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Opinion

It was rather disturbing to read the unqualified statement of Dr M. G. Barker, as a psychiatrist, that 'we are not controlled or possessed outside our will.' The famous Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung defined demonism as 'denoting a peculiar state of mind characterized by the fact that certain psychic contents, the so-called complexes, take over the control of the total personality in place of the ego, at least temporarily, to such a degree that the free will of the ego is suspended. In certain of these states ego-consciousness is present, in others it is eclipsed.' It is this crucial distinction between the conscious and unconscious levels of personality that seems to be missing in Dr Barker's appraisal.

It is understandable that the individual's responsibility for his own failings should be stressed, and the explanation of the phenomenon of projection on to demons or on to society is most helpful. There is, however, the other phenomenon of repression into the unconscious realm of the psyche. The technical definition of repression is that it is an unconscious activity, for which therefore individual responsibility cannot be claimed. The only cure is then to restore the repressed contents to consciousness, by no means an easy process. Thus Jung writes: 'The psychiatrist knows that certain dangerous unconscious forces can be rendered harmless, or at least held in check, if they are made conscious, that is, if the patient can assimilate them and integrate them with his personality.'

With this proviso, Dr Barker's main conclusion can be welcomed, that the individual must be helped to withdraw his projections and acknowledge the root of sin within himself. This is the biblical emphasis, rather than projection of evil upon Satan: 'From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, etc.' Perhaps, however, the call to repentance is presented rather simplistically. As the original Greek reminds us, this involves a radical change of attitude, by no means quickly achieved.

The evil aspect of the personality, as postulated by the doctrine of original sin, was called 'the shadow' by Jung, who saw it as 'a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort.' He warned that this achievement of self-knowledge normally met with considerable resistance, and frequently required 'much painstaking work extending over a long period.' Although most illuminating in his description of the inner processes of deep repentance, he omits any reference to the saving grace of Christ, although he and some of his colleagues acknowledge the mysterious operation of grace working with the individual towards the goal of wholeness or

salvation. Perhaps the Orthodox Church has the most helpful contribution to make towards a full Christian doctrine of repentance, not least through the practice of the Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Thus Dr Runcie in his enthronement sermon called for a note of 'constant penitence in the church.'

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