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Exorcism and Orthodoxy

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Mt. Menoikeion Summer Seminar
Princeton University
September 2017

The practice of casting out demons has been mythologized in the American consciousness since the 1973 horror flick *The Exorcist*. Nonetheless, the practice of exorcism claims a much earlier textual basis in Christian tradition throughout the Old and New Testaments. A precursor to Christian exorcism emerges in the Jewish tradition of communal purgation of sins by casting a single ram into the wilderness. And, in the New Testament, John the Baptist, the disciples and apostles, and Jesus himself “cast out demons” through exorcism and bring believers into community through baptism (Matthew 8:28-34 and Matthew 3, respectively). Indeed, the practices of baptism and exorcism stand as two sides to the same coin: while an individual has spirits cast out of her through the rite of exorcism, she is filled with the Holy Spirit in the practice of baptism.

Today, while baptism is a standard rite in “orthodox” churches, exorcism is commonly seen as a vestige of ancient liturgy, a rarely practiced rite and primarily a myth, something no longer relevant to the modern church but primarily useful for the horror genre. In this paper, I look at exorcism in varying “orthodox” traditions - the Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Episcopal / Anglican Church. Analyzing the institutional structures surrounding exorcism, theology of exorcism, and exorcist texts, I demonstrate that, while formal rites of exorcism continue to exist in the Christian orthodox tradition, informal and subvert practices of exorcism prevail most strongly within the Church.

The most robust institutional and textual basis for exorcism within the spectrum of orthodoxy can be found in the Roman Catholic Church. On the institutional level, in the Roman Catholic Church, only priests are able to perform the rite of exorcism - even then, priests must be specifically trained to perform the rite of exorcism. Just as the qualifications of the officiate are proscribed, so are the words spoken and deeds conducted during the ritual service. The Roman

Catholic Church boasts multiple official rites for exorcism, each differing in its language. In these texts, the priest addresses both positive divinities (i.e. God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus) as well as negative entities (i.e. the devil), essentially beckoning the devil to depart the individual being exorcised. In addition to the spoken script, these rites include directions for liturgical movements to accompany the spoken word, such as signs of the cross and the laying on of the priests' hands.¹

This performance of exorcism, the type enshrined in the 1973 film, is a “major” exorcism with “minor” and less institutionalized equivalents. While a major exorcism occurs only under unique circumstances, minor exorcisms are fairly frequent in the Roman Catholic Church; during the rites of baptism and confirmation, minor ceremonial exorcisms take place where the priest casts out sources of evil before replacing these demons by invoking the Holy Spirit upon an individual.² Furthermore, on a textual and theological level, informal exorcisms may take place on a regular basis in an individual's prayer life when she asks God to “cast out” forces of evil from her life and fill her with the Holy Spirit.

Turning away from the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church maintains a less centralized performance of exorcism. Like the Roman Catholic Church, was features an independent rite of exorcism, the Greek Orthodox Church also includes a formal exorcism rite, one that is reserved for trained priests to perform and is otherwise described as a “prayers cocktail.”³ Beyond the limited scope of this rite, the only other formal rite of exorcism in the Greek Orthodox Church takes place during the baptismal ceremony. Outside of formal rites, the church actively promotes each individual believer's ability to cast out demons herself. Orthodox

¹ “Rite of Exorcism,” The Roman Catholic Church, 1999, Online.

² Conversations with Charles East '18, Spring 2017.

³ Milosevic, Sasa. “The Secrets of Orthodox Exorcists,” in *The Huffington Post*, updated October 11, 2011, online.

prayer books, for example, contain multiple famous prayers for use as individual exorcism⁴ and even the Jesus Prayer serves as a sort of exorcism, whereby a believer casts out evil spirits and takes on Jesus' presence.

In the Episcopal / Anglican Church, though there exist some vestiges of liturgical exorcism, most exorcist activity takes place in the individual prayer tradition. Like the Roman Catholic Church, in the Episcopal / Anglican Church, only clerics specifically trained to perform exorcisms may conduct them and, even then, exorcisms proper occur rarely and always with the consultation of modern mental health care professionals.⁵ As another manifestation of formalized religious ritual, like both the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches, a minor exorcism takes place during a baptismal ceremony in the Episcopal / Anglican Church. But, like the Greek Orthodox tradition, the Episcopal / Anglican tradition relies most heavily exorcism through individual prayer. The Book of Common Prayer - the uniting text of the Anglican Communion - features a broad spectrum of prayers that cast out demons.

For all their differences, these three orthodox traditions all feature relatively similar exorcism practices: a specially trained priest can perform a major exorcism, but such a rite is rare; more commonly, priests perform minor exorcisms during fundamental rites of the faith, such as baptism or confirmation; and, most commonly, informal exorcism seeps into an individual's daily prayer and faith life. For further comparison, what follows is a collection of prayers used in the rite of exorcism: included are the formal rites used in the Roman Catholic Church to the Jesus Prayer of the Greek Orthodox tradition to multifaceted prayers from the Episcopal / Anglican Church's Book of Common Prayer. Consider the textual similarities, such as the "casting out" of demons to be replaced with the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the

⁴ Papademetriou, George C. "Exorcism in the Orthodox Church," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

⁵ Conversations with Rev. Joseph Wolyniak, Spring 2017.

exorcised individual, and differences, such as the formality or informality, communal or individual nature of the prayers.

Works Cited

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Note: Additional fodder comes from formal and informal conversations with: members of the Aquinas Institute (Roman Catholic fellowship) at Princeton University, especially Charles East '18; Rev. Joseph Wolyniak, Episcopal / Anglican chaplain at Princeton University; and, the Greek Orthodox sisters at the monastery of St. John the Forerunner outside of Serres, Greece.

Acknowledgements

This paper was originally presented as a paper at the “Health and Sickness” 2017 Mt. Menoikeion Summer Seminar with the Stanley J. Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies (Princeton University). Thank you to the Seeger Fellowship Committee for funding my participation in the seminar and to Izzy Durham GS for her mentorship during the program and well after.

I was interested in researching “Exorcism and Orthodoxy” following unreported incidents of student-initiated exorcisms of other students at Princeton University. Students, following evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, “cast out demons” from fellow students in dorm rooms.

Approaching exorcism in orthodox traditions, I had expected to find sheer opposition to such practices. Indeed, the Christian leaders I consulted on this project were amazed that such practices existed on campus, citing the necessity of having an ordained priest trained specifically in the practice of exorcism perform the rite and requiring an individual undergoing spiritual exorcism to consult modern mental health care professionals, as well.

However, upon further analysis of the textual and theological tradition, I discovered that “minor,” informal, and even subvert practices of exorcism exist throughout the orthodox tradition – not the least of which is the reluctant practice of the “evil eye” within Greek Orthodox circles or prayers for protection and peace throughout this spectrum of orthodoxy.

While informal and even subvert practices of exorcism may be orthodox and even part of a healthy prayer and faith life, I hope my research stresses the importance of theological education and training in the practice of more formal “major” and “minor” exorcism rites and the necessity of modern mental health care in conjunction with such spiritual practices.

Collected Prayers of Exorcism

Greek Orthodox

The Jesus Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Exorcism Prayer, St. John Chrysostom

From St. Andrew Greek Orthodox Church (South Bend, NJ)

O Eternal God, Who has redeemed the race of men from the captivity of the devil, deliver Thy servant/handmaid from all the workings of unclean spirits. Command the evil and impure spirits and demons to depart from the soul and body of Your servant/handmaid and not to remain nor hide in him/her. Let them be banished from this the creation of Thy hands in Thine own Holy Name and that of Thine Only-begotten Son, and of Thy Life-creating Spirit, so that, after being cleansed from all demonic influence, he/she may live godly, justly and righteously and may be counted worthy to receive the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments) of Thine Only-begotten Son and our God with Whom Thou art blessed and glorified together with the All-Holy and Good and Life-creating Spirit and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

O Thou Who rebuked all unclean spirits and by The power of Thy Word has banished the legion, come now, through Thine Only-begotten Son upon this creature, which Thou hast fashioned in Thine Own Image and deliver him/her from the adversary that holds him/her in bondage, so that, receiving Thy mercy and becoming purified, he/she might join the ranks of Thy holy flock and be preserved as a living temple of the Holy Spirit and might receive the divine and holy Mysteries through the grace and compassion and loving kindness of Thine Only-begotten Son with Whom Thou art Blessed together with Thine All-Holy and life-giving Spirit now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Roman Catholic
Excerpts from the Roman Catholic Rite of Exorcism (1999)

Then he commands the demon as follows:

I command you, unclean spirit, whoever you are, along with all your minions now attacking this servant of God, by the mysteries of the incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, by the coming of our Lord for judgment, that you tell me by some sign your name, and the day and hour of your departure. I command you, moreover, to obey me to the letter, I who am a minister of God despite my unworthiness; nor shall you be emboldened to harm in any way this creature of God, or the bystanders, or any of their possessions.

The priest lays his hand on the head of the sick person, saying:

They shall lay their hands upon the sick and all will be well with them. May Jesus, Son of Mary, Lord and Savior of the world, through the merits and intercession of His holy apostles Peter and Paul and all His saints, show you favor and mercy.

Almighty Lord, Word of God the Father, Jesus Christ, God and Lord of all creation; who gave to your holy apostles the power to tramp underfoot serpents and scorpions; who along with the other mandates to work miracles was pleased to grant them the authority to say: "Depart, you devils!" and by whose might Satan was made to fall from heaven like lightning; I humbly call on your holy name in fear and trembling, asking that you grant me, your unworthy servant, pardon for all my sins, steadfast faith, and the power - supported by your mighty arm - to confront with confidence and resolution this cruel demon. I ask this through you, Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, who are coming to judge both the living and the dead and the world by fire.

All: Amen.

Next he makes the sign of the cross over himself and the one possessed, places the end of the stole on the latter's neck, and, putting his right hand on the latter's head, he says the following...

Exorcism (I)

I cast you out, unclean spirit, along with every Satanic power of the enemy, every spectre from hell, and all your fell companions; in the name of our Lord Jesus +Christ. Begone and stay far from this creature of God.+ For it is He who commands you, He who flung you headlong from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell. It is He who commands you, He who once stilled the sea and the wind and the storm. Hearken, therefore, and tremble in fear, Satan, you enemy of the faith, you foe of the human race, you begetter of death, you robber of life, you corrupter of justice, you root of all evil and vice; seducer of men, betrayer of the nations, instigator of envy, font of avarice, fomentor of discord, author of pain and sorrow. Why, then, do you stand and resist, knowing as you must that Christ the Lord brings your plans to nothing? Fear Him, who in Isaac was offered in sacrifice, in Joseph sold into bondage, slain as the paschal lamb, crucified as man, yet triumphed over the powers of hell. (The three signs of the cross which follow are traced

on the brow of the possessed person). Begone, then, in the name of the Father, + and of the Son, + and of the Holy + Spirit. Give place to the Holy Spirit by this sign of the holy + cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.

God, Creator and defender of the human race, who made man in your own image, look down in pity on this your servant, N., now in the toils of the unclean spirit, now caught up in the fearsome threats of man's ancient enemy, sworn foe of our race, who befuddles and stupefies the human mind, throws it into terror, overwhelms it with fear and panic. Repel, O Lord, the devil's power, break asunder his snares and traps, put the unholy tempter to flight. By the sign + (on the brow) of your name, let your servant be protected in mind and body. (The three crosses which follow are traced on the breast of the possessed person). Keep watch over the inmost recesses of his/her heart; rule over his/her + emotions; strengthen his/her + will. Let vanish from his/her soul the temptings of the mighty adversary. Graciously grant, O Lord, as we call on your holy name, that the evil spirit, who hitherto terrorized over us, may himself retreat in terror and defeat, so that this servant of yours may sincerely and steadfastly render you the service which is your due; through Christ our Lord.

Exorcism (II)

I adjure you, ancient serpent, by the judge of the living and the dead, by your Creator, by the Creator of the whole universe, by Him who has the power to consign you to hell, to depart forthwith in fear, along with your savage minions, from this servant of God, N., who seeks refuge in the fold of the Church. I adjure you again, + (on the brow) not by my weakness but by the might of the Holy Spirit, to depart from this servant of God, N., whom almighty God has made in His image. Yield, therefore, yield not to my own person but to the minister of Christ. For it is the power of Christ that compels you, who brought you low by His cross. Tremble before that mighty arm that broke asunder the dark prison walls and led souls forth to light. May the trembling that afflicts this human frame, + (on the breast) the fear that afflicts this image + (on the brow) of God, descend on you. Make no resistance nor delay in departing from this man, for it has pleased Christ to dwell in man. Do not think of despising my command because you know me to be a great sinner. It is God + Himself who commands you; the majestic Christ + who commands you. God the Father + commands you; God the Son + commands you; God the Holy + Spirit commands you. The mystery of the cross commands + you. The faith of the holy apostles Peter and Paul and of all the saints commands + you. The blood of the martyrs commands + you. The continence of the confessors commands + you. The devout prayers of all holy men and women command + you. The saving mysteries of our Christian faith command + you.

Depart, then, transgressor. Depart, seducer, full of lies and cunning, foe of virtue, persecutor of the innocent. Give place, abominable creature, give way, you monster, give way to Christ, in whom you found none of your works. For He has already stripped you of your powers and laid waste your kingdom, bound you prisoner and plundered your weapons. He has cast you forth into the outer darkness, where everlasting ruin awaits you and your abettors. To what purpose do you insolently resist? To what purpose do you brazenly refuse? For you are guilty before almighty God, whose laws you have transgressed. You are guilty before His Son, our Lord Jesus

Christ, whom you presumed to tempt, whom you dared to nail to the cross. You are guilty before the whole human race, to whom you proffered by your enticements the poisoned cup of death.

Therefore, I adjure you, profligate dragon, in the name of the spotless + Lamb, who has trodden down the asp and the basilisk, and overcome the lion and the dragon, to depart from this man (woman) + (on the brow), to depart from the Church of God + (signing the bystanders). Tremble and flee, as we call on the name of the Lord, before whom the denizens of hell cower, to whom the heavenly Virtues and Powers and Dominations are subject, whom the Cherubim and Seraphim praise with unending cries as they sing: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth. The Word made flesh + commands you; the Virgin's Son + commands you; Jesus + of Nazareth commands you, who once, when you despised His disciples, forced you to flee in shameful defeat from a man; and when He had cast you out you did not even dare, except by His leave, to enter into a herd of swine. And now as I adjure you in His +name, begone from this man (woman) who is His creature. It is futile to resist His + will. It is hard for you to kick against the +goad. The longer you delay, the heavier your punishment shall be; for it is not men you are condemning, but rather Him who rules the living and the dead, who is coming to judge both the living and the dead and the world by fire.

God of heaven and earth, God of the angels and archangels, God of the prophets and apostles, God of the martyrs and virgins, God who have power to bestow life after death and rest after toil; for there is no other God than you, nor can there be another true God beside you, the Creator of heaven and earth, who are truly a King, whose kingdom is without end; I humbly entreat your glorious majesty to deliver this servant of yours from the unclean spirits; through Christ our Lord.

Exorcism (III)

Therefore, I adjure you every unclean spirit, every spectre from hell, every satanic power, in the name of Jesus + Christ of Nazareth, who was led into the desert after His baptism by John to vanquish you in your citadel, to cease your assaults against the creature whom He has, formed from the slime of the earth for His own honor and glory; to quail before wretched man, seeing in him the image of almighty God, rather than his state of human frailty. Yield then to God, + who by His servant, Moses, cast you and your malice, in the person of Pharaoh and his army, into the depths of the sea. Yield to God, + who, by the singing of holy canticles on the part of David, His faithful servant, banished you from the heart of King Saul. Yield to God, + who condemned you in the person of Judas Iscariot, the traitor. For He now flails you with His divine scourges, + He in whose sight you and your legions once cried out: "What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Have you come to torture us before the time?" Now He is driving you back into the everlasting fire, He who at the end of time will say to the wicked: "Depart from me, you accursed, into the everlasting fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." For you, O evil one, and for your followers there will be worms that never die. An unquenchable fire stands ready for you and for your minions, you prince of accursed murderers, father of lechery, instigator of sacrileges, model of vileness, promoter of heresies, inventor of every obscenity.

Depart, then, + impious one, depart, + accursed one, depart with all your deceits, for God has willed that man should be His temple. Why do you still linger here? Give honor to God the

Father + almighty, before whom every knee must bow. Give place to the Lord Jesus + Christ, who shed His most precious blood for man. Give place to the Holy + Spirit, who by His blessed apostle Peter openly struck you down in the person of Simon Magus; who cursed your lies in Annas and Saphira; who smote you in King Herod because he had not given honor to God; who by His apostle Paul afflicted you with the night of blindness in the magician Elyma, and by the mouth of the same apostle bade you to go out of Pythonissa, the soothsayer. Begone, + now! Begone, + seducer! Your place is in solitude; your abode is in the nest of serpents; get down and crawl with them. This matter brooks no delay; for see, the Lord, the ruler comes quickly, kindling fire before Him, and it will run on ahead of Him and encompass His enemies in flames. You might delude man, but God you cannot mock. It is He who casts you out, from whose sight nothing is hidden. It is He who repels you, to whose might all things are subject. It is He who expels you, He who has prepared everlasting hellfire for you and your angels, from whose mouth shall come a sharp sword, who is coming to judge both the living and the dead and the world by fire.

All: Amen.

All the above may be repeated as long as necessary, until the one possessed has been fully freed.

Episcopal / Anglican
“Prayers for Peace and Protection,” The Church of England (Online)

Our Lord Jesus Christ,
present with us now in his risen power,
enter into your body and spirit,
take from you all that harms and hinders you,
and fill you with his healing and his peace.
Amen.

Christ be with you: Christ within you;
Christ before you: Christ behind you;
Christ on your right: Christ on your left;
Christ above you: Christ beneath you;
Christ around you: now and ever.
Amen.

Bind unto yourself the name,
the strong name of the Trinity;
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three.
Of whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
praise the Lord of your salvation,
salvation is of Christ the Lord.
Amen.

Almighty God, heavenly Father,
breathe your Holy Spirit into the heart of this your servant N
and inspire him/her with love for goodness and truth.
May he/she, fearing only you, have no other fear;
knowing your compassion, be ever mindful of your love;
and serving you faithfully unto death, live eternally with you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Visit, Lord, we pray, this place
and drive far from it all the snares of the enemy.
Let your holy angels dwell here to keep us in peace,
and may your blessing be upon it evermore;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Christaraksha - an Indian Prayer

May the cross of the Son of God,
which is mightier than all the hosts of Satan

and more glorious than all the hosts of heaven,
abide with you in your going out and in your coming in.
By day and by night, at morning and at evening,
at all times and in all places may it protect and defend you.
From the wrath of evildoers, from the assaults of evil spirits,
from foes visible and invisible, from the snares of the devil,
from all passions that beguile the soul and body:
may it guard, protect and deliver you.
Amen.

May the risen and ascended Christ,
mightier than the hordes of hell,
more glorious than the heavenly hosts,
be with you in all your ways.
Amen.

May the cross of the Son of God
protect you by day and by night,
at morning and at evening,
at all times and in all places.
Amen.

May Christ Jesus guard and deliver you
from the snares of the devil,
from the assaults of evil spirits,
from the wrath of the wicked,
from all base passions
and from the fear of the known and unknown.
Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.

May the cross of the Son of God,
which is mightier than all the hosts of Satan,
and more glorious than all the hosts of heaven,
abide with me in my going out and my coming in.
By day and by night, at morning and at evening,
at all times and in all places may it protect and defend me.
From the wrath of evildoers, from the assaults of evil spirits,
from foes visible and invisible, from the snares of the devil,
from all passions that beguile the soul and body:
may it guard, protect and deliver me.
Amen.