cursory examination of the *Comprehensive Index of the Writings of Ellen G. White* will reveal that Mrs. White uttered numerous cautions concerning the confessing or revealing by one person of the mistakes and sins of another person, even in small prayer groups. She also had much to say about what were appropriate (and inappropriate) topics for public prayer, in contradistinction to private (“closet”) prayer.

She had a great deal to say about the place, purpose, and function of the human will (everything, she declared, depended on the *right* exercise of it, *by the individual himself/herself*) and she appears to be silent about the possibility or desirability of one person relating and confessing another’s sins. We do not find in Scripture, or in Mrs. White’s writings the provision for one Christian to “stand in the place of” someone else in the capacity of priest. Contrarily, we *all* have a crucified, risen, and soon-coming heavenly High Priest who directly intercedes for us all, the Man Christ Jesus. There is no provision for “standing in the place of” someone else for the purpose of identifying and casting out the demons alleged to inhabit the unfortunate victim. Nor is there provision for carrying the responsibility of the burden of long, constant, detailed prayers for others—either for those who are also praying for themselves or those who will not (or cannot) pray. And there is no indication that the prayers of such a “priest” are more efficacious than an individual’s prayers for himself.

One’s basic view of the “priesthood of all believers” and of “intercessory prayer” will certainly have a bearing upon one’s attitude toward some of the activities prominent in “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry.”

B. Dialogue With the Devil

Probably the chief characteristic running as a common thread through almost all variations of contemporary “deliverance ministry” is the predilection of entering into dialogue with the spirits in which the demons are asked to identify themselves, indicate the days, months, or years of their “possession,” and answer other questions of a similar nature, before being dispossessed of their prey in the name of Jesus Christ.

This practice, to which we are *strongly* opposed, is felt to be not only

inimical to a strong and growing Christian experience, but entirely unnecessary as well.

Proponents defend this approach on the precedent found in Scripture in the narrative of Christ's healing of the two demoniacs of Gadara (see Mark 5:6-13 and Luke 8:28-33), in which Christ demanded of the evil spirits that they identify themselves.

We feel that this is insufficient ground for basing a practice, for the following reasons:

1. There is *only one such instance* recorded in Scripture. This custom of directly addressing the demons was *not* the *general* practice of Christ, or yet of the apostles.
2. In the one instance on record *Jesus did not initiate* the conversation (yet, in contemporary "deliverance ministry," the initiative is invariably taken by the human "deliverer"). Instead, Jesus waited for the demons to take the initiative.
3. Even so, Jesus did not ask them to identify themselves *until after* He had authoritatively demanded that they depart.
4. And most damaging of all to the case of modern exorcists, after ascertaining that there was more than one demon inhabiting these afflicted men ("Our name is Legion"), Jesus did not (a) *ask them their names individually*, or (b) *cast them out sequentially*, one by one, as is the practice of those who would perform this task today in His name, or (c) *take hours to get rid of them*.

We would, furthermore, offer five additional reasons for avoiding the practice of addressing demons directly:

1. This kind of addressing of evil spirits seems to some perilously close to, if not actually within the realm of, two-way communication between the spirit world and humanity which is strictly prohibited and condemned in Scripture. (In Bible times it brought forth upon the practitioners the sentence of death. This is how God—"who changes not"—views communication with the spirit world.)
2. Dialogue with the spirits generally tends toward protracted efforts at casting out the demons, with consequent emotional and physical exhaustion for all concerned. These humanitarian concerns alone justify the abandonment of the practice of demanding of the demons that they identify themselves.
3. The devils are notorious liars (it was, after all, their master who invented the lie). And their word, therefore, is simply not trustworthy. It is entirely possible, for instance, that in a genuine case of demon-possession *one* demon might well simulate a number of different "voices" and offer differing identities, thus pretending to be a whole galaxy of spirits, thus making a mockery of the whole situation by pretending to go and yet "returning."
4. It is immoral to give the demon any more authority over the vocal chords of the afflicted. Hasn't the victim suffered long enough already?
5. Lastly, it tends to identify the Seventh-day Adventist Church with cultic practices.

Ellen White said it best: "Our only safety is in giving no place to the devil. . . . It is unsafe to enter into controversy or to parley with him."²⁶

²⁶*Testimonies*, vol. 3, 482-83.

An interesting variation on “dialoguing” is becoming increasingly popular in certain “deliverance” circles: instead of dialoguing with the devil, those in prayer “dialogue with the Holy Spirit,” and ask *Him* to reveal the nature of the sins of the afflicted which need to be confessed, and the identity of the individual demons which need to be summoned forth.

While we have had no doubt but that such prayers would find an “answer,” we are perplexed to know how effectively to validate such responses, because the *unholy* spirit—Satan—the author and father of all deception, can inject himself insidiously and unobtrusively.

A subculture spawned by “deliverance” ministry is a school of “divine guidance” which is growing in popularity. Based largely on the work of Joy Dawson, one Adventist version offers twelve “ways in which God speaks” to us. The first four are entirely subjective; number five in the list is the Word of God. Yet Ellen White, in discussing the same subject (in which she offers three ways), lists the Word of God *first*, because all subjective methods must be validated by the objective Word.²⁷

This school of thought goes on to allege that in the last days *everyone* will receive the Holy Spirit in the identical manner that Ellen White did (1 Cor 12:28, 29, to the contrary notwithstanding), and being able to dialogue with the Holy Spirit is just one of the benefits of this new, special relationship.

Possessors of this “gift” have an unshakable assurance that they are right and all others who disagree—or even doubt—are wrong. And those skeptics who do not wholeheartedly support are automatically dismissed out of hand as being possessed by a spirit of unbelief. Such an one might even be startled to have a conversation with the exorcist interrupted by the individual offering a short (and seemingly sanctimonious) prayer, right there: “Lord, in Your name I cast out the demon of unbelief in this person.”

“Dialoguing with the Holy Spirit” is as potentially dangerous to those who practice this perverted form as dialoguing with evil spirits.

C. Commanding Demons or Supplicating Christ?

Another characteristic of deliverance sessions, as commonly carried out, is direct confrontation of the demon by demanding—always in Christ’s name, of course—that the demons depart.

The example of Christ is sometimes cited as precedent (“Jesus . . . rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more in him” [Mark 9:25]), and the further example of Paul is used to buttress the case (“Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” [Acts 16:18]). These examples are valid and must not be ignored.

It has been suggested, however, that *in both of the above instances the demon took the initiative*, himself initiating the confrontation. Because in other contexts the example offered in Scripture is, rather, that of the Christian believer’s

²⁷*Testimonies*, vol. 5, 512.

appealing to *Christ* to cast out the demon, *instead of addressing the demon directly*.

In the past God used “divers manners” to communicate with humanity (see Heb 1:1); and there is also evidence in Scripture that He used “divers manners” in communicating with demons.

In Jude 9 we find Christ here called Michael (the archangel) “contending with the devil” who disputed His intention to resurrect Moses from his lonely grave atop Mount Nebo. Satan claimed Moses as his own, for he had come under the dominion of Satan and was therefore his lawful prey. Further, Jesus had not yet come to pay the penalty-price for sin. Nevertheless, Jesus assumed responsibility for salvation and eternal life on Moses’ behalf. Yet even here, Christ “durst not bring against him [Satan] a railing accusation,” but instead said, “the Lord rebuke thee.”

In Zechariah 3:1, 2, we find Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, while Satan was standing there “at his right hand to resist him.” Instead of rebuking the devil directly, Joshua allowed the *Lord* to handle the matter, “and the *Lord* said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

Direct confrontation, and direct address to the “possessing” demon, sometimes is not only undesirable but also pragmatically unproductive. Mark I. Bubeck, a leading exponent of “deliverance ministry,” tells of his surprising discovery when, in the mid-1970s, he endeavored to bring freedom from demonic powers to a young man on the brink of destruction.

Through the young man’s faculties, Bubeck says,

I was in direct confrontation with a snarling, cruel, crude, vulgar demon that had taken the same name as this young man’s last name. This wicked power was very talkative. He constantly threatened and insulted me, the young man, and another person who was working with me in the confrontation. After taking back ground he was claiming against the young man, I kept commanding him to leave and go where the Lord Jesus Christ would send him. He was very obstinate in refusing to go. I kept quoting the truth of God against him, but even though he was weakening, he still refused to go. We were all near the point of physical exhaustion when finally I quoted the promise of our Lord, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20).

After quoting this verse, I said, “This is the very truth of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is here. Dear Saviour, this wicked spirit is insulting You, and he’s insulting us, Your servants. I ask You now in Your presence here to put Your holy hand against him and send him where You want him to go.” Almost immediately, a great cry came out of the young man’s mouth, and he was immediately delivered from that

destroying power.²⁸

Apparently Mr. Bubek misread the entire situation, for he had already been “quoting the truth of God” repeatedly, but the spirit “still refused to go.” More important, however, is the approach that *did* work—instantly. For when Mr. Bubek ceased directly commanding the demon to leave, and commenced to ask the Lord Jesus to take charge and Himself dismiss the demon, *then and only then did the demon depart.*²⁹

In one instance of deliverance, Jesus told His disciples, “*This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*” (Matt 17:21). In other instances “this kind goeth not out” when commanded to depart—even in the name of Christ—by the servant of the Lord, but only when Christ is addressed directly and is asked to perform the task personally!

How much better, then, in the presence of demons—especially in instances where they have not initiated the confrontation—for the leader to address Christ rather than the demons, and allow *Him* to do the job He is eminently qualified to perform.

D. A Ritualized Liturgy

Another objectionable feature of the conventional “deliverance” service is the growing tendency to develop a highly ritualized approach in which the preparatory steps are outlined with the victim in advance. During this “briefing” session the “deliverer” speaks in language highly suggestive and in an authoritative manner which bears an extremely close similarity with instructions given by a hypnotist to a client while he is yet conscious.

One writer in the growing body of “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” literature describes the preparatory service as follows. The leader first prays for guidance, discernment, and protection by the blood of Jesus. He then addresses the “client”:

Now, C, there are three things you do not have to do. You don’t have to hurt yourself, you do not have to hurt either one of us, and you do not have to break or damage anything in the room. You may feel like coughing or screaming. Do that if you feel like it. Coughing or screaming doesn’t cast out the demon—only the Holy Spirit can do that. But if you feel like coughing or screaming, and you don’t, you may be holding the demon inside. The demons will put many strange things in your mind, like you’re going insane, that this is all a fake, that this is all psychological, that you’re going to wind up without a personality, or that other people are going to hear about it. Don’t worry, all of these are only old tricks. None of them are true. Okay, now relax. Don’t initiate any

²⁸Bubeck, 95, 96.

²⁹1 Ibid., 96.

thoughts.³⁰

No such “preparations” as these are described in Scripture! On the other hand, most victims of demonic control appear to be highly suggestible, and the form of address by the leader of a “deliverance” session could take the form of hypnotic suggestion, with him in effect making a self-fulfilling prophecy by the instructions he chooses to give.

E. Aiding and Abetting the Enemy

Acknowledging that at times it is difficult to tell whether a harassed individual is or is not demon-possessed, practitioners of “deliverance ministry” often nevertheless proceed with their ministrations on the ground that “if in doubt, try it, since there will be no harm done if the diagnosis of demon-possession was found to be in error.”

But this lingering suggestion in the mind of the victim that he or she might be demon-possessed (even though nothing by way of proof subsequently showed up) may work untold havoc in treating such a victim, and there is often an even greater danger from such unconscionable experimentation.

“Deliverance” sessions often last several hours (all night sessions are not uncommon), and the experience is generally exhausting and emotionally grueling for all concerned. The net effect is to leave the patient in a state of extreme emotional fatigue. At such times the inhibitory neural pathways are often incapable of functioning normally, while the excitatory pathways are discharging their impulses readily.

This means that the patient’s power to resist, to control the thoughts, is wiped out. (The effects are identical to those produced by the brain-washing tactics of certain well-known religious cults. This generally accepted psychological fact, coupled with the insights to be gained from inspired writings concerning the wiles of Satan, ought to warn us that Satan can—and does—take advantage of this fatigued condition to make *his* suggestions that will be acted upon without resistance by the fatigued victim. He may even make his hypnotic suggestion for a later performance, after the deliverance session is over, one possible explanation for the fact that a large number of individuals who have been the subject of a “deliverance” session later exhibited recurring problems. This is almost guaranteed by the nature of such exhausting efforts at exorcism.

Fatigue for the victim is not the only by-product of unduly prolonged “deliverance” sessions. Christians who participate in long prayer vigils may experience a delayed-exhaustion syndrome. For a month or two the individual may exhibit a “high,” seeming to abound in physical vitality, seeming to be able to defy the normal needs of the body for rest and sleep by late night or all night prayer vigils. Their “freshness” the next day seems coercive clinical evidence to

³⁰Kent Philpott and D. R. Hyhmers, *The Deliverance Book: A Handbook for Ministers and Those About to Have Deliverance* (Van Nuys, CA: Bible Voice, Inc., Box 7491, 1977), 105ff.

them that the Lord was really working on their behalf, as well as for the afflicted. They even cite, by way of justification, how Christ spent all night in prayer, and came forth inexplicably refreshed the next day, ready to resume ministering to men and fighting the devil. So there would be great praising of the Lord after such experiences.

Nevertheless, the net effect seems to be that the body was depleting its reservoir of life force, its energies were being bankrupted (Ellen White's concern expressed at one point for Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's health because he was "living two years in one, and I utter my protest against this"³¹ seems somehow relevant here).

And after two, three, or four months, acute aging commences to set in. There is a "bottoming-out," and cumulative exhaustion then takes its toll in a devastating manner. The physical deterioration is evident to all who behold it. And the law of physics ("to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction") and the law of Scripture ("Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" [Gal 6:7]) is proven correct again.

F. Oppression Versus Possession

A final area of concern which we have in "deliverance ministry" as it is presently practiced in many circles is the tendency of its proponents to equate "oppression" with "possession."

The word "oppression" (and related forms of the word) is almost entirely an Old Testament word. It is used only twice in the New Testament. In Acts 7:24 Stephen, in his defense, refers to the experience of Moses in slaying an Egyptian who had "oppressed" an Israelite. The other instance is of particular interest as we consider "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry": In Acts 10:38 Peter tells "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

That human beings are "oppressed" by the devil is certainly biblical. That such "oppression" is to be equated with "possession" by a demon is equally *unbiblical*, for in Isaiah 53:7 we are told that Jesus was "oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth." Jesus was oppressed, but Jesus certainly was never *demon possessed*.

The Bible appears to use the word "oppressed" to describe an acute form of *temptation*, not possession by an evil spirit. And Christians who are thus "oppressed" by Satan or his evil angels do not need to call an exorcist to come and cast out a demon, for none is there.

As we have already noted, "control" is the unique characteristic of "possession; how encouraging, then, is this assurance from heaven, "Satan cannot control minds unless they are yielding to his control."³² If you are a genuine

³¹Ellen G. White Letter 10, 1887 (February 23); cited in Richard W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg, MD* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Assoc., 1970), 133.

³²*Testimonies*, 1:301.

member of the kingdom of God, Satan *cannot control* you, though he certainly may oppress (severely tempt) you, even as he did our Lord Jesus Christ.

How one gains power over oppression/harassment/temptation is the subject of the following section.

IV. Prayer for the Afflicted

With this kind of “deliverance services” in extreme doubt, is there no hope for victims of genuine demon-possession today? The committee, while unanimously recommending against certain procedures described in the preceding section, yet feels that the Lord’s commission, “cast out devils” (Matt 10:8), was given to meet the real situations that do confront God’s people. The methods used, however, will be in contradistinction to the highly ritualized and sensationalized drama of the “deliverance session” which appears to borrow (however unconsciously) substantially from ancient pagan cults of Mesopotamia. There is, indeed and in fact, hope for genuine deliverance.

A. Hope in the Face of Hopelessness

“If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us,” the father of a demon-possessed lad once appealed to Jesus (Mark 9:22). Jesus’ immediate response was, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (vs. 23). Matthew quotes the Master, in the same incident but now talking privately with the nine disciples who had been defeated in their attempts to cast out this demon earlier, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt 17:20).

In the fact of increasing activity of a supernatural nature emanating from the prince of darkness, Christians in general and Seventh-day Adventists in particular may face this distressing phenomenon with optimistic courage and confidence.

While the Scriptures clearly teach that these malevolent spirits are banded together in an organized power structure for the express purpose of subverting and destroying God’s created works, and especially mankind, those same Scriptures declare the unwillingness of our God “that any should perish” (2 Pet 3:9).

In “every time of need” Christians are invited—indeed, commanded—by a loving Father in heaven to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help” (Heb 4:16).

Standing by the right hand of that throne (Acts 7:56) is an Intercessor who has never lied (Num 23:19); and His continual declaration is that “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). He further adds:

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. (John 10:28, 29)

Indeed, the “good news” of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that by one decisive

blow at Calvary, God, by the death of His Son, effectively broke the power of Christ's mortal enemy, Satan.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb 2:14, 15)

The essence of the gospel that God now bids His servants declare is the proclamation of individual Christian liberty from the bondage of sin and Satan, here and now, through a bestowal of unmerited eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (1 John 5:11, 12)

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (John 8:32, 36)

While Christ lived among men on this earth He utterly defeated every demon He ever confronted; and furthermore, He gave His disciples the power to confront and cast out demonic spirits from human beings who were thus oppressed: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt 10:8).

In New Testament times, as we have already noted, the phenomenon of demon possession was a stark fact of existence:

Satanic agencies were incorporated with men. The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling place of God, had become the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the passions, the organs of men, were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed.³³

Christ did something about it; and the same author, elsewhere, adds that today "God's messengers are commissioned to take up the very work that Christ did while on this earth. They are to give themselves to every ministry that He carried on."³⁴

³³*The Desire of Ages*, 36.

³⁴Ellen G. White MS 27, 1907 (January 22), "The New England Sanitarium"; cited in *This Day With God*, 30.

We would add only, at this point, that our work today is not the conducting of rituals and ceremonies so common among those of the “deliverance ministry” persuasion which bear a striking resemblance to similar rites in the very heart of paganism in Old Testament times. Indeed, with Paul, “I show unto you a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31).

It is neither God’s intention nor His plan that the people created in His own likeness should be the plaything of Satan. In love, and by a divine initiative, our heavenly Father has in mercy provided “the weapons of our warfare.” They are “not worldly”—human or naturalistic, and certainly not of pagan origin—but they are indeed “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Cor 10:4, KJV, also RSV; see also Eph 6:10-18).

Therefore, the individual Christian need not falter, much less fail, if confronted by supernatural demonic forces (Eph 4:13). Rather, he/she may fight victoriously “the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12), in God’s strength (Phil 4:13), and then come off from that battle “in all these things . . . more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom 8:37).

This is the birthright of every born-again Christian child of God.

B. The Christian’s Preparation

There are times when the Christian layperson or minister is confronted by evil spirits harassing or possessing those for whom Christ died. He/she must sense the necessity of proper and complete spiritual preparation to meet the situation. The need of such preparation is highlighted by the experience of the nine disciples of Jesus who attempted—unsuccessfully—to cast out a demon possessing a young man brought to them one day.

Jesus, Peter, James, and John were on the mount of transfiguration when the distraught father came with his demon-possessed son looking for the Lord down in the valley. Upon learning of his quest, the remaining nine disciples may well have assured the man that he need not await the indefinite return of Jesus. They themselves were eminently capable of dealing with perplexing situations such as these (see Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29).

Now, prior to this the twelve had been given power over unclean spirits (Matt 10:8). And still later the seventy would experience so great success in their ministry in freeing Satan’s captives that in returning to Jesus they came with great rejoicing because “the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (Luke 10:17-20). Yet, strangely, upon this singular occasion, these nine men all tasted the bitter fruit of total defeat. And they privately besought Jesus to explain the cause of this humiliating failure.

Jesus’ immediate response revealed a serious deficiency: They lacked “mustard seed” faith. And to correct the situation they needed to engage in prayer and fasting—for themselves (Matt 17:20, 21).

In her inspired commentary on this passage Ellen White identifies the various causes of this celebrated failure as (1) an “unbelief” that “shut them out from deeper sympathy with Christ,” (2) the “carelessness with which they regarded the sacred work committed to them,” and (3) dwelling in “a state of darkness” in

which they mulled over their “discouragements” (Jesus had pointed to His impending death) and their “personal grievances” (jealousy toward the three favored disciples who alone were invited to join Jesus on the mount).

Now, in order to succeed in their conquest of the kingdom of darkness, Mrs. White continues, these nine disciples needed: (1) to have their faith “strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart”; (2) they must be “emptied of self”; and (3) they must “be filled with the Spirit and power of God.” *Then* they must come to God with earnest and fervent supplication *in* faith.

Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men the Holy Spirit’s aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places.³⁵

Indeed, “if you have faith like this, you will lay hold upon God’s word, and upon all the helpful agencies He has appointed. Thus your faith will strengthen, and will bring to your aid the power of heaven. . . . ‘Nothing shall be impossible unto you.’”³⁶

The human agent should ever remember that he/she has no power within himself/herself; we are simply channels through which the divine power may be poured out to the stricken victim. This being the case, Paul’s admonition is appropriate: “Let a man examine himself” to see if there is anything in the life that could possibly obstruct the flow of divine power (1 Cor 11:28). If such be found, it ought speedily be removed by the confessing and forsaking of sin, lest one’s prayers be “hindered” (1 Pet 3:7). Fasting may be necessary (it is always appropriate) in the making of this self-examination.

And in harmony with our Lord’s admonition in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:16-18), this fasting should be done privately, individually. Again, long, drawn-out prayer seasons involving *self*-examination certainly seem contra-indicated by the thrust of this passage.

Finally, this inspired counsel may prove helpful as the Christian prepares himself for this special ministry:

In such cases of affliction, where Satan has control of the mind, before engaging in prayer there should be the closest self-examination to discover if there are not sins which need to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken. Deep humility of soul before God is necessary, and firm, humble reliance upon the merits of the blood of Christ alone. Fasting and prayer will accomplish nothing while the heart is estranged from God by a wrong course of action.³⁷

³⁵*The Desire of Ages*, 431.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Testimonies*, vol. 2, 146.

In such situations “the earnest prayers of His faithful followers” are necessary.³⁸

C. The Afflicted One

The manner in which good and evil angels secure the compliant cooperation of the human agent is not always apparent. In some cases demonic possession may begin with the weakening of the bodily forces brought about through dissipation or circumstances causing continuing and unrelenting anxiety, to the point where the human being finally loses control of himself or herself and in some cases control passes over to the hands of unseen evil entities. The converse may also be true: Through the building up of the physical powers, self-control may be regained, even wrested from satanic forces, by the active cooperation of the human will with the power of the Holy Spirit and holy angels.

Also, control of an individual’s will by demonic forces may be partial or total. Cases vary, and it is not always clear why they vary. But in cases where control is partial, it would seem appropriate—even essential—to secure the cooperation of the subject. In all instances the worker for Christ should seek to enlist the will of the afflicted on the side of Christ that he or she may be strengthened to resist the evil foe. In cases where control of the individual seems more total, it may be necessary for the Christian worker to secure the cooperation of those closest to the victim of demonic harassment and to pray on his or her behalf without this manifest consent.

There are today perhaps three groups of individuals who are particularly susceptible to the approach of demonic forces: (1) some who are emotionally disturbed; (2) some who are presently (or formerly have been) associated with spiritualistic phenomena—seances, Ouija boards, mediums, et cetera; and (3) some who make room for sin in the daily life, especially those who are professing to serve God, but who have not yet *totally* surrendered to His Lordship over their lives. All need help, and all need a work of preparation if satanic power is to be broken.

Instruction in Bible truth. Before prayer is undertaken, the victim of satanic oppression should first be helped to understand certain rudimentary Christian principles, including:

1. His/her inalienable right as a confessing Christian, to live a life free from control (though not, of course, from temptation and/or harassment) of evil spirits, in harmony with the expressed will of God.
2. The biblical provision and teaching of personal victory over the evil one, through which even the thoughts may be brought into captivity to Christ (1 Cor 10:13; 2 Cor 10:5; Phil 2:5).
3. The fact that as long as a person is himself/ herself able to confess, repent, and commit his/her life to Christ, such an individual is able *personally* to invoke the Lord’s power against the enemy on the basis of Christ’s victory over Satan at the cross (John 16:33).

³⁸*Testimonies*, vol. 1, 299.

4. The fact that Christ has *already* won the “great controversy” against Satan by His decisive victory at Calvary, and that He has committed to His followers a redemptive ministry to free the captives of satanic control in and through His holy name.

5. The nature and practice of importunate, “effectual fervent prayer” by the Christian (James 5:16).

6. The need for faith to believe that prayer offered in Jesus’ name and for His sake will bring deliverance from Satan’s control.

Ellen White makes a cogent point about the fact that there is a work for persons who are still in control that need not (indeed cannot) be done by another:

Those who have tempted the devil to tempt them will have to make desperate efforts to *free themselves* from his power. But when they begin to *work for themselves*, then angels of God whom they have grieved will come to their rescue. Satan and his angels are unwilling to lose their prey. They contend and battle with the holy angels, and the conflict is severe. But if those who have erred continue to plead, and in deep humility confess their wrongs, angels who excel in strength will prevail and wrench them from the power of the evil angels.³⁹

And what is the nature of the work that the victim must do for himself/herself? First, he/she must seek the Lord earnestly. “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me *with all your heart*” (Jer 29:13).

Then he/she must accept God’s word that deliverance is possible. There are three important points in 1 Corinthians 10:13—temptation is the normal experience of every human being, God is faithful to those who serve Him, and a way of escape is available for all who wish to find one. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

Then the counsel of James 4:7-10 is especially appropriate at this point. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

And “wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Ps 119:9). The mind must be focused away from self and defeat and directed upon God and victory: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa 26:3). Indeed, we must allow Jesus to bring into “captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5).

Power of the will. An individual’s will plays an important—even decisive—role in the success or failure of prayer upon his behalf, and it is therefore imperative that the afflicted one being prayed for understand the place and the

³⁹*Testimonies*, vol. 1, 301 (emphasis supplied).

power of the will.

While it is true that supernatural beings seem to have an incalculable advantage over human beings in the warfare thus waged, yet these angels—whether evil or good—cannot compel the will of an individual when that will is committed to Christ. Evil angels can tempt and harass; good angels can woo and bless. But evil angels cannot force the will, and good angels will not. So the surrendered human will, exercised with faith in God’s Word and power, is the crucial factor in this consideration.

(Unfortunately, in some “deliverance” circles today the concept of “surrendered” has come to mean a totally passive stance on the part of the individual vis-à-vis God’s control. While such practitioners would deny that they [or God] manipulate the afflicted person, the net result often comes down to a mindless abdication of the victim’s human reasoning powers, instead of the combination and cooperation of “divine power and human effort” which Ellen White continually holds before us. Surrender is not passive; it is very active.)

D. Concerns and Cautions

Basic attitudes. Church leaders have been accused by some in “deliverance ministry” as wishing to create a monopoly in which only “professionals” or “specialists”—be they clergy, medical psychiatric, or psychological—may officiate in prayer for the emotionally and physically ill. (Ironically, some of these who protest thus give evidence that they would prefer to have the monopoly in their hands.) Prayer is not the prerogative of any one group; and the church continues to hold that no practicing Christian needs an advanced academic degree in prayer before he/she can be used to minister successfully to those afflicted by Satan.

Avoid “adventure” approach. When after careful consideration and prayer for guidance it is decided to intercede with God for relief and victory of one afflicted by satanic power, the one who leads out and those who take part need to guard against a “morbid” curiosity, a craving for the sensational, the dramatic, a desire to witness supernatural forces in mortal combat, in short: to indulge a sort of “adventurism.” Each Christian participating in this kind of personal ministry needs to examine carefully his/her motives. One thinks instinctively of the story of the seven sons of Sceva (see Acts 19:13-17). These men “played around” with exorcism, perhaps little realizing the power of the agencies with which they were dealing. They received a sound thrashing for their pains. Those same evil spirits are still around today; and those who flippantly, carelessly seek to confront demon forces could run substantial personal risks.

Avoid inordinately long seasons of prayer. Evil angels sometimes seek to prolong the season of prayer, hoping thereby to wear out the supplicants and eventually to win the day by default.

There is no evidence in Scripture that when demons were cast out by Christ or His disciples that the service was dragged on inordinately long. Jesus Himself decried the “heathen” philosophy that repetitious utterance of the same petition, in “much speaking,” was the way to move effectively the hand of the Almighty

(Matt 6:7; see 1 Kgs 18:26). And Jesus was also down on “long prayers” (see Matt 23:14), as was also Ellen White, who had quite a little say in warning against prolonging seasons of public or semi-public prayer.⁴⁰

Not only are long, drawn out prayer services unnecessary and without scriptural foundation, they are also generally counterproductive in terms of exhausting the physical and emotional resources of all concerned.

Avoid encouraging overdependence. There is a twofold danger that the one who is doing the praying will experience difficulty in confidently leaving the one prayed for in the hands of God, and also that the one being prayed for will develop an overdependence upon one or more of those who intercede in prayer on his/her behalf.

While the Christian should and will carry a burden for those under Satan’s control, he/she needs to know when to “let go” and trust God to take over and do whatever is needful in the case. Christians can become genuinely trapped by these burdens for others, and it interferes not only with their ability to help others but also may interfere with their own ability to function in daily living. One may be tempted to conclude that he/she cannot trust God to handle the case in His own way and in His own time, and also that he/she can really add something to the ministry of Christ. The idea grows that somehow if I can add my sacrifice to Christ’s then it will count for more in the victim’s life than Christ’s sacrifice without my own.

Sometimes the one for whom prayer is offered develops an unreasonable overdependence upon one or more of those who pray. While the mature Christian will certainly be called upon to supply large, personal quantities of love, care, and interest in providing personal support in prayer, study, and emotional stabilization, he/she will certainly need to avoid permitting the victim to develop a mindless, irrational overdependence by encouraging telephone calls at all times of the day or night and childish and unreasonable demands for personal attention.

While no Seventh-day Adventist Christian would ever seek to hypnotize someone for whom he/she was working to bring relief from demonic forces, there is yet a potential danger of “practical hypnosis,” whereby the effective control of the believing Christian over the mind of the victim of harassment is *accepted by the latter* because of an undesirable overdependence upon the former.

In this context, then, the cautions of Ellen White concerning one of the practical dangers of hypnosis seems particularly apt:

The theory of mind controlling mind was originated by Satan, to introduce himself as the chief worker, to put human philosophy where divine philosophy should be. Of all the errors that are finding acceptance among professedly Christian people, none is a more dangerous deception, none more certain to separate man from God, than is this. Innocent though it may appear, if exercised upon patients it will tend to their destruction, not to their restoration. It opens a door through which Satan will enter *to take possession both of the mind that is given up to be*

⁴⁰*Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, vol. 2, 2113.

*controlled by another, and of the mind that controls.*⁴¹

E. As We Look to the Future

Ellen White has written that satanic activity will greatly increase in these last days before Jesus returns, and we accept that declaration without equivocation. As it examined the work of many engaged in “deliverance ministry” at this time it *also* concluded that cases of genuine demon-possession associated with physical phenomena are still not as common today as is confidently declared by some practitioners of “deliverance ministry.” However, the near future may reveal more such cases, especially in some cultures.

We fully recognize that Satan is at work in the earth today, and in certain instances he actually does control individuals in the here and now. This is an undeniable fact.

But to make “deliverance ministry” a prominent, if not the chief, work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at this time, is, we believe, to fall for yet another of Satan’s specious devices: that of diverting the remnant church from its true, ultimate mission on earth—spreading the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14.

We have often been reminded that “we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teachings in our past history.”⁴² Let us, therefore, at this point examine an incident in our past history which we feel teaches a lesson that is well considered yet today.

In 1900 the devil succeeded in getting a large number of Seventh-day Adventist Church members, ministers, and even at least one conference president, into a fanaticism which called forth an unsparing, direct rebuke from the Lord through His servant, Ellen White. This “holy flesh” movement (as it came to be known) was, in turn, but a repetition of an earlier fanaticism by which Satan had succeeded in seducing certain of the people of God.⁴³ It involved manifestation of supernatural powers that were most dramatic and sensationalistic. There was much excitement. But God was not in it; and the net effect of it all was to disgust and turn away serious-minded people who might otherwise have felt led to become members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Ellen White declared to the practitioners of this fanaticism in Indiana: “You are giving the wrong mold to the precious and important work of God.”⁴⁴ Then she added that at the very end of time Satan will come in again among the remnant people, to destroy their effectiveness by getting them entangled with fanaticism involving excitement and confusion.⁴⁵

An important distinction, perhaps, needs to be made at this point. It is clear

⁴¹*The Ministry of Healing*, 243.

⁴²*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, 196.

⁴³*Selected Messages*, book 2, 33, 34.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 37, 38. For a more complete account of the “Holy Flesh” movement and fanaticism, see also Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), chap. 7.

from Ellen White's writings that *after* the latter rain experience has been received by the remnant people of God, there *will* be amazing phenomena exhibited by laity and ministers alike: "Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men."⁴⁶

However, she also seems to indicate that *before* the latter rain is poured out upon Adventists, such miracles will not be so abundant. Indeed, the miracles of Satan, his evil angels, and their human accomplices, will be held up to Seventh-day Adventists (whose activity then is not especially characterized by the working of miracles) as proof of the legitimacy of their position and their standing with God!⁴⁷

Even as late as the giving of the mark of the beast, and the concomitant forbidding of the sealed saints to buy and sell, those in Babylon will be "mocking" the remnant, "threatening to destroy" them. They ridicule their "feebleness," mock at the "smallness" of their numbers. And at this time the wicked declare that they (and not the remnant) have "the truth, that miracles were among them" (and, by contradistinction, not abundant among the remnant). They will boast "that angels from heaven talked with them, and walked with them, that great power, and signs, and wonders were performed among them" (and, by distinction, not so much among the remnant), and that "the whole world was converted and in harmony with the Sunday law."⁴⁸

More to the point, Ellen White further points out very clearly that in the last days (especially *before* the outpouring of the latter rain), "God's people will not find their safety in working miracles, for Satan would counterfeit any miracle that might be worked. . . . They are to take their stand on the living Word."⁴⁹

Summary and Conclusion

We would summarize our findings briefly as follows:

1. Demonic forces of a supernatural character exist today, as they did in Bible times; and the goal now, as then, is the subversion and destruction of men and women, wherever possible, for time and for eternity.
2. We distinguish between the affliction/harassment/oppression of Satan and his evil angels on the one hand, and possession on the other. The former is the experience of acute temptation which comes to all mankind; the latter represents total control of human physiology and neurology, and is the experience of a more limited group of individuals.
3. Among various Christian bodies today there is a movement called "Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Ministry" in which dramatic and highly ritualized ceremonies (which unwittingly bear some resemblance to pagan

⁴⁶*The Great Controversy*, 612.

⁴⁷*Selected Messages*, book 2, 52, 53.

⁴⁸Ellen G. White Letter 6, 1884; cited in *Maranatha*, 209.

⁴⁹*Selected Messages*, book 2, 55.

exorcism of Bible times) are used in attempts to cast out demons.

4. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that there is a place for ministry to those who are tempted and controlled by Satanic agencies; and furthermore, it is not a ministry to be limited to professional clergy, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

5. The church is also highly conscious of the fact that our Lord foretold *false* (and apparently successful) efforts at casting out demons, by professing Christians, just prior to His second coming to this earth; and He emphatically disassociated Himself from such activity in the strongest of terms (see Matt 7:22, 23).

6. Not all forms of gross human behavior are *directly* instigated by Satan, nor are they, in and of themselves, necessarily conclusive evidence of demon-possession. Ellen White strongly denounced the practice in her day of certain church members who went around declaring certain persons as possessed of the devil, then prayed with them, and then pretended to cast out evil spirits. She called such work fanaticism, and said it would destroy any church that sanctioned it.

7. Because Jesus specifically warned of deceptions, especially in the days just before He returns to this earth (four times in Matthew 24 alone), the church cannot endorse many facets of “Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Ministry” as it is currently practiced by many Christians and some Seventh-day Adventists. Particularly objectionable to the church are:

a. Dialogue with demons: entering into conversation with them, asking them to identify themselves by name, asking questions of them, et cetera. The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings uniformly forbid human communication with the evil supernatural world of Satan and his demons.

b. Long protracted prayer seasons in which release from demonic possession is sought: there is not one instance in the Bible of such interminable, wearying exercises. The demons always left as a result of a brief, authoritative command to depart.

8. Christians may be called upon to participate, or even to lead out, in prayer services for victims of Satanic harassment or possession. An important work of personal preparation is spelled out in Scripture and in Ellen White’s writings which includes close self-examination to discover the possible presence of sin which needs to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken before confrontation with the supernatural forces of evil. Fasting and prayer may be an important part of this preparatory work.

There *is* a place for this kind of ministry, conducted properly; but important as it is, deliverance ministry is not to be the *main* thrust of the work given to Seventh-day Adventists to perform in these closing days of this earth’s history.

Whether a counterfeit “spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry” is one of the fanaticisms into which Satan will seek to lead the remnant people of God in these last days, we cannot now say with certainty. But that the possibility exists in a very real sense, we cannot deny. And every member of the church should follow a prudent, yet positive, course of action. We believe that Jesus is an all-powerful Saviour, and that demons will be cast out of suffering souls today as in apostolic

times.

Let us, however, keep in mind the counsel of the servant of the Lord as we ponder this whole question of satanic activity in our world, especially in these, its closing days:

There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?⁵⁰

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⁵⁰*The Desire of Ages*, 493.