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### Background:

Encounters with the demonic and the spiritual realm are not unusual in the slightest. The records of these instances appear cross-culturally with each culture creating their own demonology that progresses over time. Take for instance the Christian/Catholic understanding of demons. The earliest and most readily available depictions of “evil spirits” can be seen in the gospels where possession has led to illness and pain and its healing methods consisted of Jesus or a qualified disciple “driving out” these spirits (Luke 8:30, Acts 19:13-16). This biblical depiction created the awareness of the demonic for which each religious sect interpreted and implemented systems of understanding to identify and thus ritualistically respond to. For Ethiopian Christians in northern Sudan, the theories of *zār* possession surrounded the function of fertility within the community. Possessed females were identified by means of their history of physical and financial issues surrounding fertility (Boddy 1989). For Roman Catholics, the standardization of exorcism rituals signified their understanding of demonic knowledge with physical convulsions and erratic manifestations marking the presence of unwanted spirits. The Vatican’s recent formal exorcism training taken place in April earlier this year is a clear indication of the constant evolution of demonic identification (Exorcism 2017).

For Western Pentecostals, which is the denomination I choose to focus on for this study, demonic possession has evolved from being identifiable by means of illness and disease like the other denominations described previously to being closely associated with the present psychodynamic issues within a person. The detectable characteristics of demonic possession have shifted from a physically based discomfort to an emotionally based discomfort. Personality conflicts such as loneliness, insecurity, and lust frequently have transitioned from emotional sensations to areas of an individual’s soul that need redemption and healing. Much of this specific transition from physical to emotional and hyperawareness to emotional responses is due in part by the success of the psychological community. Its birth in the 1960’s created a new framework to approach issues concerning health, relationships, communication and ultimately religion (Williams 2008). The influence of psychology on the Pentecostal religion forms the basis of my research. My present study brings into consideration the convergence of psychology on the healing rituals, specifically the deliverance prayers of demon-possessed individuals, of Western Pentecostals.

### Present Study:

With this knowledge of the varying approaches to demonic possession and the understanding of the Pentecostal relationship to psychology, I plan to concentrate on the pentecostals from the Third Wave of the Charismatic movement, or the Neo-Charismatics (1985-present), and understand their incorporation of psychological discourse in the performance of demonic deliverance prayers. The modern wave of charismatic thought has propelled a hyper-focus on concepts such as “spiritual warfare” where the battle between dark and light takes place within cognitive spaces (Bartos 2015). Because of this, key leaders such as Shawn Bolz and Bill Johnson have made a specific type of healing ministry known as Sozo prayer available to their followers as a way of relieving oneself of the presence of dark beings. The main means of

mobilization is dialogue between prayer leader and prayer recipient in a space that greatly resembles that of a psychotherapy session. The evidence of this is found in the language utilized by these leaders as they frequent phrases like “spirit of loneliness” or “spirit of insecurity” to identify demonic activity. Thomas Csordas notes this observation similarly in the Catholic Charismatic circle when he writes, “the clusters of demons are used as signifiers in defining a spiritual-psychodynamic condition, or as spiritual ‘symptoms’ defining a spiritual ‘syndrome’” (Csordas 1983). These demonic personifications of intrapersonal struggle create the Neo-Pentecostal framework for redefining evil and therefore, adjust the approach to demonic possession.

With this thesis, I plan to further explore the identification of demons within the Neo-Pentecostal perspective as well as address the psychological benefits and limitations to relating to possessive beings in this way. Since Bethel Church of Redding, California stands as the focal point of this type of demonic deliverance ministry, it will be my primary point of reference for gathering evidence. Their inner healing site provides a plethora of opportunity of Charismatics worldwide to receive the liberation of demonic happenings as well as the formal training for other ministers to make Sozo prayer available to their churches. Therefore, by interviewing leaders, current students of their Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, and recipients of this Sozo prayer, I plan to evaluate the language utilized in this transformative process as means of discussing the benefits and limitations of psychological discourse in religious endeavors.

#### Possible Findings:

In my exploration of the history of inner healing development, I anticipate to find that the incorporation of psychological terms is not an intentional decision by the Neo-Pentecostal community but rather a result of having psychodynamic language used so frequently in everyday discourse by society. As a result, I can also anticipate that the benefits of psychology, such as affirmation of worthiness and belonging among other things, transferring over into this religious field and being misinterpreted in terms of receiving supernatural favor or power typically associated with religion. My hope is that this research project will shed more light on the other areas of benefit and more clearly show the limitations of this religious form of soft psychotherapy.

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