

THE DEMONIC PROBLEM AND PASTORAL COUNSELLING

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[In the printed version, some footnotes had been omitted. These footnotes have now been added, which has resulted in some of the original footnotes being renumbered. –Revising ed.]

Introduction

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear the word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die’, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn him from his wicked way, in order to save his life, he shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require a your hand” (Ezek 13:17-18).

The words of Ezekiel, I would like to use here, continue to verse 21, and, according to my interpretation, they describe the role of the minister. The minister is, as his title indicates, a servant of the Lord, a shepherd, a guardian, and, of course, the messenger of the light of the world (Jesus Christ) to the world. In a congregation, a minister is primarily a facilitator.¹

He is also a prophet of the community in which he lives. With his prophetic assignment, it is his responsibility to ignite the conscience of the individuals in the community to the existing spiritual problems and their causes, and to assure them that there is only one solution to that problem. He urges, and simultaneously assists, either the individuals, or the community, to maintain their relationship to their Creator.

The demonic problem is categorised as the spiritual problem, however, it can also be characterised as idolatry. Although the people may be ignorant of the idolatrous nature of the demonic problem, they fear it. By that attitude, the supernatural aspect of the so-called demonic potential is upheld. Whoever is identified as possessor of any form of authority, e.g., to heal sickness, believed

¹ Mark Ellingsen, “Word and World”, in *St Paul*, vol 1 no 4 (1981), p. 338.

to be caused by an evil spirit, or uses the power of any evil spirit to disturb the health of a person, and eventually kill, is esteemed a lord, or the master.

The belief in demons has existed in Melanesia for many thousands of years, and is deeply rooted in the conscience of Melanesians. The articles by Jatiban Nail² and Esau Tuza³ portray the traditional benefits in the area of healing. Healing is also an integral part of traditional religion. Nowadays, those who practise traditional healing, claim that the healing ministry is given to them by Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit, through traditional religion.

The Simeon Namunu demonstrates the atmosphere or the environment in which an individual person is brought up.

Our grandmother was a very faithful church member, as well as a local preacher. She was very keen on our attending Sunday school, and regular church services. In spite of her Christian convictions, however, she did not hesitate to tell us about how spirits, living in the trees, caves, rocks, and certain other specific areas, could affect us, if we were not careful. ‘These spirits are dangerous, and can make you sick and die,’ she said. She believed very strongly, too, that witches were very active at night, roaming about, laying traps to harm people, towards whom they had hostile and vicious feelings. Innocent people could be caught in those traps if they were not careful. Hence, we have to be careful, and return home before dark. If my brother and I got ill, my grandmother would send for a sorcerer to drive out the evil power, or objects in our bodies, which were causing the illness.⁴

This lengthy quotation enables us to understand the cosmos, in which all communities live. My father was a pastor, my mother was a committed Christian, but we were not isolated from other people. We actually lived among the people, as members of the community, so that I learned from my parents the Bible stories, and, from others, the stories of witches, spirits, and

² Jatiban Nail, “A Healer in Two Traditions”, in O’Brien, Helen, ed., *Healing Ministry: part two, Point* (1/1982).

³ Esau Tuza, “Life: An Attitude to Living: a Cultural Viewpoint from the Solomon Islands”, in O’Brien, Helen, ed., *Healing Ministry: part two, Point* (1/1982).

⁴ Simeon Namunu, “Spirits in Melanesia and the Spirit in Christianity”, in Wendy Flannery, Wendy, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia today* (3), *Point* 4 (1984).

even the stories of demons. So my life was sandwiched between the two worlds.

The Demonic Problem

Melanesians were, and are, religious people. Traditional religions play an important role in the people's spiritual affairs, and the total life of the community.⁵

The belief in demons, or evil spirits, is a part of traditional religion, as it is included in the cultural tradition. Melanesians are possessed by that belief, so that they try every possible way to harmonise their living in relation to what they called “*masalai*” – spirits that are believed to be harmful. They go through specific rituals to resist the harm caused by the evil spirit, or follow a certain pattern of life, to avoid disturbing their relationship with the spirits (disturbing of relationship in dangerous). The problem, I would like to point out here, is that the people are becoming slaves of that belief, and we need to pay special attention to those people – using specific tools, instead of using blacksmiths' tools, for performing an operation.⁶

There are two additional cases, which I would like to mention here. A man came to me with a bottle of unknown liquid. He advised me to wash my wife and myself, because we were just married. He explained, “You are just married, and still have the youthful attractive power that would invite outsiders to disturb, and even destroy, your marriage. The liquid will help confine your attractive power to your marriage. You are living in the urban area, among different people, with different cultural powers.” He was actually a member of my congregation. I did not want to embarrass him, and so I asked him to leave the bottle at my house. I did not use it, of course, but, by receiving it, I conveyed the wrong message. He came a second time, when he heard that my wife was ill, with bark of a tree. I refused to take the bark, and told him that I had only one healer, i.e., Jesus Christ, who has overcome the world. He went away, but I visited him, some days later, and made him a regular attender of our church services.

⁵ Ennio Mantovani, “Introduction”, in Ennio Mantovani, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions, Point 6* (1984), p. 1.

⁶ John D'Arcy May, “Introduction”, in John D'Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia, Point 8* (1985), p. 69.

His attitude demonstrated the world in which he lived, and that enabled me to consider a different approach for my preaching. Although people are born in so-called Christian areas, even third to fourth generation Christian, the traditional beliefs and practices remain somewhere in the corner of their hearts, as parts of their lives. I was told by an Indian that he had been in the Christian-run school for ten years, but that did not change him from being a Hindu. The same is true in Melanesia.

It is sad to say that, but I mention it so that we can understand the situation, which challenges the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The students of the theological institutions were brought up in two religious environments, namely, Melanesian and Christian. They came to seminaries with that background. Some came as changed persons. Others are what we call “following the crowd”. The second case, below, will serve as an example. I was once told, by a fifth-year student, the story of the evil spirit living around our campus. He confirmed the demonic activity of the spirit by giving me the number of victims. I asked him whether or not he believed in them. He answered, “Yes, I heard them laughing, and once they threw stones at me.” He warned me not to go towards that area at night. I asked him a few more questions, with the intention of getting him to realise the fact that, although we Christians live in the world, we live under the protection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not change, unfortunately, and left the seminary a day before graduation.

Pastoral Care and Counselling

Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples, not merely believers, in an intellectual sense, students, in an academic sense, or converts, in a statistical sense. People do not necessarily grow in discipleship by making a decision for Christ, accepting a doctrine, attending a class, or participating in a seminar. While these, and other things, may be appropriate steps along the way, and may help people become more knowledgeable, they do not necessarily make people more faithful.

Disciples are made, not simply by teaching, but by training. Maturity comes not only by obtaining information in the Word of God, but by having spiritual formation. Spiritual formation involves more than preaching: it requires pastoral care that helps people to live in the Word of God. In the charismatic renewal, the idea of teaching is being broadened to include practical training in discipleship, in which believers

are encouraged and supported in Christian growth, not only by teaching, in an academic sense, but by the personal association and example of a spiritual mentor.⁷

This quotation helps to clarify the aim we should have in mind, when we are training disciples. The students are called out of the situation, which I mentioned, earlier. Of course, they have accepted the call, but they have to be reminded of their calling. As St Paul stated in Rom 15:1-2: “We, who are strong, ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour, for his good, to edify him.” The edification requires more than growing in an intellectual knowledge of the word of God. Although growing in biblical and theological knowledge is a necessary part of equipping the shepherd for ministry, the edified are encouraged to examine themselves, and achieve a personal spiritual transformation. “Examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ is in you?” (2 Cor 13:5)

In theological institutions, the pastoral counselling and training emphasis is, basically, on a pastoral vocation – preaching, and teaching others. While it may be part of training, the pastoral counselling emphasis should be more on self-edification. When I observe how St Paul handled the elders and the leaders of the church, I noticed that he urged them, first, to look at themselves. Acts 20:28: “Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flocks, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord, which He obtained with his own blood.” Rom 2:21: “you then, who teach others, will you not teach yourself?” 1 Tim 4:7: “Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Train yourself in godliness.” 1 Tim 4:16: “Take heed to yourself, and your teaching, hold to that, for by so doing, you will save both yourself, and your hearers.”

Pastoral counselling may now take the role of assisting the individual student, in theological institutions, to build a positive self-image. Again, Paul says, in Rom 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect.” In pastoral counselling, it is necessary to gain information about the surrounding world. It is an essential part of equipping

⁷ Larry Christensen, ed., *Welcome Holy Spirit*, Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1987, p. 239.

the shepherd. The shepherd has to be aware of the nature of the sheep. The shepherd has to have a wider scope of knowledge, so that he may be able to understand the problem of the sheep, and, with this knowledge, lead his sheep to reach the solution. But, the aim of assisting the shepherd to obtain the information, should be clarified, so that the shepherd may not conform to the sinful nature of the sheep, or the world, but be transformed, both on his part, and on the part his sheep.

“First take the log out of your eyes, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye”: Matt 7:5.

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